

Teachers' Beliefs about Classroom Assessment and their selection of Classroom Assessment Strategies

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The use of classroom assessment is strongly supported to promote student learning. However, assessment for promoting learning is not yet widely used. On the contrary, summative assessments are emphasized and teachers continue to use classroom assessments primarily for grading students. Teachers' attitude and beliefs about students provide foundation for their philosophy of teaching. Teachers enter teaching with prior knowledge and beliefs about learners, learning and classroom teaching. These beliefs affect teachers' choices of assessment strategies. This research was conducted to compare the beliefs of trained and untrained middle and secondary school teachers of Pakistan about classroom assessment. The data was collected from 123 teachers selected from 15 schools of various cities of Pakistan. The samples were selected by using the convenience sampling strategies (Gay, 1992; Gay, & Airasian, 2003; Fraenkel, Wallen, 2006) and teachers were categorized into trained and untrained groups. The data gathered from the sample was tabulated and analyzed. The hypothesis was tested using Chi Square. Except a few differences, the study revealed that there is no significant difference in the beliefs of trained and untrained teachers regarding the teacher knowledge and teaching approaches. The study opens up an issue, "whether or not the teacher training has a significant impact on teachers in Pakistan." It was recommended that teacher education institutes should reconsider their teachings and there should be more professional development activities inside schools to encourage teachers to equip themselves with contemporary approaches of assessments.

Keywords: traditional assessments, alternative assessments, assessment of learning, assessment for learning, assessment as learning

Background of the Study

The process of classroom teaching involves three main aspects: (1) target setting or objectives (2) providing learning experience for students (content, method) (3) assessment. It is extremely important that all three aspects of the process of classroom teaching are congruent. Teachers usually emphasize only on "what" to teach (Humphreys, 1995) that is content to be taught and this overemphasis on the content to be taught imbalances the process of teaching and learning. On the contrary to what Humphreys asserts, Stiggins and Conklin (as cited in Sikka, Nath, & Cohen, 2007) found that teachers spend one third to one half of their time on assessment-related activities.

The purpose of education is to change students' behaviour. The most important aspects of this change are amount, type and level of the cognitive,

and psychomotor skills developed among students. These aspects of changes are determined by assessment (Nenty, Adedoyin, John. Odili & Major, 2007). Secondly, provision of more concrete evidence for justifying judgments about students' work, placing students in various programmes, receiving funds for student achievement is demanded by different stakeholders. Therefore stakeholders such as educators, parents, government, have become interested in finding out what teachers know and believe about assessment (Sikka, Nath, & Cohen, 2007).

Assessment is a challenging task and effective classroom assessment requires knowledge of the approaches of assessments and mastery over assessment strategies. Therefore teachers need to be educated and skillful in the application of classroom assessment. Oppositely, Sikka, Nath and Cohen

found that many teacher education programmes do not require prospective teachers to take up courses in classroom assessment, and in-service teachers reported that they were not well prepared to assess students' learning. As a consequence, teachers neither have knowledge of classroom assessment nor of large-scale testing (Sikka, Nath, & Cohen, 2007). Sikka, Nath and Cohen further assert that pre-service teachers knew much less about assessment than their in-service counterparts.

Teachers' attitude and beliefs about students provide foundation for their philosophy of teaching (Bloom, n.d.). Teachers enter teaching with prior knowledge and beliefs about learners, learning, classroom instruction (i.e. target setting, learning experience and assessment), and the nature of classroom interactions and so on (Martin, 2004). Teachers' beliefs about learners, learning and classroom instruction are the result of teachers' knowledge and experiences. Sikka, Nath and Cohen argue that one critical issue that affect teachers' beliefs about assessment is high stakes testing, that is, situations where testing has significant effect on students' lives, reputation of schools and its personnel, funding and so on. Such a high stakes testing encourages teachers to alter their instructions (Sikka, Nath, & Cohen, 2007).

In Pakistan, classroom assessment is considered a tool for making judgments about the quality of schools, teachers and students or as Aly (2007) asserts furthering students' academic progress. Nevertheless, Pakistan lacks an assessment system that can provide adequate feedback for policy making. The process is limited to assessing students through examinations which are conducted at various stages of education (Aly, 2007). Such examinations are summative assessments and can be named as traditional (Ground, as cited in Alkharusi, 2008; Ahsan, as cited in Rahman, Babu & Ashrafuzzaman, 2011) or teacher-centered assessment strategies. Popham is of the view that these assessment strategies pressurize teachers to complete their syllabi (Popham, as cited in Behar-Horenstein, & Seabert, 2002) and they spend more time on completing their syllabi and little time on classroom assessment.

The use of classroom assessment is strongly

supported to promote student learning (Tierney, 2006). However, assessment for promoting learning is not yet widely used. On the contrary, summative assessments (or teacher-centered assessments) are emphasized and teachers continue to use classroom assessments primarily for grading students (Kehr, as cited in Tierney, 2006; McNair et al., as cited in Tierney, 2006; Uchiyama, as cited in Tierney, 2006). Ground (as cited in Alkharusi, 2008) has identified alternative assessments such as portfolio, observation and other performance-based assessment strategies. Even though such assessment strategies require more time to use and score (Ground, as cited in Alkharusi, 2008), they are preferred to use as these assessments according to Shepard (as cited in Alkharusi, 2008) are intrinsically motivated, in other words, are student-centered assessment strategies.

This research has compared beliefs of trained and untrained middle and secondary school teachers of Pakistan about classroom assessment and has identified whether trained or untrained teachers believe in traditional, teacher-centered assessment technique or alternative, student-centered assessment strategies. From the analysis of the data, inferences were made and conclusions were drawn.

Review of Literature Classroom Assessments

Assessment is an important component of the teaching and learning process as it helps teachers in classroom decision-making (Rahim, Venville, & Chapman, 2009). Where classroom assessment helps teachers to make decisions concerning students' learning and development and suitability and effectiveness of classroom instructions (Linn & Miller, as cited in Rahim, Venville, & Chapman, 2009), it informs students about their progress and identify their learning areas that need improvement (Nitko & Brookhart, as cited in Rahim, Venville, & Chapman, 2009). Stiggins and Conklin (as cited in Rahim, Venville, & Chapman, 2009) noted that teachers spend one-third to one-half of their time in assessment related activities. Nevertheless, classroom assessment is not only the task of teachers rather it is a collaborative activity of teachers, students, school management and parents (Wolfendale, as cited in Earl, 2003).

There are different classroom assessment strategies that can be employed to collect information about students' achievement (Angelo & Cross, as cited in Rahim, Venville, & Chapman, 2009; Nitko & Brookhart, as cited in Rahim, Venville, & Chapman, 2009). One set of the assessment strategies is considered traditional strategies or teacher-centered strategies and include test, exams, quizzes and textbook exercises (Rahim, Venville, & Chapman, 2009). The other set of assessment strategies that are considered alternative strategies to the traditional strategies, are student-centered strategies and include concept maps, group work, portfolios, journals and presentations (Bell, as cited in Rahim, Venville, & Chapman, 2009).

The global educational assessment scenario has gradually moved from the traditional examination culture to more flexible assessment culture (Linn & Miller, as cited in Rahim, Venville, & Chapman, 2009). This global reform has encouraged Asian countries to move away from rigid, high stake testing to a flexible assessment culture (Rahim, Venville, & Chapman, 2009). For example, Malaysia has started devising a new national assessment system with the intent to meet the global demands concerning student assessments (Tuah, as cited in Rahim, Venville, & Chapman, 2009). Pakistan also recommends alternative approaches to assessment and suggests that assessment should be based on the curriculum (covering cognitive development, social development, emotional development and so on) not only the textbooks and formative assessment of students' learning should be an integral part of the assessment mechanism (Aly, 2007).

Effective (alternative) assessment strategies can be categorized in different categories. These categories are: (1) Rubrics which is a tool to assess students' knowledge and skills. It is the criteria of knowledge and abilities that cannot be measured by standardized testing (Reeves & Stanford, as cited in Price, Pierson, & Light, 2011); (2) Performance-based assessment which is known as the project-based or authentic assessment and assesses whether or not students can apply their knowledge and skills in a real world situation (Palm, as cited in Price, Pierson, & Light, 2011); (3) Portfolio assessment which helps teachers to assess students' effort, development and achievement over a period of time

(Anderson & Bachor, as cited in Price, Pierson, & Light, 2011; Barootchi & Keshavarz, as cited in Price, Pierson, & Light, 2011), (4) Student self-assessment which is used to enable students to identify their own strengths and weakness and work to make improvements to meet specific needs (Andrade & Valtcheva, as cited in Price, Pierson, & Light, 2011), (5) Peer-assessment which is a process in which students consider and give feedback to other students about the quality and value of their work (Topping, as cited in Price, Pierson, & Light, 2011).

Earl (2003) defines three approaches to classroom assessment which include: (a) Assessment of learning: This is a summative assessment (Cole & Chan, 1987) and can pressurize teachers to encourage students to practice prior to tests in order to raise their scores (Popham, cited in Behar-Horenstein, & Seabert, 2002). (b) Assessment for learning: This assessment shifts the focus from making judgments (at the end of a unit or course) to create descriptions (such as keeping portfolios, keeping records of reflective interviews and keeping anecdotal records of students (Earl, 2003). Assessment for learning support ongoing teaching and learning (Assessment Reform Group, as cited in Price, Pierson, & Light, 2011; Heritage, as cited in Price, Pierson, & Light, 2011). (c) Assessment as learning: In this type of assessment the student is actively engaged in making sense of information and relating it to his or her prior knowledge and in mastering the skills involved. Making sense of the process is called metacognition. It occurs when students personally monitor what they are learning. They use the feedback from this monitoring to make judgments, adaptations and even major changes in what they understand (Earl, 2003).

Teachers' beliefs influence their classroom decision-making regarding the teaching and learning experiences for students and assessment for making judgment about students' leaning (Isenburg, as cited in Rahim, Venville, & Chapman, 2009; Pajares, as cited in Rahim, Venville, & Chapman, 2009; Hofer & Pintrich, as cited in Rahim, Venville, & Chapman, 2009). For example, studies conducted on Mathematics teachers' beliefs indicated a positive relationship between Mathematics teachers' beliefs and their instructional practices (Anderson, Sullivan & White, as cited in Rahim, Venville, & Chapman,

2009; Barkatsas & Malone, as cited in Rahim, Venville, & Chapman, 2009; Beswick, as cited in Chapman and Yates, as cited in Rahim, Venville, & Chapman, 2009). Therefore the teachers' selection of classroom assessments will be influenced by their beliefs about classroom assessment. Teachers believing in assessment of student learning will use traditional, teacher-centered assessment strategies, whereas teachers believing in assessments for student learning and assessment as student learning will be motivated to use alternative, student-centered assessment strategies.

Teachers' Beliefs about Classroom Assessment

With the help of the literature review seven beliefs of teachers concerning classroom assessment were identified and the following null hypothesis was formulated to compare differences between two categories of teachers' beliefs. The beliefs and the null hypothesis are listed below:

- (1) Assessments which take place informally in the class are the best ways of assessing students' performance
- (2) Informal assessments are a waste of teaching time
- (3) Assessment is a joint venture between teachers and parents
- (4) Assessment encourages students to look critically their own classroom performances
- (5) Assessments in the form of direct observation, reduces students' academic achievements
- (6) Assessment pressurizes teachers to complete their syllabi
- (7) Assessments, in the form of formal tests, makes a negligible contribution to student learning.

Ho₁: There is no significant difference between trained and untrained teachers' beliefs concerning the classroom assessments and their selection of assessment strategies.

Methodology

Research Design and Sample

The cross-sectional survey (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006) was used to conduct the research study. The sample for the study was teachers selected from 15 schools ranging from middle to secondary schools in various cities of Pakistan (namely, Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Faisalabad, Multan and Gujranwala near

Rawalpindi). From the samples (teachers from 15 schools), two groups of trained teachers (Those who have completed any regular training (education) that includes: PTC, CT, Dip Ed., B.Ed and M.Ed) and untrained teachers (Those who have not done a regular training) were formed.

The two groups of teachers included 88 trained teachers (71.54% of the total number of the sample) and 35 untrained teachers (28.46 % of the total number of the sample), from middle to secondary schools. The beliefs of the selected teachers were compared and hypothesis was tested by using the Chi Square.

Research Instrument

A questionnaire was developed to gather data for the research. The samples for the research were scattered all over Pakistan. Therefore, a questionnaire was considered to be the suitable tool for data gathering (Burns, 1997; Gay, & Airasian, 2003; Fraenkel, & Wallen, 2006). The questionnaire was a combination of true and false statements and the respondents were required to give their opinion about each statement on a five (5) point Likert Scale (Annexure A).

The expected number of the sample was 130 teachers (65 trained teachers and 65 untrained) but only 123 questionnaires returned back. Eighty eight (88) of these questionnaires were completed by the trained teachers and only 35 by the untrained teachers.

Limitations of study

There were some limitations which may have influenced the results of this research study. They were: (1) Only one type of data collection tool (questionnaire) was used; (2) It was difficult to get equal number of trained and untrained teachers due to less number of untrained teachers in some school (particularly in government school) and due to the inability of some untrained teachers to complete the questionnaire. (3) Questionnaire was not translated in Urdu therefore some teachers might have misunderstood some questions.

Results

The Chi Square (χ^2) test was used for

determining whether or not the two artificial categories (Gay, 1992) namely, trained and untrained teachers were significantly different from each other in terms of their beliefs about classroom assessment and their selection of classroom assessment strategies.

The results of the study support the hypothesis. Hence it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between the beliefs of trained and untrained teachers regarding classroom assessments and their selection of classroom assessment strategies.

To draw out conclusions of the study, teachers' responses were arranged into three categories namely, the high level of agreement/disagreement (above 60%), the moderate level of agreement/disagreement (between 50% and 60%) and the low level of agreement/disagreement (below 50%).

Teachers' beliefs about Classroom Assessment and their Selection of the Assessment Strategies

The data gathered for this study supported the hypothesis (H_{01}) [calculated $\chi^2 = 0.1$ whereas tabulated χ^2 at $p < 0.05 = 3.841$]. Hence it is concluded that there is no significant difference between the beliefs of trained and untrained teachers regarding the classroom assessment and their selection of classroom assessment strategies.

A pattern of similarity between trained and untrained teachers is quite obvious in the responses collected from trained and untrained teachers. Both the groups (i.e. trained and untrained) believe that assessments which take place informally in the class are the best ways of assessing students' performance (the percentage of agreement among trained and untrained teachers is 70.1% (high level) and 59% respectively (moderate level); they disagree that informal classroom assessments are a waste of teaching time (disagreement among trained and untrained teachers is 55% (moderate level) and 68.6% (high level) respectively); both trained and untrained teachers consider that assessment is a joint venture between teachers and parents (agreement among trained and untrained teachers is 80.2% (high

level) and 73.5% (high level) respectively) (Annexure B & C).

It can be noted in the analysis given above that both trained and untrained teachers consider assessment as tool for learning (Earl, 2003). According to Earl, assessment for learning shifts the focus from summative to formative, from making judgments (at the end of a unit or a course) to creating formative descriptions (such as keeping records of reflective interview and keeping anecdotal records of students). Hence it is suggested that teachers gather a wide range of data concerning students' needs, strengths and weaknesses so that the teachers can modify the learning work for their students and gather sufficient amount of data to make judgments about students' performances and achievements.

It also appeared from the responses that both trained and untrained teachers believe that assessment encourages students to see critically their own classroom performances (agreement among trained and untrained teachers is 87%, high level and 77.1%, high level respectively). This belief is consistent with the concept of assessment as learning given by Earl (2003). In this type of assessment students are actively engaged in monitoring and making judgment of their learning (Earl, 2003). Assessment for learning and assessment as learning can be considered as student-centered classroom assessments (Smith, Smith & Lisi, 2001) as they keep the student in the centre and encourage the assessment which does not take place only at the end of the learning process but occurs at different occasions through out the learning process.

However, misconceptions about some student-centered assessment strategies (such as direct observation) are also evident among trained teachers. Trained teachers agree that assessments in the form of direct observation, reduces students' academic achievements (agreement = 41%, low level and disagreement = 39.5%, low level disagreement). Untrained teachers on the other hand, disagree with the statement (disagreement = 62%, high level). However, trained teachers agree that classroom assessments pressurize teachers to complete their syllabi. The percentage of agreement among trained teachers is 48.2% (low level) whereas disagreement = 39% (low level). Nevertheless,

untrained teachers are divided as among the untrained teachers agreement is 44.1% (low level) whereas disagreement = 41.2% (low level).

It is inferred from the above data that both trained and untrained teachers prefer using student-centered assessment strategies. However, trained teachers will be reluctant in using some student-centered assessment strategies such as direct observation. Trained teachers' reluctance shows their lack of knowledge and skills of using some student-centered assessment strategies. Trained teachers do not get proper education and experience of using student-centered assessment strategies as Sikka, Nath and Cohen (2007) assert that teacher education institutes do not require prospective teachers to take up course unit in classroom assessment (Sikka, Nath, & Cohen, 2007). In Pakistan, prospective teachers at Bachelor of Education (BEd) level take up a course unit called Evaluation and Measurement. However, teacher education institutes in Pakistan are considered incompetent for preparing prospective teachers for the realities of classroom situations (Qazi, Rawat, & Thomas, 2012). Therefore, teachers educated from educational institutes keep on using traditional, teacher-centered classroom assessment strategies.

On the other hand, both trained and untrained teachers believe that both the groups are observing a pressure due to classroom assessments which forces them to complete their syllabi. The pressure on teachers is increased when the school or system's policy or practices are to use summative assessment (in the form of formal tests and examinations) (Cole & Chan, 1987) or use assessment strategies which focus on assessment of student learning (Earl, 2003). Earl describes the purpose of assessment of student learning as certifying learning and report to parents the students' progress in schools. Such an assessment usually identifies the student's relative position compared to other students. This kind of assessment pressurizes teachers and encourages them to exclude those topics from the syllabi which are not included in the tests or examinations and over-emphasize those topics which are included in the test or examination (Earl, 2003). Hence both trained and untrained teachers are of the view that classroom assessments in the form of formal tests and examinations make a negligible contribution to

student learning. The percentage of agreement among trained and untrained teachers is 53% (moderate level) and 45.5% (low level) respectively whereas percentage of disagreement among trained and untrained teachers is 32.2% (low level) and 39.4% (low level) respectively. Teachers' agreement with the concept of assessment as formal tests and examinations is consistent with that of Popham and Trucker and Clark (cited in Behar-Horenstein, & Seabert, 2002). According to these authors, assessment which is used to evaluate overall performance of students and consequently to evaluate teacher performance has not been proven to be an effective measure of student, teacher or school accountability.

Conclusion

As a result of this study it can be concluded that both trained and untrained teachers believe that alternative, student-centered assessment are effective. They believe in the concept of assessment for learning and assessment as learning. However, some teachers particularly trained teachers are reluctant in using some student-centered strategies. Reluctance among trained teachers opens up an issue, "whether or not the teacher training has a significant impact on teachers in Pakistan." It can also be concluded that because teachers in Pakistan are pressurized by the system of formal assessment (in the form of tests and examinations), they tend to complete the prescribed syllabus and overlook the assessment of the students' knowledge and skills. The teachers spend more time on over-emphasizing some parts of the syllabi hence claim they do not get time to use student-centered strategies of assessment which usually require more time for preparation and administration.

Recommendations

On the basis of the results of the study the following recommendations are made:

- It is suggested that teachers ensure that they have acquired mastery over the alternative, student-centered assessment strategies and use these strategies for the holistic development of students rather than focusing on their ability of rote memorization.

- The school management needs to provide opportunities for their teachers to take part in various professional development workshops, seminars and in-service programmes. These programmes should particularly focus on helping teachers to realize the importance of using student-centered assessment strategies as well as encouraging them to develop skills required for using student-centered classroom assessments.
- Principals themselves should be well aware of the advancement in the field of classroom assessment and have a skill to motivate the staff to use the student-centered assessment strategies.

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Annexure A

Quantitative Research Questionnaire

Teachers' Beliefs about Classroom Assessment and their selection of Classroom Assessment Strategies

Code # _____ Name (optional) _____ School and Place: _____

Section A: Biographical Profile

Please place a tick (?) in the appropriate box in each of the following items

2. Sex	
Male	<input type="checkbox"/>
Female	<input type="checkbox"/>

1. The level you teach	
Middle	<input type="checkbox"/>
Secondary	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. Academic Qualification	
Matriculation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Intermediate	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bachelor	<input type="checkbox"/>
Master	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Professional Qualification	
Bachelor	<input type="checkbox"/>
Master	<input type="checkbox"/>
None	<input type="checkbox"/>
Any other (Explain) -----	

Section B: Teachers' Beliefs about Classroom Assessment and their Selection of Classroom Assessment Strategies

Think about how well each of the following statements describes your beliefs about classroom Assessment. Please place a tick (?) against each statement by choosing one of the levels explained below:

Strongly Agree: SA Agree: A Uncertain: U Disagree: D Strongly Disagree: SD

S #	Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD
1	Assessments which take place informally in the class are the best ways of assessing students' performance					
2	Assessment encourages students to look critically their own classroom performances					
3	Assessment pressurizes teachers to complete their syllabi					
4	Assessment is a joint venture between teachers and parents					
5	Assessments in the form of direct observation, reduces students' academic achievements					
6	Informal assessments are a waste of teaching time					
7	Assessments, in the form of formal tests, makes a negligible contribution to student learning					

Thank you for completing the questionnaire



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Annexure C

Untrained Teachers' Beliefs about Classroom Assessment and their Selection of Classroom Assessment Strategies

S #	Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	NR	Total
1	Assessments which take place informally in the class are the best ways of assessing students' performance	04	16	06	07	01	01	35
		11.76	47.06	17.65	20.59	2.94		
		%	%	%	%	%		
		59.0%			23.3%			
2	Assessment encourages students to look critically their own classroom performances	03	24	03	03	02	00	35
		8.57%	68.57	8.57	8.57%	5.71		
		%	%	%	%	%		
		77.1%			14.3%			
3	Assessment pressurizes teachers to complete their syllabi	01	14	05	12	02	01	35
		2.94%	41.18	14.7	35.29	5.88		
		%	%	%	%	%		
		44.1%			41.2%			
4	Assessment is a joint venture between teachers and parents	05	20	06	03	00	01	35
		14.7%	58.82	17.65	8.82%	00%		
		%	%	%	%	%		
		73.5%			9%			
5	Assessments in the form of direct observation, reduces students' academic achievements	01	09	03	18	03	01	35
		2.94%	26.47	8.82	52.94	8.82		
		%	%	%	%	%		
		29.4%			62%			
6	Informal assessments are a waste of teaching time	00	07	04	20	04	00	35
		00%	20%	11.43	57.14	11.43		
		%	%	%	%	%		
		20%			68.6%			
7	Assessments, in the form of formal tests, makes a negligible contribution to student learning	03	12	05	13	00	02	33
		9.1%	36.36	15.15	39.39	00%		
		%	%	%	%	%		
		45.5%			39.4%			