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ASSESSMENT PRACTICES IN ADE/B.ED. PROGRAM IN BALOCHISTAN:A CASE STUDY OF COURSE OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN 1ST SEMESTER OF ADE AS SPECIFIC COURSE OF PROFESSIONAL EDUCATIONIST

Abstract

In recent decades research on assessment practices has led to a shift in theoretical perspectives and beliefs about assessment practices, from traditional summative exams to more learner-centered continuous forms of assessment (Plessis & Muzaffar, 2010). The new pre-service teacher education programs in Pakistan, ADE/ B.Ed. (Hons), aim to shift faculty practice in this direction. The research presented in this paper investigates the assessment practices followed by faculty in the new pre-service programs, their rationale for using certain practices and the ways in which they negotiate the different sets of assessment requirements (institutional and programmatic). The research entailed a case study of assessment practices in two courses of the new program at two institutions in Balochistan. Methodology included semi-structured interviews of faculty, observations of their practice and document analysis of the assessments. This paper discusses the findings of this study and their significance for institutional policy. The

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results of this study will help policymakers make the changes needed to facilitate alignment between curriculum, instruction, and assessment in pre-service teacher education.

Introduction

Assessment is process of collecting information and evaluating student performance according to learning outcomes and consequently informing teaching practice. Traditionally education reform has tended to focus on curriculum and instruction without equal emphasis on assessment practice. However, in recent decades substantial research on assessment practices has been conducted. This has led to a shift in theoretical perspectives and beliefs about assessment practices, from traditional teacher-centered summative exams to more learner-centered continuous forms of assessment (Plessis & Muzaffar, 2010). Research shows that such 'alternative' assessments are closely aligned with instructional strategies and learning objectives, privilege higher order thinking skills, combine formative and summative assessments and provide clear criteria or rubrics for assessment (Anderson, 1998; Plessis & Muzaffar, 2010). The new pre-service teacher education programs in Pakistan, ADE/ B.Ed. (Hons), aim to shift assessment practice in this direction.

Research Questions

Research questions for this study are as follows:

1. What are the institutional assessment requirements?
2. What are the suggested assessment techniques for the selected B.Ed. (Hons) courses?
3. What are the current assessment practices followed by the faculty for the courses?

4. What is their rationale for their choice of assessment practices?
5. How are faculty and institutions experiencing and adjusting to the difference between the new curriculum and institutional assessment techniques?

Literature Review

Theoretical Context

Assessment, curriculum, and instruction are deeply connected with each other. Some even argue, “get assessment right and everything else will follow,” (Knight, 1999, p. 109). The learner centered, dynamic, and activity based learning approaches have led to an alternative set of assessment practices, which are different from traditional paper and pencil approaches for assessing student outcomes. Our understanding of assessment has undergone substantive changes due to developments in cognitive science. The traditional paper and pencil tests are increasingly seen as misaligned with active learning approaches (Anderson, 1998; Shepard, 2000; Wiggins, 1989). Alternative assessment practices also emphasize both the learning process and the product rather than just the latter, view the purpose of assessment as a means for facilitating learning rather than just documenting it, and view learning as a collaborative process rather than just an individual enterprise (Anderson, 1998.)

The traditional tests are typically replaced by strategies that do more than merely test students for memory recall. One of the weakness of traditional exam driven assessment approaches is that they often are unable to adequately assess students’ thinking at higher cognitive levels (for a review of literature on alternative and authentic approaches, see Plessis & Muzaffar, 2010, pp. 66-

81). However, the reforms demand faculty to engage the prospective teachers in thinking and reflection about their learning. The assessments strategies should, therefore, encourage students to think instead of merely recall facts by memory.

Typically the purposes of studies of assessment practices have been to determine the extent to which they are aligned with the approaches toward learning and teaching embedded in the curriculum and instruction (Martone & Sireci, 2009). The studies of the assessment practices typically require developing a thick description of classroom practices, and, therefore, employ qualitative, case study methodologies.

Methodology

Research Design

The research study uses a multiple case study methodology of inquiry (Stake, 2005). The cases for this purpose are the collection of selected B.Ed. course offered at particular institutional sites. The choice for using case study methodology is guided by the complex nature of assessment practices and their specific rationales. The assumption is that each institution is a site of particular practices guided by the characteristics of faculty conducting the courses and university requirements. An in-depth understanding of assessment practices and their rationales, therefore, requires that each institution is treated as a case. The case study approach also provides an opportunity for a cross-case analysis to develop insights about the similarities and differences in assessment practices across the institutions.

Data Description & Instruments

As is typical with case studies approach the data is mainly qualitative. This includes documents such as the institutional policies and B.Ed. course syllabi as well as the actual assessment documents used by the faculty (assignment, quizzes and exams), transcripts of semi-structured interviews with faculty and heads of institutions and field notes of observations of assessment events.

The data for each case was collected by the following data collection instruments:

- Guidelines for identification and analysis of institutional assessment policy documents as well as student assessments (assignments, quizzes and exams)
- Interview protocols for semi-structured interviews with the course faculty and heads of institutions
- Observation guidelines for presentations at each course site

Research Sites & Courses

Research sites were selected on the basis of their participation in the first cohort of the ADE/ B.Ed. (Hons) program in Balochistan. These included three institutions the University of Balochistan (BU), Government Girls Elementary College Pishin and Government Elementary College Panjgoor. Initially all three institutions were selected, but the number of sites were reduced to two, dropping Panjgoor College, due to budgetary constraints and the law and order situation in Balochistan. Two courses were also selected for case studies, namely child development and classroom management courses (both 3 credit hour courses). Thus

the case study of assessment techniques includes cases of 2 different types of courses at 2 different sites.

Data Collection

The data collection for this study was conducted between March to December 2012. The appropriate approvals were obtained for conducting interviews and observations; approval was not needed for those documents already in the public domain.

Policy documents regarding the assessment, course syllabi, and other necessary documents were collected at the beginning of the academic year. Based on the initial analysis of the documents, guidelines for the interview protocol, observations and the review of assessment instruments were developed. Then the semi-structured interviews of the heads of institutions and faculty were conducted and the assessment documents reviewed. Finally, a follow-up interview was conducted with faculty and heads of institutions to probe findings from initial analysis.

There were some limitations in the data collection. Although the team was able to complete all data collection activities for case one on child development, they were unable to collect the assessment documents and conduct follow-up interviews for case two on classroom management due to shortage of time. Also respondents were not as forthcoming as expected, despite thoroughly explaining the purposes of the study.

In addition to the above mentioned techniques and partly to address the data limitations, the main team member wrote her reflections on the ADE/B.Ed. assessment practices, given that she has participated in the new programs. Reflections covered aspects of the context, practices, challenges and any other aspect that had not been covered in detail through data collection.

Data Analysis

The data from each case site was first analyzed separately followed by a cross-case analysis. The qualitative data analysis techniques of open coding were used. The codes were carefully developed with reference to research questions and sought to capture any additional themes that emerged from data. The development of a final set of codes entailed several iterations. The qualitative data analysis software Dedoose and Excel were used to conduct data analysis. Given the shortage of data available for each case, only a cross-case analysis consisting of the similarities and differences in assessment practices across different institutions has been provided in this report.

Findings

The findings for this study are organized into four sections. The first section provides a description of those aspects of the context that have an impact on assessment practice. The second section compares the requirements of the institution and B.Ed. courses on different aspects and highlights the areas of difference (answering research questions one and two). The third section describes faculty practices and their reasons for utilizing them (answering research questions three and four). This section provides an in-depth snapshot of each assessment practice and then compares them on various aspects such as emphasis or linkage to learning outcomes. The final section explores how faculty is negotiating the differences in the requirements, particularly the challenges they face and how they attempt to overcome these differences (answering research question five).

- **Context**

Three aspects of the context are important to discuss, these include the recently introduced semester system and the changes it has initiated, the new teacher education programs' course structure and roles, and background on the institutions themselves.

- **Semester System**

The semester system was introduced by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) in 2008-09 in universities of Pakistan. A significant part of the changes that this system introduced was the concept of using multiple assessments to assess and grade students. This was a move away from the annual system where only the final exam counted towards the final grade.

The semester system is different, according to research team, in that the individual teacher matters. It has gradually created a sense of responsibility in both students and teachers. For example teacher's involvement in making the assessments has increased. Previously faculty members were only responsible for teaching, not for making assessments. Now under the semester system, faculty members are entirely responsible for making assessments, grading them and submitting grades for their courses. Similarly students have to work consistently in order to meet the requirements of the semester system.

The semester system has also created greater accountability. Faculty has to be there to teach, conduct activities and submit results throughout the semester. In a way this has decreased faculty absenteeism as well. For the students, this system has made cheating harder. According to research team, at least students must now show-up themselves for their quizzes and

exams, they cannot have someone else sit in their place as done before.

According to the research team, faculty and students are still getting used to this system. Many of the faculty members find it difficult to implement since they themselves have studied in the annual system and have not experienced the semester system. Faculty are likely to feel overburdened by this new system as it requires a change in behavior and what appears to be a greater workload. This brings up the question as to whether this effects faculty's motivation to implement new kinds of assessment practices.

- **B.Ed. (Hons) Program is the new program**

The ADE/ B.Ed. (Hons) program was introduced in 2011. As described previously these new programs seek to bring about a substantial shift towards more active, student centered assessment practice. The program has conducted extensive trainings in content and pedagogy and continues to do so in order to achieve this objective. With regards to assessment, there have been specific modules that have dealt with assessment practice, one in particular focused on developing subjective questions and rubrics for grading them.

In order to support the programs at the institutional level, every university has two coordinators, one for the program and one for practicum. The role of the program coordinator is largely administrative. It entails setting the academic calendar, rescheduling classes in case of shutdowns, dealing with student issues and monitoring whether classes are being conducted and their timings. The coordinator is not involved at the level of the class, how the faculty teaches or assesses students. The role of the

practicum coordinator is to develop a schedule for students for visiting schools and monitoring their portfolios.

In practice the faculty is expected to file a course coverage report which includes the percentage of course covered and the topics covered, student attendance per month and the student results. However, there is no scrutiny on what the assessments cover, particularly whether the course learning outcomes are being achieved or not. This means that at the institutional level there is not likely to be awareness of whether course learning outcomes are being met.

In the third and fourth years of the B.Ed. (Hon) programs there is a teaching practicum. In the teaching practicum, it is expected that faculty will create timetables for school visits and students will make their portfolios. According to the research team, the practicum is taken far more seriously than any teaching practice included in regular courses. This means any assessment related to classroom practice is not as likely to be done in regular courses as it seems to be under the practicum.

Institutional Background

The education department of University of Balochistan, Quetta was the sole department for many years to teach prospective teachers in Balochistan. It experienced many programs relevant to teacher education successfully in morning and evening sessions. In 2008 the university was given the option to introduce the semester system for the MA Education course. BU availed the opportunity as the head of institution at the time felt that it was a direction they would have to take eventually. Shortly thereafter in 2011 the Pre-STEP USAID/ TEP selected BU to start the B.Ed. (Hons) 1st Cohort. Initially in the first semester 19 students were enrolled. Now by the fourth semester there are only 9 students

remaining. The others have dropped out due to performance, having less than 1.5 GPA which is below the passing criteria set by the BU semester rules of 2008. Over the years, Balochistan University Department of Education faculty has decreased from 14 in 2008 to 4 in 2012 due to security issues. As a result there are less faculty members to take on the new tasks and responsibilities required by the B.Ed. program and existing faculty members are overburdened. They have to make use of visiting faculty from other departments to overcome the gaps.

Government Elementary Girls College in Pishin is located near to Quetta. It also began implementation of the ADE program in March 2011. Prior to this, they had not had the opportunity to work under the semester system. They had previously implemented the Primary Teachers Certificate (PTC), a one year teacher education course that has now been phased out. In contrast to BU, Pishin College appears to have more than sufficient amount of faculty members, there were approximately three members teaching the child development course alone.

Assessment Requirements

Types of Assessment

The institutional document points out three types of assessment in total - assignments, quizzes and exams - but does not justify the reasons why any of them are to be used. In contrast, the B.Ed. child development course syllabus lists multiple forms of assessment, about 9-10 different types in total - including observation, child portfolio, reflective journal, case studies and so on. The course syllabus explains the reason why this is needed, "By using multiple forms of assessment, the instructor will have many windows on the knowledge, skills and dispositions of

prospective teachers.” (Child Development Syllabus, p.10). The classroom management course syllabus also outlines a few assessment techniques such as classroom management plan, observations and reflective journal, but in far less detail. There is clearly variation from one course syllabus to the next in the B.Ed. program.

All respondents, in both institutions and courses, are clearly aware of institutional requirements. In contrast we find a varying degree of awareness about the B.Ed. requirements. The heads of institutions are generally less aware of the course based requirements whereas the faculty is more informed. And in BU, greater awareness of course based requirements was found, whereas in some instances in Pishin college there appeared to be a bit less clarity on the requirements.

Emphasis

In the institutional document the frequencies for each type of assessment are very specifically laid out, whereas in the B.Ed. course documents frequency is not specified at all (refer to Table 1 for details). The B.Ed. course appears more flexible in its requirements and leaves a lot for the faculty to decide.

Table 1: Comparison of Assessment Requirements by Emphasis

Assessment Type	Frequency		Weightage	
	<i>Institutional</i>	<i>B.Ed. Child Development</i>	<i>Institutional</i>	<i>B.Ed. Child Development</i>
Quizzes	3 out of 5 best	Not specified	15%	5-10%
Mid-term examination	Once	Once	30%	15-20%
Final examination	Once	Once	40%	20-30% (not to exceed 40% with mid-term in total)
Assignments	Two	Not specified	15%	25-30%
Presentations or group tasks	None	Not specified	Not there	5-10%

There is a difference in weightage assigned to different assessments between the institutional policy and B.Ed. course (refer to Table 1). The institution still places more emphasis on paper and pencil tests (i.e. quizzes and exams), whereas The B.Ed. course clearly specifies that exams should not comprise more than 40% of grade, which denotes an emphasis on alternative forms of assessment. The B.Ed. course includes a wide variety of assessment tools not included in the institutional policy that emphasize the learning process not just the product. The classroom management course provides no details on the weightage assigned to the different types of assessment.

Linkage to Thinking Skills & Learning Outcomes

Box 1: Institutional Policy Excerpt



Type of Questions

Descriptive Questions	20%
Short Essay Questions	20%
Multiple Choice Questions	25%
Extended Match Questions	10%
Fill in the Blanks	15%
True / False	10%

Evaluation Tools

Simple Recall	20%
Conceptual Knowledge	40%
Data interpretation	20%
Problem solving	20%



The institutional document does not provide any details on the linkage of assessment techniques to learning outcomes. It only provides a breakdown of the types of questions and evaluation tools to be used in an examination (refer to Box 1 excerpt from Semester System Rules & Regulations 2008, p6). These tools, such as recall and problem solving, seem to indicate some thought on thinking skills, but no further detail on their use is provided.

Alternatively the B.Ed. syllabus for child development provides a clear linkage between assessment and learning outcomes. It lists in a table the different types of assessments suggested for each unit in the course and the specific learning outcome (refer to Box 2 for excerpt). The learning outcomes, such as 'use knowledge of individual needs to design classroom environment', seem to emphasize higher levels of thinking skills, namely application, which is again missing from the institutional document. The

classroom management course syllabus simply provides a list of learning outcomes, less detailed than the other course syllabus, however application is embedded in assignments such as developing a classroom management plan. In terms of learning outcomes, application is important, particularly for prospective teachers.

Box 2: Child Development Syllabus Learning Outcomes & Assessment

Topic/s	Learning outcome/Standards	Assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Definition and theories of cognitive development according to Erikson, Bandura, Piaget, Bruner, Vygotsky, Gesell Introduction to ways of assessing cognitive development Cognitive Development from Infancy to childhood/adolescence Characteristics of individuals at different cognitive levels Organization of relevant activities in the classroom at the following levels. Preschool and Kindergarten Elementary 	<p>Explain theories of cognitive development (1.1, 2.1)</p> <p>Compare important features of developmental theories (2.1, 2.2)</p> <p>Describe characteristics of children at different cognitive levels (individual differences)(1.1, 3.2)</p> <p>Use knowledge of individual needs/differences of children to design a classroom environment (4.2, 4.3)</p> <p>Develop classroom activities according to individual learning activities (2.2, 4.2)</p>	<p>Quiz/ written assessment</p> <p>Presentation</p> <p>Observation</p> <p>Case study</p> <p>Child Study Portfolio</p> <p>Reflective Journal</p>

Perceived Differences between Requirements

Respondents noted that the new curriculum is structured in entirely a different way. While requirements are quite clearly set, the courses have very different demands with many more types of assessment. There is also a greater degree of detail in the course syllabi developed for the B.Ed. (Hons) program as compared to the other education programs (M.Ed., M.A Education) and is perceived as more detailed, thus burdensome.

Emphasis

The frequency and weightage of assessments is done according to the institution policy across the board in both institutions. At the most one finds a variation where the faculty substitutes a presentation for one of the quiz marks or for the written assignment. However, this is a practice that is done entirely at the level of the faculty member, and shows some motivation on his/her part to formally utilize this other assessment technique.

Topics

Usually detailed topics that require more time are covered by the assignments, presentations and to some extent, the subjective questions of the exam, whereas shorter topics are covered in quizzes. In terms of coverage, we find that the BU child development course all topics are covered in the various assessments except for some of nature nurture controversy and the unit which links child development to human learning and classroom teaching. The reason provided for not covering these topics was that there was no time to cover the particular unit related to this in class teaching either.

Learning Outcomes

In order to understand the kinds of learning outcomes assessed in different assessments we first conducted a document review and then interviewed faculty on their choices. Given the lack of availability of documents in case two, there was limited data available for this aspect. Also generally responses to questions on learning outcomes did not yield much detail, indicating a possible lack of thought on the links between assessments and learning outcomes on the part of faculty.

In the case of the BU child development course, we find that learning outcomes assessed tend to relate to lower order thinking skills of remembering or understanding, for example describing or comparing theories, identifying factors or characteristics of developmental stages (refer to Box 3 for child development course outcomes). The assessments do not really provide an opportunity to assess the higher order thinking skills such as the application to teaching (designing teaching methods, plan environments etc.).

Box 3: Child Development Course Learning Outcomes

- Describe major theories and big themes in how children develop
- Compare the characteristics of various developmental stages according to various theorists
- Identify factors influencing the learning process
- Design different age appropriate teaching methods based on developmental theory
- Plan environments for learning based on developmental stages of children
- Identify individual differences of students and children with special needs
- Reflect on their conceptions about child development and its implications for teaching and learning

There is only some emphasis on application in the BU presentations as students are encouraged to use examples from everyday life in explaining development stages.

Guidelines and Grading

Faculty members provide guidelines for assignments and presentations that include a varying degree of detail. In the child development course in BU the faculty provides a fair amount of detail on what to put in the assignment or presentation as well as how to structure it. In other cases this level of detail was not articulated by faculty and does not seem to exist, indicating a lack of emphasis on helping students understand how to they will be assessed.

In terms of grading, there were no documented rubrics. The BU child development faculty did follow the guidelines mentioned, but these were not documented. There was a mention of the word rubrics in Pishin College but it did not seem to be accompanied by an actual understanding of the term. Research team does note that in the practicum component of the B.Ed. (Hon) course, however, written rubrics exist to help faculty know the standards on which to assess students. Further exploration of this practice may be needed in further research.

On a positive note, with the presentations we find that faculty members are at least providing feedback to the students on the presentation in addition to the grades. In both classroom management courses faculty also provided positive and negative feedback. Such feedback is in line with effective assessment where the purpose is to also inform students about their learning and the gaps in it (Anderson, 1998).

Reasons for Using

By and large the main reason for choosing a particular type of assessment is the institutional requirements. The only exception is the presentation, which appears to be something of a norm at the institutional level and is used as one of the assignments.

Within the realm of accepted assessment practices, the applicability of certain assessment methods to a particular topic is also deciding factor. For example, the level of detail of the topic determines which type of assessment is used. In some cases the faculty decides to use multiple assessments for the same learning outcome. For example in BU child development course the faculty assesses whether students know how to discuss different developmental stages through quizzes, exam long essay questions and presentation.

Other than these reasons, there are certain challenges which serve as deciding factors. For example the availability of time, if there is more time then the faculty will have each student make presentations, if less then written assignment and so on. Or for example there is the issue of transparency, faculty members hesitate to use those techniques for which they have no evidence to show. These challenges will be discussed in further detail in the next section.

Practices across Institutions

The research team reflected on the assessment practices in terms of the institutions as well. They find that with regards to assignments, the Pishin College assignments did not have the same depth as the BU assignments. In the presentations, the Pishin College faculty seemed to focus more on the format or appearance of the presentation, the use of PowerPoint and time

management, but very little focus was on the content. Whereas, in BU focus appeared to be on content such as providing real life examples and student's level of preparation as well. The team feels that the BU faculty have had greater exposure having taught courses at a higher level, such as the regular B.Ed., M.Ed., and they have been exposed to the semester system longer therefore they find it much easier to manage the new assessment requirements, whereas in Pishin College, faculty have not had such opportunities and are struggling more as a result.

Negotiating Differences

Experiences & Preferences

Across the board, faculty and head of institutions follow the institutional policy with regards to assessment practice. They are obliged to follow the institutional guidelines as the university will not accept the result otherwise. As one faculty member puts it, "I am preferring to follow the policy guidelines from the institution because my institution who pays me as a visiting faculty can check me anytime and in case of any rule violation my job will be considered as unsatisfactory."

After reviewing the policy document it is clear that the frequency of different assessments and distribution of marks are followed very closely. However, the policy is not necessarily considered in-depth in terms of the kinds of questions that can be asked. This ultimately links to learning objectives and appears to be an ignored part of the institutional policy in practice.

Challenges:

These are the challenges

- *Lack of guidelines & support*
- *Time management*
- *Differences in approach*
- *Transparency*
- *Institutional constraints & attitudes*
- *Law and order in Balochistan*
- **Overcoming Challenges**
- **Positive Impacts**

Conclusion

This research highlights that in recent years the expectations about assessment practices at the college and university level in Balochistan and elsewhere in Pakistan are undergoing a dramatic shift. They have gone from the traditional summative assessments to limited set of multiple assessments under the semester system to flexible continuous assessment techniques under the ADE/B.Ed. programs. In practice, finding the very existence of multiple forms of assessment is a step in the right direction. However, it is clear that a substantive shift in faculty perspective, capacity and practice is still required to bring assessment practice to where it is expected and various challenges will have to be addressed along the way to do so.

It is clear from the research that there is a disconnect between the institutional policy and B.Ed. course requirements whether in terms of the types required, their emphasis or linkage to learning outcomes and thinking skills. It appears that the institutional policy still retains a traditional perspective (Plessis & Muzaffar,

2010) on assessment practice with its emphasis on summative examinations that account for 70% of the grade, teacher driven assessment and a lack of real guidelines on how to assess different thinking skills or provide feedback to students.

In terms of practice, faculty members very clearly follow the institutional requirements. This means that they have learned to accept assignments and quizzes as a part of their repertoire of assessment practice but any other assessment practice suggested by the ADE/B.Ed. (Hon) course syllabi is not implemented. Such assessment practices are considered 'informal' as they have no connection to the grades denoting a perspective that focuses on the learning product rather than the learning process (Anderson, 1998). It appears that faculty members do not necessarily think about the learning outcomes they want to assess with different assessments; their approach is still quite mechanical focusing on topic coverage and so on. They also do not appear to focus on higher order thinking skills in the assessments, sticking to remembering and understanding levels of thinking (Kratwohl, 2002). Finally there is no use of written rubrics for grading assignments, presentations or subjective questions, indicating again a lack of link to any particular learning outcomes although there is some concept of providing feedback to students on presentations.

Finally, the challenges that shape faculty assessment practice range from issues of lack of guidelines and structure to time management to fears over transparency to the differences in underlying approach between institutional policy and teacher education programs to broader contextual constraints related to the institutions themselves and the law and order situation in Balochistan. Some of these challenges can be addressed.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions of the research study, a set of recommendations have been put together.

- 1: There should be Alignment of Assessment Requirements
- 2: when there will be Greater Alignment with Teaching Practice and Learning Outcomes
- 3: There must be the Greater Support for Teachers
- 4: The Planning & Creating Evidence should be there

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