

Evaluation of the Assessment Criteria of English Language at Higher Secondary Level in Pakistan

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Abstract

The present research aimed to explore the weaknesses of the assessment criteria in relevance to the performance of the student in the subject English of grade XI-XII. The research was conducted to analyze the theoretical framework of assessment and practical pattern, practiced in public Examinations. The data have been collected from the handbook of National Curriculum document, 2006, up-to-date papers of the English subject (2007-2010), experts, teachers and students of respective classes. The mixed method approach was used for the interpretation of data. The major issues regarding the nature of assessment and its relevance with curriculum objectives has been studied. Comparison about the content, teaching methods, evaluation and objectives at intermediate level in the opinions of experts, teachers and student was analyzed. A descriptive and qualitative analysis was used. The findings of the study exposed that there is need to improve the quality of assessment to fulfill the desired learning outcomes. Assessment system suffers from multiple deficiencies like rote learning and assessing lower level skills. Methods of assessment have not been shifted from theory to performance in Pakistan.

Key Words: Assessment, criteria, desired learning outcomes, Examination, English Language.

Introduction

Assessment and evaluation in language teaching always has a strong link with objectives and implementation. Assessment system is a process that determines the course of action and recommends changes for the betterment of the National Curriculum Development or policies.

The assessment system acts as change agent it measures the fulfillment of the set objectives and provides feedback for the improvement. Some researchers have concluded through their work analyze of the results of HSSC (Higher secondary school certificate) of last five years of various Educational boards, it was revealed that most of the students failed in English. The academic assessments in Pakistan do not judge real competence or genuine educational accomplishment of the students. Even the Pakistani educational system encourages those who can best reproduce what they have learnt in class and fails those who are unable to do that. It seems as if the whole system of education revolves around exams (Khan, 2006). Rehmani (2003) points out that "Teachers teach for testing, rather than for learning. The examination system reinforces approaches to teaching that reward memorization, the more reproduction, the better and higher are the scores or marks awarded by the examiners" (p.3).

According, to Ministry of Education (MoE, 2009) "student performance shall be based on assessing competence in a specialized area that requires a given skill set". According to Warsi (2004) assessing the English language in Pakistan is subjective in setting in such a manner that it measures pupils' knowledge of the language rather than their performance in it. However, the MoE (2006) has stated that language teachers should employ both formative and summative forms of assessment. Secondly, examiners should explore the cause of students' strengths and weaknesses and provide helpful and effective feedback to them. Moreover, in constructing an English reading comprehension test, teachers should primarily decide on the purpose of the test and the objectives. Thirdly, the examiners should do an item analysis to find out the validity and reliability of the test (MoE, 2006).

Ali (1994) also notes that testing is not viewed as a vital component of teaching and is considered quite distinct from teaching and learning as well as practice (as cited in Imran, 1998). Rehmani (2003) pinpoints that reliability and validity of examination papers in terms of coverage of curriculum, selection of paper setters, lack of training or otherwise of the paper setters and examiners, marking system and preparation of results, are considered dubious. Moreover, SPELT (1986) also points out that textbook materials are prescribed by the teacher for their learners to be learnt and explained word by word and sentence by sentence. According to Shah and Saleem (2010) Pakistan's educational system depends on rote learning that is confined to only one textbook, due to this approach of teaching and learning, students become passive recipients of prescribed content knowledge of the textbook.

Khan (1995) states that the questions after each lesson of the textbook are based on literal level that measures only low order thinking skills. She (1995) further says that comprehension questions are useful for checking understanding particularly if they are of the type which requires the students to actively seek out the

answer and formulate it themselves, rather than simply repeat a section of the text, moreover the questions do not encourage the personal involvement of the learner which is an important factor in motivating students (Khan, 1995).

The present study is based on the assumption that system of evaluation is theoretically a set of interconnected parts; all these parts (objectives, curriculum, teaching methodology and assessment) are working collectively to achieve a final goal. These parts are dependent on one another for input and output, and the whole system needs feedback to conclude if its preferred goal is to achieve. If not, then the whole system is adapted till the successful achievement of the goals.

Objectives

The main objectives of the study are to

- Explore the relevance of curriculum objectives with the set criteria of assessment in Examination papers over the last four years. The relevance was explored in terms of
 - a) Language skills assessed in the English papers at HSSC Examination.
 - b) Level of questions with reference to cognitive levels.
 - c) Content coverage and repetition of items in papers.

Research Questions

- Are the theoretical principles for assessment criteria reflected in English Language assessment?
- Is the curriculum driven assessment reflected in the Examination papers?

Significance of the Study

The present research provides empirical data on the different aspects of the assessment pattern at intermediate level about the subject English. The information relevant to paper setting, language skills assessed in papers, distribution of items according to cognitive level, relevance of assessment criteria with the objectives of national curriculum will provide feedback to the curriculum developers, policy makers and the BISE of Pakistan

Research Design

S#.	Type of data	Source of data
1.	Objectives of Curriculum & assessment criteria at intermediate level.	National Curriculum document (grade XI-XII)
2.	Contents	From four text books at intermediate level.
3.	Examination papers	Examination papers of English of BISE (Board of intermediate & Secondary Examination) from board
4.	Methods of teaching at classroom and teaching practices	Teachers and students

The present study was about the evaluation of assessment criteria at intermediate level. This study was conducted in two dimensions and data was collected from five sources. The study was qualitative in nature and data collected through documents were interpreted in descriptive form.

Research Method

The present research was to study the theoretical picture of desired learning outcomes of national curriculum (curriculum documents) for English language teaching and practical picture of English language testing through examination papers. In order to measure the existing gap between the curriculum objectives and assessment criteria researcher used qualitative research method. Data was collected from the curriculum documents and four years up-to-date board papers of subject English.

Results and Discussion

In order to see the gap between desired learning outcomes and assessment Practices at intermediate level of the subject English. The content analysis of HSSC is based on four aspects of i.e. Objectives, content, method of teaching and method of assessment.

General objectives of teaching English at Higher Secondary level

The predetermined objectives of a particular course provide guidelines about the course outline, curriculum, course designers, and planners of curriculum, educational experts, relevant instructors and language assessors. Objectives describe the educational purposes which fulfill the targets and needs of nation as presented in its national policy (Taba, 1962).

Critical Analyses of Curriculum Objectives

- The objectives stated in National curriculum Document (MoE, 2006, p.120-142) are standard based. The major focus is on the skills based learning rather than on content. The objectives no doubt fulfill the national

and international standards and focused on the integration listening, reading writing and speaking skills. Learning of English language is a multidimensional task with a focus on integration of four skills through thematic approach (MoE, 2006, p. 143). In the curriculum documents, though the focus has been given on the integration of four skills but we actually find five competencies with its own specific benchmarks and standards.

- The objectives of NCD (National Curriculum Documents) paid focus on reading comprehension, reading for pleasure, reading with acceptable pronunciation, reading skill should be developed in a way that student will be able to analyze the organization of text able to understand the function of different devices present in text beyond the text books (C1, S1, BM2), (MoE, 2006, p. 41) It has been observed most of our English Exams are based on reading and writing.
- Through writing skill student will be able to develop composition, drafting, and paraphrasing, summarizing, using information in new context (C2, S1)' (MoE, 2006, p.12). Even they will be able to write research reports to promote oral communication with fluency and accuracy. The practical observations about the oral communications skills are not examined through examination.. National curriculum Document focused on lexical grammatical skills, use of grammar for writing conventions use of noun, verbs, adverbs, phrases, use of tenses. Grammar has been separated from language and it has its own competency.
- Ethical issues and social values have been focused in the documents.

Critical Analyses of Contents at Intermediate level

The contents of Intermediate level are mixture of Pakistani and English writers. There are many topics about Islamic values which promote ideology of Muslim nation, it means it is based on ethical issues and promotes Islamic culture. Contents of intermediate level are not in accordance with the international standards. There is no logical sequence in the contents of HSSC (Rashida, 2006).

Contents are not divided into language skills, so contents are not skill oriented among the students. Activities, given at the end of the lessons are guided and based on fixed responses, so content is not able to motivate the students to think in English. Contents are outdated and demand hold of teachers in the class. Contents of the book are boring, not attractive and interesting for the students. Like scientific essays Lious Pasteur, Alexander Flemming, Hitch Hiking across the Sahara, Mustafa Kamal all are boring and outdated, not helpful for language development (Iffat, 2007).

The organization of the contents must be based on the approaches described in aims and objectives; it must follow the standards given in the benchmarks, it must cover the competencies described in documents and focus on the interests and needs of individuals (Smith, Stanley and Shores, 1957). Teacher centered instructions are mostly used in classroom teaching, lecture pattern of teaching is commonly familiar one where as students are the passive listeners, as the teachers talks without any interaction or break for the whole period (Sarwar, 2001).

In teacher centered approach, teacher is key to activate the whole process of teaching and learning, organization of contents, commercial textbooks leading lessons, skills, the whole class is motivated by readymade curriculum, at same pace, Individualized instruction is very low, students cannot move freely in the classroom to have interactions with other students (Chall, 2000). There should be certain criteria for the development of contents to meet the objectives of concerned curriculum. These criteria must cover the different aspects of language which promote aims of education and involve the students in learning understanding and to use the valuable learning experience (Romine S.A, 1954).

In curriculum documents only themes have been discussed, practical guidelines have not been provided for the implementation of these themes (MoE, 2006, p. 144). Curriculum documents put more focus on conventions, reading, writing, verbal communication, even suggests competencies but provides not any opportunities through which material these creative activities will be performed. There is a list activities and different genre but it has not been clear that which genre has been listed for speaking, reading or writing or will serve the purpose for all skills (MoE, 2006, p. 145-149).

Critical Analyses of Teaching Methodology at Intermediate level

The prescribed methodology of teaching English at Intermediate level (MoE, 2006, p. 150-152) is based on the development of language, comprehension and understanding of four skills. It has focused on listening as an input of foreign language according to the psychological rules and principles of language learning. The Curriculum Document has focused on the holistic approach, multiple techniques and approaches for teaching and learning English, It may result in effective process of learning and teaching, such as Input teaching, group discussion, Inquire method, project method and focus on individual student (Gefforey, 1983). Motivation towards language teaching and learning plays an important role and based on the factors which are helpful for successful

learning; Social factors (age, class size), psychological factors, cultural factors (geographical boundaries), teaching English with cultural background (Allen, 1987).

Critical Analyses of Assessment Scheme for Setting Question Papers at Intermediate level

Table 1

Details of English Paper Part I Faisalabad Board 2007

SN	A*	Question .No.	R	W	G	V	Marks
1.a	Objective	Possible answers are given to each statement. Tick the correct one				V	10.
b.		Possible answers are given to each statement. Tick the correct one					05.
C		Possible answers are given to each statement. Tick the correct tense			G		05.
2.	I Subjective Part	Answer in (3-4 lines/ sentences) any Six question of the following from Book-1(short stories)		W			12
B		Answer in (3-4 lines/ sentences) any Five question of the following from Book III (one act play)		W			10.
C		Answer in (3-4 lines/ sentences) any Four question of the following from Book-III (one act play)		W			08.
3.	II	Write a letter of condolence to your friend on his mother's death.		W			10
		Or Write an application to the principal for School leaving certificate.		W			
4.		Write a story bearing the moral : "unity is strength"		W			10
5.a		Explain the following lines with reference to context		W			05
b.		Punctuate the following lines (book-I)	R				05
c.		Attempt any Five of the following pair of words in your own sentences			G		05
6.		Translate the following passage into Urdu(short stories book-I)	R				15

Note: R=Reading, W=writing, G=Grammar, V=Vocabulary, *A=English paper A

Table 2

Details of English paper Part II Paper English (Part II) 2007

SN	Question .No.	W& R	G	V	Marks
Q1a	Tick the appropriate word			V	10
B	Fill in the blanks with appropriate preposition &Tense		G		5
C	Tick the correct sentence		G		5
Q 2a	Write Short answers from book- II part I	W			12
Q 2b	Write Short answer from book-II Part I	W			12
Q2c	Write Short answer from novel Mr. Chips	W			16
Q3.	Write an essay on the given topic (1)	W			15
Q4	Use in your sentences		G		10
Q5	Translate the following paragraph in English				15

Note: R=Reading, W=writing, G=Grammar, V=Vocabulary

Marks Distribution of Paper Part I Subject English

The marks distribution for the paper of English has been constant from the previous four years . Twenty percent marks have allocated for presentation skill for assessing listening and speaking skill in National curriculum documents (p,158) but this skill has not been given any weight age in Examination paper, So practically we can say the English paper covers only 80% marks.

Table 3
HSSC Examination, Allocation of 100 Marks for English Paper

Board Exam. (years)	Grammar	Vocabulary	Reading & writing	Listening Speaking	Translation
2007	10%	15%	60%	-----	15%
2008	10%	15%	60%	_____	15%
2009	10%	15%	60%	_____	15%
2010	10%	15%	60%	=====	15%

Table 4
HSSC Examination, Allocation of 100 Marks for English Paper part II

Board Exam	Grammar	Vocabulary	Reading & writing	Listening and Speaking	Translation
2007	20%	10%	55%	-----	15%
2008	20%	10%	55%	_____	15%
2009	20%	10%	55%	_____	15%
2010	20%	10%	55%	=====	15%

Language skills assessed in the English paper Part I

The analyses of question paper shows that most of the part of paper is based on the reading and writing skill. This shows that paper measures only two skills of language (reading and writing), listening and speaking skills are not measured in the paper.

Table 5
HSSC Examination Language Skills Assessed in Paper Part I

Board Exam	Grammar	Vocabulary	Reading & writing	Listening & Speaking	Translation Eng to Urdu
2007	10%	15%	60%	-----	15%
2008	10%	15%	60%	_____	15%
2009	10%	15%	60%	_____	15%
2010	10%	15%	60%	=====	15%

Language skills assessed in the English paper Part II

Table 6
HSSC Examination Language Skills Assessed in Paper Part II

Board Exam	Grammar	Vocabulary	Reading & writing	Listening & Speaking	Translation Urdu to Eng
2007	20%	10%	55%	-----	15%
2008	20%	10%	55%	_____	15%
2009	20%	10%	55%	_____	15%
2010	20%	10%	55%	=====	15%

Repetition of questions paper part I

The number of repetition has been calculated from year 2007. It has been observed that questions from story Button, Button have been discussed in each paper from the year 2007 -2010. Same structured questions from three plays have been repeated in almost all papers of English part I, The poem Hollow man has been repeated three times in four years paper. Application for Re-admission has been repeated three times from 2007 to 2010, Short Story Tit for Tat, Haste makes Waste has been repeated two times during 2007 to 2010. But the passage for reference to context, text for punctuation, pair of words paragraph for translation are not repeated one during 2007-2010.

Table 7
HSSC Examination Repetition of Questions in English Paper part I

Board of Examination	2007	2008	2009	2010
Q2 a.) Short answers from book I	Button, Clearing in the sky, The reward of Magi	Button, Clearing in the sky, The gift of Magi	Button, The gift of Magi	Button, Button
b) Short answers from book III	Heat lighting, visit to planet, the oyster and pearl	visit to planet, the oyster and pearl	Heat lighting, visit to planet	Heat lighting, visit to planet
c) Short answers from book III	The hollow men Loveliest tree	The hollow men, tale of two cities, times, night mail	Night mail, times, hollow men	Ruba'iyat, ozymandias
Q3 Letter writing	Letter to friend invitation	Letter to increase monthly	To purchase new books	For re-admission
Q4. Application Story writing	For re-admission Tit for tat, Nothing is inferior	For re admission Haste makes waste, honesty is best policy	Issuance of certificate Tit for tat, honesty is the best policy	Changed Text Changed Words
Q5 Reference to context Punctuation (book-1) Pair of word	Changed Tex Changed Words	Changed Text Changed Words	Changed Text Changed Words	Changed paragraph Changed paragraph
Q6. Translation (Eng to Urdu)	Changed paragraph	Changed paragraph	Changed paragraph	Changed paragraph

Repetition of questions Paper Part-II

A slight repetition has been observed, in essay type structured question, otherwise no repetition has been observed in translation paragraph, in idiom phrases. Mostly structured question has been taken from the book II and novel so we find a single repetition of essay 'A picnic Party' during the four years.

Table 8
HSSC Examination, Repetition of Questions in English Paper part I

Q.#	Board of Exam	2007	2008	2009	2010
2.a	Short answers Book II	Lesson,2,3,5,6,7,8,10	Lesson,2,3,5,6,7,8,9,10	Lesson,2,3,5,6,7,8,9,10	Lesson1,2,3,5,6,7,8,10
B	Short answers Book II	Lesson, 11,12,14,15	Lesson, 11,12,13,14,15	Lesson, 11,12,13,14,15	Lesson 11,12,13,14,15
	Short answers Novel	Structured question from book	Structured question from book	Structured question from book	Structured question from book
3	Q3 Essay writing	Changed topics	A picnic party	A picnic party	Changed topics
4	Idioms	Changed phrases	Changed phrases	Changed phrases	Changed phrases
5	Translation (Urdu to Eng)	Changed paragraph	Changed paragraph	Changed paragraph	Changed paragraph

Text book Based question with cognitive levels (Paper Part-I)

The allocation of marks and repetition of questions in Faisalabad Board has remained constant same is the case with the text book based questions according to the cognitive levels

Table 9
Textbook based question with cognitive levels (Paper Part- I)

Knowledge	Comprehension	Application	Creative writing
45%	35%	10%	10%

Textbook based question with cognitive levels (Paper Part- II)

The analyses of the papers shows that mostly the structured questions given at the end of the exercise have been given in the papers from 2007 to 2010, 65% questions are based on the memorization of the knowledge, 10% based on the understanding level, only 25% is based on the use of grammatical structures in writing. If the questions are divided according to the cognitive level than it might change the teaching styles of the teachers in the class room but most of the paper is based on the knowledge level question so only memorization of textbook based question is enough to pass the examination with good grade.

Table 10

Textbook based question with cognitive levels (Paper Part- II)

Knowledge	Comprehension	Application	creative writing
50%	10%	25%	15%

Content Coverage at HSSC, Examination (Part-I)

The results of analyses show that during the year of 2007 only three lessons are discussed, out of 15 topics, and same is the case with poems only two poems have been discussed out of 20 poems, this gives an opportunity to students to learn first 10 topics to attempt the paper, where as in case of plays all the plays has been discussed. During the year 2008 it shows some variation in term of content coverage. Similarly in the year 2009 and 2010 more improvements have been observed.

Table 11

Content Coverage at Higher Secondary School Certificate Examination (Part-I)

Board of Exam.	Q2a. Short answer Book- I (15)	b) Short answers Book- III. (3)	c) Short answers Book III. (20)
2007	Lesson 1,2,6, 20%	Play1,2,3 100%	Poem,3,10 10%
2008	Lesson1,3,4,5,12 33%	Play2, 3 66%	Poem, 2,7,10,13 20%
2009	Lesson ,1,3,5,10, 12,13,15 46%	Play1,2,3 100%	Poem, 2,7,10,12 20%.
2010	Lesson1,3,11,13,14 33%	Play1,2,3 100%	Poem,5,8,17,5 20%

Content Coverage at HSSC Examination (Part-II)

The analyses of the paper of the part II shows that 100 % contents of the prescribed books have been discussed in the papers from the year 2007 to 2010.

Table 12

Content Coverage HSSC Examination (Part-II)

Board of Exam.	Q2 a.) Short answers Book II (10)	b) Short answers Book II (05)	c) Short answers Novel (18)
2007	Lesson,2,3,5,6,7,8,10	Lesson, 11,12,14,15	Structured question from book
2008	Lesson,2,3,5,6,7,8,9,10	Lesson, 11,12,13,14,15	Structured question from book
2009	Lesson,2,3,5,6,7,8,9,10	Lesson, 11,12,13,14,15	Structured question from book
2010	Lesson1,2,3,5,6,7,8,,10	Lesson, 11,12,13,14,15	Structured question from book

Discussion on the Analyses of question papers at HSSC

There is clear difference between the proposed and practical assessment criteria at intermediate level. Only two skills are focused in the examination papers of part I and part II which are reading and writing, the higher order skills of language competency has not been observed in the examination paper. Critical thinking, language understanding is not observed by question paper. Content based questions are asked in the question paper which can easily be reproduced by the students. It means our papers are based on the rote learning. Combination of objective and subjective paper has been selected for the intermediate classes' shows that the entire paper is selected from the text books exercise which does not promote creativity in language learning. In the paper of English language there is not activity about the skimming and scanning the text, or critical views from the student side. The process of assessment is restricted to teaching methodology. The written document of curriculum presents a false impression of constant assessment (MoE, 2006, p. 153). The analyses of document shows that assessment has no connection with the prescribed teaching methodology and said objectives of language curriculum although curriculum is based on competency but still more weight -age has been given to Knowledge based questions. Final assessment is grade based assessment have not any relationship with the formative assessment as only the final grades covers the entire evaluation. The formative assessment is done only to prepare the students for final assessment. The document recommends that Examination papers should be

based on decided standards with specific portion (MoE, 2006, p.159).According to curriculum documents, assessment should be based on learning skills of language and should satisfy the needs of the students in social setting (MoE, 2006, p. 154).But at the same time ,curriculum gives 60% weightage to knowledge, which gives false impression about the competency based curriculum so authentic and modern techniques of assessment are missing in the practice. Curriculum documents (MoE, 2006, p, 158) presents sample rubric for the oral presentation and also provide a performance criteria for the benchmark oral communication but in actual practice such type of assessment is not the part of final assessment. In the final assessment there is not any part of the formative assessment, curriculum document allot 20% marks to formative assessment and classroom activities (MoE,2006, p.159) but in the final examination only summative assessment is dominated.

Conclusion:Curriculum presents the standards and benchmarks in a systematic way but experience of engaging the students in language are less focused. Curriculum documents put great focus on the integration of four skills but for each competency separate standards and benchmarks have been given, even for the grammar separate standard. Theme based teaching and learning have been suggested for the integration of the language skills, lack of practical guidelines for implementing the themes. Documents reflects sample rubric for oral skills in English language but in actual practice such activity is not the part of actual assessment. Assessment is restricted to teaching of text books not with the objectives of curriculum and it is considered as disconnects from standards and benchmarks. Curriculum is based on the competencies, performance standards but gives 60% weight-age to conventional knowledge and claim to measure all the standards of competencies, more focus is on the conventions not on functional performance of the students. There is not any reflection of the formative assessment in final assessment; summative assessment is the last decision. Document of curriculum recommends the distribution of marks to specific standards in tests but actual assessment is based on the learnt material to satisfy the needs of the students, learning takes place due to extrinsic motivation.

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