



Alignment between Student Learning Outcomes of Single National Curriculum (2022) and Formative Assessments at Elementary Level

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to find out the alignment between the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) of Single National Curriculum (SNC, 2022) and students' formative assessments at elementary level (Grade VI, VII & VIII). For the investigation of alignment a mixed method approach is followed with both quantitative and qualitative measure of the test items and the SLOs given in English curriculum. For qualitative measure the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (2001) and for quantitative measure theoretical framework of (Porter, 2002) is employed. Data related to formative assessments is collected from Government School of Nowshehra, district Sargodha and data related to SLOs is collected from English SNC. The formative assessments of students show (80%) alignment for grade VI, (73%) alignment for grade VII and (66%) alignment for grade VIII. So overall assessments show a satisfactory level of alignment with the curriculum SLOs. With respect to the cognitive demand level 'applying' level shows high coverage in formative assessments. With respect to language skills 'vocabulary and grammar' shows higher representation in formative assessments.

Keywords: Formative Assessment, Student Learning Outcomes, Single National Curriculum, alignment

Introduction

Education system caters to all the educational needs of students and provides them with opportunities to achieve higher levels of understanding. It comprises of different components which ensure to provide quality education. For maintaining the standard of quality it is important to keep all the components aligned with each other. Alignment plays crucial role in achieving desired educational goals. Curriculum, textbooks and assessments are particularly involved in the process. Education system not only provides learning outcomes but also the assessment format for gauging the performance of students with respect to learning outcomes. Outcome based education mainly focuses on planning everything in favor of a student's educational success and what is necessary for them to learn (Spady,1994). In this study focus is given to alignment between curriculum Student Learning Outcomes henceforth mentioned as (SLOs) and formative assessments of English language at elementary level.

English is the international language and taught as second language in Pakistan. Not only is it the official language of Pakistan but the science, Information technology, mathematics and other social sciences subjects are taught in English language so English plays important role in acquiring knowledge of all these subjects. Therefore, attainment of competency level in English is necessary. For this purpose, a curriculum document focusing on all language skills becomes the need of the hour. Importance of English in the context of teaching and learning is also recognized in Single National Curriculum henceforth mentioned as (SNC), (2022). As most of the textbooks used in schools are written in English, so it can be said that learning English helps the students in understanding all subjects. SNC is a milestone in this way, as the (SLOs) cover all the four language skills (Reading, oral communication, grammar and vocabulary, writing). According to the definition provided in SNC (2022) SLOs include 'skills, learner strategies, attitudes and behaviors' required to achieve the benchmarks and standards. As formative assessments are the practical representation of curriculum in classrooms it becomes necessary to assess the alignment between them. The rationale for this study is that previous researches have been conducted in area of summative assessments but formative assessments evaluation is an under-researched area and no comprehensive study related to it has been conducted earlier. This study is delimited to formative assessments only and do not take into account the summative assessments. As the skills are given more importance at the early learning stage and specifically the language skills in case of English language, so it is necessary to evaluate if formative assessments are properly measuring or not.

The evaluation of formative assessments with respect to curriculum SLOs will help in identification of areas which are more focused in test items and also the cognitive demand level of the test items will gauge the worth of tests in academic progression of students. As this study only focuses on elementary level English language formative assessments so its results may not be utilized to generalize about other levels like primary, secondary or higher secondary.

In English language classroom assessment refers to making judgments about the learner's ability to use a language (Chapelle & Brindley, 2002). It is stressed by (Bloom, 1969) that if assessment is aligned with the teaching process, it influences the student's performance in positive way and also motivates the learner to study more. There are two types of assessments referred to as summative and formative assessment. Formative and summative assessment differ in their way of usage. As the summative assessment makes a comparison among students or checks if the student has achieved the learning targets, so it measures achievement of student.

On the other hand formative assessment gives insight about the learning gap and what is needed to improve it, so it increases student's achievement (Muho & Taraj, 2022). Assessment is identified by (Black & William, 2009) as a way to support learning. That is why summative assessment is defined as 'assessment of learning' as after it the student gets certificate of his learning or promotion to next level. While formative assessment is defined as 'assessment for learning'. As the teacher adapts his teaching after students also come to know about their strengths and weaknesses through formative assessment. In large classrooms, it becomes impossible for teacher to ask every individual student about their learning issues, but formative assessment provides the necessary information about the students in a shorter period of time. With the results of formative assessment students can also 'reflect on their performance'. Formative assessments also prepare students to perform better in summative assessment.

Clear outcome statements in curriculum play important role in selection of test items for assessment. Instead of vague statement like "thinking critically" there must be some explanation given with the help of examples which define exactly what students will be able to perform at end of instruction. If the outcomes are defined clearly it becomes easier to measure the progress of students. For this purpose, tests also need to be aligned with outcomes so that the score a pupil gets is real measure of his/her learning (English, 2000). When SLOs are clearly mentioned in the curriculum it makes the other processes easier like what will be content of instruction, the teaching methodology, assessment techniques and the quality of education in general (Adam, 2006).

Importance of academic standards in curriculum is highlighted by (Sadler, 2005), before start of the educational year both teachers and students need to be familiarized with the standards of that particular grade level or class. In this way students also get to understand about the standards and when they are assessed they are able to judge whether the assessment was reliable or not. And if the assessment is reliable, students' satisfaction increases with their program in which they are enrolled. As it also puts the students on self-learning journey as they know where they are heading, at which level they are standing right now and how much more they need to learn in order to meet the standards.

Literature review

Assessment is considered to be more impactful for the student learning than teaching by educational experts, as assessments are directly focusing on important concepts so it acts as a motivation for students to study (Boud & Falchikov, 2007). Assessments are designed for students to provide them with the opportunity to demonstrate that whether they have achieved competency in the relevant skills and to what extent (McConlogue, 2020). Two important components which are taken into consideration while designing assessment are validity and reliability. An assessment will be termed as valid if it measures what it claims to measure. For instance if students have learnt one concept during class instruction but asked about some other concept in the assessment which was not discussed in the class, the test will not be considered as valid. Only those concepts can be assessed which were taught in the class. While reliability refers to the way in which when a test is employed from time to time and it provides same results as it produced for the first time it means the test is reliable. Besides all this, alignment between assessment and provided curriculum is also important.

Two levels of alignment between assessment and curriculum have been identified by (English, 2000), one is content alignment where 'content of test is matched' with the content of

curriculum. On the other hand, there exists context alignment where the ‘shape of assessment item is taught’ along with the content of item. It is also referred to as format alignment. If students are made familiar with the format of text it helps them in preparing for test. As mentioned by (Webb, 1997) alignment is not a separate characteristic of curriculum standards or assessments but it is about their relationship with each other. And this relationship can be improved by making some alteration in one or both of them. There are two ways in which alignment can be assured. One is frontloading in which the teacher writes the curriculum first and then looks for an appropriate test which measures if student has learnt what was included in curriculum (Lindvall & Nitko, 1975). But the issue with frontloading is that the local tests are not reliable as they are based on memorization of facts. Second one is backloading which matches the test ‘back to the curriculum’. In this way 100% alignment is expected for the reason that curriculum which students will study is derived from the test on the basis of which they will be tested. In this process of backloading the test itself needs to be examined to check if there is anything included in it which is irrelevant (English, 2000).

Description of Curriculum provided by (English,2000) states that there are three kinds of curriculum: Written curriculum refers to the curriculum document which is being provided by government specified educational departments, Taught curriculum comes from teachers who are seeking to follow the written one; so basically it is related to the lesson plans and other activities teacher plans for students, Tested curriculum consists of the standardized tests or assessment in form of some assignment or project. Assessments need to be aligned with what is written in the curriculum document and also aligned with what is taught in the class. Assessment method is selected on basis of Student Learning Outcomes (Crespo, 2010). For instance, if the outcome is knowledge based it can be assessed with help of multiple choice questions. And if the outcome is skill based, as is the case of English language writing and oral communication skill, a written test and oral activity can prove fruitful.

Formative assessment is defined by (Noyce & Hickey, 2011) as the process of gauging students’ educational progress during the course in order to provide feedback and make necessary adjustments in instruction. For instance a teacher might take test of a single unit or the test of concepts or definitions in that unit. The teacher keeps in mind the basic objective of the formative assessment. Sometimes teacher designs the formative task in a way that students are assessing their peers or involved in self-assessment. In this way students are actively involved and they are at the center of whole learning activity. Before start of activity goal of formative assessment ought to be communicated to students.

Formative assessment promotes autonomous learning by students as they come to know what modifications they need to make to meet expected goals. At the same time, formative assessment makes teacher aware about his or her teaching methodology, and if there is need for alteration (Alvarez, et, al, 2014). Formative assessment helps the teacher and learner in measuring the progress of student’s learning and after realization of the points where student is deficient, the teacher introduces new learning strategies (Kelly, 2009). Not only the summative assessment need to be aligned with standards but also the formative assessment need to be aligned with curriculum (Update, 2018).

Appropriate placement of formative assessment is also important, as they can be conducted at different points of educational year. Firstly they can be conducted at teaching sessions on daily basis. Secondly at level of course of study and thirdly at the point when whole course of a

program is completed. A schedule of formative assessment can also be included in course outline for effective implementation. Formative assessment can be taken in different formats like oral exams, quizzes, portfolios, peer assessment, assignment, presentation and individual exercises (Kulasegaram, 2018). Tests on a regular basis prove to be beneficial for recalling and retrieving of knowledge and also for associative nature of memory storage.

Formative assessment results not only indicate about the progress students have made but also points out the areas where improvement is required. Test should not include things out of syllabus otherwise students will be confused about what are the important things to learn. So alignment of test with standards is necessary (Rothman, 2004). The test items which only test students about facts do not allow students to reach upper levels of understanding. Tests could be designed in a way that they are not exact copy of instruction material but testing by presenting the problem related to the same concept taught in a different manner. It means that change the context of the problem. In this way students might be able to use their learning in handling new situations. Instruction material need to be specific in this regard as students are going to use their content for further exploration and application. Teacher might also choose to avoid/leave for students to memorize facts and focus on content which is going to be tested and evaluated. Tests are not always measuring everything mentioned in the curriculum standards but mostly they measure least skills mentioned in curriculum.

A study was conducted by (Genon, 2020) in elementary English classrooms of Philippines to examine assessment practices. The data of study revealed that most of the assessment practices were informal and included oral recitation, collaborative work and interactive discussion. And the ‘assessment practices during discussion facilitate learning’, while those after discussion provide information about what students learned from the lesson. Some assessment tasks were found inadequate with regard to assessment of four skills of language, as speaking and reading were given more weightage than writing and listening.

One major issue in Pakistan’s education system identified by (Shah, 2012) in her research study about classroom instruction is ‘teaching to the test’. As this practice prepare students only for exams. As getting higher marks in BISEs examination is a key criteria for determining the position of any educational institute that quality education is provided there. There is no problem if the teacher is teaching to the test which is aligned with the curriculum (English, 2000). But there is a problem identified by (Cronbach, 1963) in teaching to the test is that pupils are only learning items of test and not familiarized with the idea or process behind it. If the test is measuring what was intended then the test is valid. And if that test is taken again and again and it produces same results as it produced for the first time then it is a reliable test (Shah, 2012). There are two types of tests taken from students. The Norm referenced test places the student in comparison of his/her performance with all other students while the criterion referenced test works on the basis of correct or incorrect answers provided by students (English, 2000). Language skill development depends upon the quality of assessment format (Kakar, 2023) that how well a skill is being measured helps in identifying areas for further improvement. This study revealed that the action words used for SLOs indicated the level of assessment. The tool used for exploring the assessment level was Bloom’s Taxonomy. Most of the SLOs were related to lower levels of cognitive domain of Bloom’s Taxonomy. The researcher also emphasized that critical learning skills should be made specific and be kept separate from reading competency, as both are different from each other. The inclusion of

action verbs could be done for planning and designing test items and classroom strategies. Specific assessment plan for each language skill ought to be incorporated along with separate grading mechanism for each skill.

Different curriculum alignment models have been employed by researchers to evaluate the alignment between the Curriculum and assessments. Below is given a brief of some curriculum alignment models and their utility for gauging the alignment between different elements of education system.

First one is Webb's Alignment Model (1997, 1999, 2002 & 2007) where Webb synthesized three modules for measuring alignment. The first module presents the concept of 'sequential development' among documents where things are developed in a sequence, as the curriculum is developed first and then the textbooks and assessment items are aligned with the curriculum document. In the second module different documents are compared with each other by expert reviewers to check if alignment exists among them. The third module is about document analysis where specific codes related to curriculum and assessments are identified from the relevant documents in accordance with the objectives of the study. Then the frequencies are tabulated to measure the extent of alignment between the two documents. The frequencies calculated are based on four descriptions of 'Depth Of Knowledge' level' (Webb, 1999). These four descriptors are stated as 'recall, skill/concept, strategic thinking and extended thinking, (Webb, 2002). After this rating procedure alignment between curriculum and assessment is checked with the help of four alignment criteria named as 'categorical concurrence, depth of knowledge consistency, range of knowledge correspondence and balance of representation (Webb, 2002).

Second one is Achieve Model (Achieve, 2006) which involves the analysis of test items with the standards in regard of 'quality and precision of test items'. Criteria for this model include the 'centrality of content': that to what extent contents are covered in assessment, how much the challenging subject matter is acquired by learners.

The third model is Surveys of Enacted Curriculum (SEC) by Porter and Smithson (2002). It provides a common language for explaining concepts and examining different components of curriculum. And also this model investigates the alignment among 'standards, classroom instruction and assessments'. Two content matrices are developed according to this model where one represents the curriculum and the other may include assessment, classroom instruction or textbook. First of all topics list is developed and their level of cognitive demand is determined. So this model if applied to textbooks can provide data about the alignment of textbook with curriculum.

Research objectives

The objective of this study is to:

To find out the alignment between formative assessments at elementary level with SLOs of Single National Curriculum

Research question

This research deals with the following question:

1-To what extent are the formative assessments of students at elementary level aligned with SLOs of Single National Curriculum?

Theoretical framework

In order to measure the alignment between SLOs of SNC and formative assessments, the alignment model of (Porter, 2002) is utilized. This model is considered effective tool for measuring the extent of alignment between different educational components like curriculum, content of instruction and assessments. Three effective tools are available under this model which are utilized in alignment studies. First two tools are related to teacher surveys and analysis of instruction material, while the third one is related to alignment between standards and assessment. The first and third tool is utilized in the current study. This model creates content matrix in form of topics and cognitive demand levels, but as the evaluation of assessment items is carried out and there is no topic mentioned, so they are categorized only with respect to their cognitive demand level. Further the first tool of model is modified to allot alignment values for every assessment item. The cognitive demand levels mentioned above are assigned keeping in view the Bloom's Revised Taxonomy of Anderson and Krathwohl (2001). The cognitive demand levels include 'remembering', 'understanding', 'applying', 'analyzing', 'evaluating' and 'creating' level'.

Research methodology

The current study employs the mixed method approach. The mixed methods concept was first introduced by Campbell and Fiske in 1959 for study of psychological traits (Johnson et al., 2007). Pragmatism philosophy is followed in mixed method research which aims at interpretation of data and which focuses more on understanding of the problem with lens of different approaches. In any research study it is important to find answers of research questions, so the decision of choosing a particular research method depends on the nature of research questions (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Quantitative method aids to set up the relationship between variables while qualitative method helps in providing explanation about the type of relationship that exists between variables. In this way quantitative data helps to validate the findings of qualitative data.

The formative assessment data of grade VI, VII and VIII is collected from the government school of Nowshehra, district Sargodha. These assessments are based on daily taken written tests on regular basis. The sample of study is selected on the basis of most frequently occurring questions in the tests, and the extent of their alignment with the SLOs is measured, but the categorization of test items into separate language skills is not done as there is no separate test of every skill area but they appear in merged form in the formative assessment.

The analysis of formative assessments is carried out by employing Porter's alignment model (2002). For every assessment item, the cognitive demand level is recognized and then the relevant SLO is found to which it corresponds and after that the alignment value is assigned to the test item on basis of its extent of alignment with the curriculum SLO. The alignment values assigned range from 0-3 on basis of no alignment, low, partial and high alignment. In the sequence of '0' value for no alignment, '1' value for low alignment, '2' value for partial alignment and '3' value for high alignment. Also in formative assessments the test is usually based on only one language skill, topic or one test item. Percentages of alignment values are calculated at the end of every table.

Further necessary information for the data collection and analysis was taken from the following document:

Single National Curriculum (2022), English for Grade VI, VII and VIII, (Curriculum Wing, Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad).

Results and discussion

Alignment between grade VI formative assessment and grade VI curriculum SLOs

The table below presents the results of alignment between the formative assessments of grade VI and the SLOs of Grade VI.

Table 1 Grade VI formative assessments alignment with grade VI English curriculum SLOs

Grade 6, Test item no	SLO to which it aligns	Cognitive demand level	Alignment value of test item
1-Answer the following question, How did Ameena help the landlord?	Ask and answer simple and higher-order questions to guide/assess reading	Analyzing	2
2-Define, simile, metaphor, personification and compound sentences	Identify the use of some figures of speech like simile, metaphor, personification and hyperbole	Analyzing	2
3-Write application for fee concession	Write a formal letter/email (application, complaint)	Creating	2
4-Write letter to uncle thanking him for a gift	Write informal letters to people in extended social and academic environments for various purposes	Creating	3
5-Write essay on 'My best teacher'	Write a simple descriptive composition (giving physical description and characteristics/traits of a person/object/place moving from general to specific	Creating	3
			12
			Percentage=80 %

According to the above table cognitive demand levels of test items ‘creating’ level is most represented one as it requires from students to be involved in creative use of language for writing different pieces of information. The second represented level is ‘analyzing’ which requires the students to analyze the concepts and questions and then provide answers.

First test item from grade six formative assessment is about answering the given questions. This test item is partially aligned with the given SLO as it only focuses on asking simple questions and no higher order questions are asked which require the student to think critically. The second question is related to simile and metaphor and it also shows partial alignment as the students are only asked to define the given concepts and no instruction is given about their use in sentences. The third test item is related to writing of application and it shows partial alignment as it corresponds to only one part of SLO and the other items of complaint or email writing are not asked in any formative assessment. The fourth test item is related to writing informal letter and shows high alignment with the given SLO. The fifth test item is related to essay writing and shows high alignment with the given SLO.

Alignment between grade VII formative assessment and grade VII English curriculum SLOs

The table below presents the results of alignment between the formative assessments of grade VII and the SLOs of Grade VII.

Table 2 Grade VII formative assessments alignment with grade VII SLOs

Grade 7, Test Item no	SLO to which it aligns	Cognitive demand level	Alignment Value
1-Answer the following question, What is pathetic fallacy?	Ask and answer simple and higher-order questions to guide/assess reading	Analyzing	2
2-Write meanings of the words	Guess the meaning of the word and phrases in the text. Compare with the dictionary meaning to understand the contextual meaning	Applying	2
3-Write essay on 'My best friend'	Write a composition of three or more paragraphs following conventions of essay writing	Creating	3
4-Take dictation of words	Take dictation of paragraph/ text of grade level	Applying	2

Alignment between Student Learning Outcomes	AI-JAMEI
5-Write degrees of the Change and use Analyzing adjectives degrees of adjectives	2
Total	11 Percentage=73%

According to the above table cognitive demand levels of test items ‘analyzing’ level is the most represented one while ‘creating’ and ‘applying’ level is the least represented level. The first test item is about answering the given questions. This test item is partially aligned with the given SLO as it only focuses on asking simple questions and no higher order questions are asked which require the student to analyze the questions and then answer. The second test item is about writing the meanings of words. This test item is partially aligned with the given SLO as it only requires from students to provide meanings and nothing is asked about the comparison of dictionary and contextual meanings. Third test item is about writing of essay. This test item is highly aligned with the given SLO as it requires the students to use their creative skills and write essay. Fourth test item is about taking dictation of words. This test item is partially aligned with the given SLO as it applies the task to a limited level only restricting to words and not including dictation of paragraph. Fifth test item is about writing degrees of adjectives. This test item is partially aligned with the given SLO as it only instructs for writing the degrees and nothing about their use in sentences.

Alignment between grade VII formative assessment and grade VII curriculum SLOs

The table below presents the results of alignment between the formative assessments of grade VII and the SLOs of Grade VII.

Table 3 Grade VIII formative assessments alignment with grade VIII English curriculum SLOs

Grade 8, Test Item no	SLO to which it corresponds	Cognitive demand level	Alignment Value
1-Answer the following questions, Why was haji Usman respected by villagers?	Ask and answer simple and higher-order questions to guide/assess reading	Applying	2
2-Write whether the following sentence have a linking verb or an action verb	Distinguish and use action verbs, linking verbs, sensing and feeling verbs, mental and thinking verbs and verbs of possession	Applying	2
3-Use the future continuous tense	Use all types of tenses correctly in speech and writing	Applying	2

4-Write meanings of words	Guess the meaning of the word and phrases in the text. Compare with the dictionary meaning to understand the contextual meaning	Applying	2
5- What is difference between homograph and homophone	Use homograph in writing	Applying	2
Total			10 Percentage=66%

According to the above table cognitive demand levels of test items ‘applying’ level is the most represented level as all the test items belong to this level. All the other levels are missing. The first test item is about answering the questions. This test item is partially aligned with the given SLO as it only focuses on asking simple questions and no higher order questions are asked. Second test item is about identification of linking or action verb. This test item is partially aligned with the given SLO as it lacks any instruction about use of action and other verbs therefore no application of the given concepts. The third test item is about use of future continuous tense. This test item is partially aligned with the given SLO as only the use of a single tense is given and other tenses are missing. The fourth test item is about writing meaning of words. This test item is partially aligned with the given SLO as it only requires from students to provide meanings and nothing is asked about the comparison of dictionary and contextual meanings. The fifth test item is about difference between homograph and homophone. This test item shows partial alignment with the given SLO as it only requires the students to identify the difference between two concepts but no instruction is given about their practical use in writing. Most represented level among all test items is ‘applying’ level while the basic levels of ‘remembering’ and ‘understanding’ are missing, and also the ‘evaluating’ level is missing which means that students are not tested for the basic level and also not given the opportunity to evaluate different concepts.

With respect to representation of four language skills in formative assessments of English language at elementary level it is found that focus of test items is more on vocabulary and grammar skills with (6) test items, on second number lies the reading skills with (5) test items, on third number lies the writing skills with (4) test items while the fourth skill of oral communication has no representation with (0) test items. So there is need for incorporation of oral activities in formative assessments.

Conclusion

Regarding the alignment of formative assessments with the English curriculum SLOs the grade VI test items shows (80%) alignment with the curriculum SLOs, grade VII test items show (73%) alignment with the curriculum SLOs and grade VIII test items show (66%) alignment with the curriculum SLOs. Grade VI formative assessment contain more test items related to

‘creating’ level, grade VII formative assessment contains more test items related to ‘analyzing’ and ‘applying’ level while grade VIII formative assessment contains more test items related to ‘applying’ level. Overall the ‘applying’ level shows high representation while the ‘analyzing’ and ‘creating’ level show low representation. In conclusion it can be said that assessment items show satisfactory level of coverage of curriculum SLOs in formative assessments but there is further room for improvement with respect to inclusion of other cognitive demand levels (remembering, understanding, evaluating) related test items. Also in regard of language skills writing, vocabulary and grammar are part of formative assessments while there is no representation of oral communication skills.

Future recommendations

The present research only focuses on one format of formative assessment but this study can be expanded further to investigate other formative assessment strategies and compare their effectiveness with the written test’s impact on student achievement. The comparison of summative and formative assessments can also be made to check their alignment with each other. Teacher surveys can also be conducted to know different formative assessment strategies utilized by various instructors to gauge the competence of language skills. Role of digital tools can also be investigated for creation of automated formative assessments for oral skills, as they are given less weightage in traditional tests.

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