A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ASSESSMENT PRACTICES IN B.Ed. (HONORS) ELEMENTARY PROGRAM IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

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ABSTRACT

This research paper is based part of a larger study that explores the assessment practices employed in the B.Ed. (Honors) Elementary Program in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The study aimed to identify the challenges associated with assessment processes in the program with an aim to highlight issues and present solutions. The paper is based on part of data collected for a larger study as part of PhD research. The sample of respondents for this part of the study consisted 10 Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teacher educators from the two public sector universities, University of Haripur and Hazra University Mansehra in Pakistan to get insights into the assessment system in the B.Ed (Hons) Elementary program. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that the assessment system was not adequately aligned with the program objectives. There were inadequate procedures forensuringfairness, accuracy, consistency, and transparency. Feedback and regular review of the assessment system are emphasized, and the results are disseminated to stakeholders. Quality improvement plans are developed based on assessment results and stakeholder feedback. The study suggests areas for further improvement in the assessment and evaluation system in the B.Ed. (Honors) Elementary Program.

Keywords: Elementary, assessment, emphasized, stakeholders

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Assessment in Teacher Education

Assessment in teacher education is a multifaceted process designed to evaluate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of future educators (Black, P., & Wiliam, D. 1998). It serves as a critical component in ensuring the quality and effectiveness of teacher preparation programs. Assessment methods in teacher education encompass a variety of tools and techniques, including written examinations, performance-based tasks, classroom observations, and portfolio assessments. These assessments are aligned with professional standards and program objectives, aiming to gauge candidates' readiness for the teaching profession (Christie, D. 2006).. Moreover, assessment in teacher education extends beyond mere measurement of content knowledge; it also encompasses the evaluation of pedagogical competencies, classroom management skills, and the ability to reflect on and improve instructional practices. By providing feedback and support to teacher candidates, assessment in teacher education facilitates their professional growth and development as reflective practitioners committed to continuous improvement (Darling-Hammond, L. & Snyder, and J. 2015).

Effective assessment practices in teacher education require careful consideration of validity, reliability, and fairness. Assessment tasks and criteria should be clearly defined and aligned with program goals and standards. Moreover, assessment processes should be inclusive and culturally

responsive, taking into account the diverse backgrounds and experiences of teacher candidates. Additionally, ongoing collaboration among faculty, candidates, and school partners is essential to ensure the relevance and authenticity of assessment practices. (Delandshere, G. & Arens, S. A. 2003). By promoting a culture of assessment literacy and continuous improvement, teacher education programs can prepare candidates to meet the complex demands of 21st-century classrooms and contribute positively to student learning outcomes (Dinther, M. van, Dochy, F., & Segers, M. 2015)

Types of Assessment Practices in Teacher Education

In teacher education, various types of assessment practices are employed to evaluate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of aspiring educators. One prevalent type of assessment is performance-based assessment, which involves observing candidates as they engage in teaching activities, such as planning and delivering lessons, managing classroom interactions, and assessing student learning. Performance assessments provide valuable insights into candidates' instructional competencies, classroom management abilities, and interpersonal skills, offering a more authentic measure of their readiness for the teaching profession (Nasir, A., & Ahmad, S. (2018).Additionally, performance-based assessments often incorporate feedback from peers, mentors, and supervising teachers, fostering a collaborative and reflective approach to professional development among teacher candidates (Snyder, C. R. 2000).Another common type of assessment in teacher education is written examinations, which assess candidates' understanding of subject matter content, pedagogical theories, and educational policies and practices. Written exams may include multiple-choice questions, essays, case studies, or scenario-based prompts, allowing candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and critical thinking skills in various areas relevant to teaching. While written examinations provide a standardized means of assessment and can efficiently evaluate candidates' declarative knowledge, they may not fully capture the complex nature of teaching practice or candidates' ability to apply knowledge in real-world classroom settings (Hayward, L. 2015). Thus, a combination of performance-based assessments and written examinations is often used in teacher education programs to provide a comprehensive evaluation of candidates' readiness to enter the teaching profession (Harrison, J. (2007).

Importance of Assessment in Teacher Education

Assessment holds significant importance in teacher education as it serves multiple crucial purposes in preparing future educators for the complex demands of the profession. Firstly, assessment in teacher education ensures accountability and quality assurance by evaluating the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs (Havnes, A., & Prøitz, T.S. 2016).. By systematically assessing candidates' knowledge, skills, and dispositions, teacher education institutions can identify areas of strength and areas needing improvement, leading to continuous refinement and enhancement of program curricula and instructional practices (Hughes, G. 2011). Moreover, assessment plays a pivotal role in guiding candidates' professional growth and development (Hegender, H. 2010). Through feedback provided during assessments, teacher candidates gain valuable insights into their strengths and areas for improvement, allowing them to engage in reflective practice and refine their teaching skills (Imhof, M., & Picard, C. 2009). This reflective approach to assessment fosters a mindset of lifelong learning and continuous improvement among aspiring educators, preparing them to meet the diverse needs of students and adapt to evolving educational contexts throughout their careers (Wahl, R. 2017)..

Need for research in the area of Assessment in Teacher Education

The need for research in the area of assessment in teacher education is paramount to advancing the effectiveness and relevance of teacher preparation programs. (Ludlow, L. e.a. 2008). Firstly, ongoing research can help to identify and validate innovative assessment strategies that align with the complex and diverse nature of teaching and learning. As education systems evolve and student demographics become increasingly diverse, there is a growing demand for assessment practices that accurately measure candidates' readiness to address the needs of all learners(MacPhail, A., Tannehill, D. and Karp, G.G., 2013). Research can explore alternative assessment methods, such as

performance-based assessments, portfolio assessments, and authentic tasks, which provide more holistic and contextually relevant insights into candidates' teaching abilities. By investigating the validity, reliability, and feasibility of these assessment approaches, researchers can contribute valuable evidence-based insights to inform the design and implementation of assessment practices in teacher education (Meeus, W., Looy, L. van & Petegem, P. van 2006).Secondly, research in the area of assessment in teacher education is essential for addressing emerging challenges and opportunities in the field. With the rapid advancement of educational technology and the increasing emphasis on competency-based education, there is a need to explore how these developments can be leveraged to enhance assessment practices in teacher education. (Mumm, K., Karm, M., & Remmik, M. 2016). Research can investigate the integration of digital tools, such as learning analytics platforms and simulation-based assessments, to provide real-time feedback and support for teacher candidates' learning and development. Additionally, research can examine the impact of assessment on teacher learning and professional growth, exploring how formative assessment practices can promote reflective practice and continuous improvement among aspiring educators (Sluijsmans, D. & Prins, F. 2006).. By addressing these pressing issues through rigorous empirical inquiry, researchers can contribute to the ongoing improvement and innovation of assessment practices in teacher education, ultimately leading to better-prepared and more effective teachers in the classroom. (Mooi, L.M., Periasamy, S., Ming, C.C., & Osman, S. 2014).

Issues in Assessment in Teacher Education

Assessment in teacher education faces several significant issues that warrant attention and resolution (Smith, K. 2016) One prominent issue is the challenge of ensuring the validity and reliability of assessment instruments used to evaluate teacher candidates. Traditional assessments, such as standardized tests or written examinations, may not fully capture the complex and multifaceted nature of effective teaching practice. Moreover, there is a risk of bias in assessment instruments, particularly regarding cultural relevance and linguistic diversity among teacher candidates. (Tillema. H.H. 2009). Addressing these issues requires careful consideration of assessment design, including the development of performance-based tasks, portfolio assessments, and other authentic assessment methods that align with professional standards and accurately measure candidates' readiness for the teaching profession. (Tillema, H. & Smith, K. 2007). Additionally, ongoing efforts to ensure the fairness and inclusivity of assessment practices are essential to promote equity and diversity in teacher education. (Wiens, P.D., Hessberg, K., LoCasale-Crouch, J., & DeCoster, J. 2013). Another significant issue in assessment in teacher education is the tension between accountability and authentic assessment practices. While accountability measures, such as standardized testing and external evaluations, are intended to ensure program quality and accountability, they may incentivize a narrow focus on test preparation rather than fostering deep learning and reflective practice among teacher candidates. Moreover, the emphasis on high-stakes assessments may contribute to undue stress and anxiety among candidates, detracting from their overall learning experience (Imhof, M., & Picard, C. 2009). Balancing the need for accountability with the promotion of authentic assessment practices that support meaningful learning and professional growth is a complex challenge facing teacher education programs. (Wahl, R. 2017). Collaborative efforts among educators, policymakers, and stakeholders are needed to address these issues and promote assessment practices that effectively support the development of competent and reflective educators prepared to meet the diverse needs of students in today's classrooms.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research design was adopted to explore assessment practices in teacher education. Qualitative research designs are useful for obtaining in-depth insights into people's perceptions regarding social and natural phenomena (Creswell, J. W. 2018). They are also helpful in exploring issues firsthand.

The population for this qualitative study would be the teacher educators involved in the B.Ed (Honors) Elementary Program in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Teacher educators refer to the academic staff

responsible for instructing and guiding aspiring elementary school teachers within the program(Adams, Tony E., Stacy Holman Jones, and Carolyn Ellis. 2015). This population includes individuals actively engaged in teaching and assessing students enrolled in the B.Ed (Honors) Elementary Program.

Purposive sampling was used to select the six teacher educators who participated in the study. The selection criteria may have included factors such as years of teaching experience, academic background, and diverse representation from different educational institutes within Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This approach ensures that the sample includes individuals with rich experiences and varied perspectives on assessment practices. Considering the qualitative nature of the study, a small sample size is typically employed to gain in-depth insights from participants. (Kelly, L. 2010). In this case, a sample of six teacher educators from different educational institutes within Khyber Pakhtunkhwa would be appropriate. The selection of the sample should be based on purposive sampling, ensuring that the chosen educators possess diverse experiences and backgrounds to provide a comprehensive understanding of assessment practices. While the sample size of six teacher educators may appear small, qualitative research focuses on depth rather than breadth. In-depth interviews and discussions with each participant will allow the researchers to gather rich and detailed data about their assessment practices, beliefs, and experiences. Additionally, as the study aims to explore assessment practices in a specific program within a particular region, a smaller sample size can be effective in capturing the nuances and context-specific aspects of the assessment process in the B.Ed (Honors) Elementary Program in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Data collection Tool

In the qualitative study on the analysis of assessment practices in the B.Ed (Honors) Elementary Program in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the following data collection tools and process were adopted: In-depth interviews were the primary data collection tool used in this study. Semi-structured interview guides were designed to explore the perspectives, experiences, and beliefs of the six teacher educators regarding assessment practices in the B.Ed (Honors) Elementary Program. The interviews were conducted in a one-on-one setting to allow participants to express their views openly and in detail.

Data collection

Thematic analysis was used as the data analysis method. Researchers reviewed the transcribed data, identifying patterns, recurring themes, and commonalities in the teacher educators' responses regarding assessment practices. The data were coded, and similar codes were grouped to form themes that reflect the participants' perspectives.

Validity/reliability

To enhance validity, the research design employed qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to directly capture the perspectives and experiences of teacher educators regarding assessment practices. Transcriptions and data cleaning were conducted meticulously to ensure accurate representation of participants' responses, contributing to the reliability of the collected data. The process of thematic analysis was carefully documented and explained, allowing for potential replication and validation of the analytical process.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the data collection process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that they understood the purpose of the study, their rights as participants, and how their data would be used. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained to protect participants' identities and ensure their privacy.

Data Analysis

The assessment and evaluation system of the B.Ed (Hons) Elementary program should be meticulously crafted to nurture educational excellence, fortified by invaluable feedback garnered from robust assessment practices. Aligned seamlessly with the program's objectives, this systematic approach should orchestrate a continuous cycle of improvement. It should actively engage teacher educators, tutors, coordinators, and stakeholders in a collaborative process of perpetual review and refinement. A diverse array of assessments should be conducted at various pivotal junctures, ensuring the acquisition of comprehensive data and facilitating a panoramic understanding of student progression. This system should operate on the bedrock of rigorous procedures, meticulously formulated to ensure equity, precision, uniformity, and transparency throughout its operations. The dissemination of assessment outcomes should cultivate a culture of accountability and transparency among all stakeholders involved. Moreover, the dynamic feedback mechanism should serve as an inviting conduit for insights from coordinators, educators, aspiring scholars, and other vested parties, thus fostering an environment characterized by continuous enhancement. The program's unwavering commitment to the meticulous documentation and resolution of stakeholder complaints should underscore its dedication to proactive problem-solving and responsive administration. Through the strategic synthesis of assessment findings, feedback loops, and resolutions to stakeholder concerns, the B.Ed (Hons) Elementary program should chart out pathways for substantive quality improvement. Particularly noteworthy should be the program's judicious alignment of its assessment system with the overarching goal of elevating program quality, a testament to its deliberate and strategic responsiveness. This commitment should be further reinforced by the establishment of regular feedback mechanisms involving program alumni and their employers, thus enriching the program's evolutionary trajectory by assessing its sustained impact and ongoing relevance within the professional sphere.

In B.Ed Hons Elementary program at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, The assessment system for the program falls short of complete alignment with its intended objectives, necessitating efforts to strengthen this vital connection and ensure accurate measurement of desired outcomes. Furthermore, there appears to be insufficient evidence of consistent monitoring and feedback from teacher educators, tutors, coordinators, and stakeholders, highlighting the need for a more steadfast feedback loop that can facilitate regular review and refinement of the assessment system. Equally important is the establishment of clear and effective procedures within the assessment system to uphold principles of fairness, accuracy, consistency, and transparency throughout its operations. A conspicuous absence of a feedback mechanism involving coordinators, educators, aspiring scholars, and stakeholders further underscores the necessity of implementing an inclusive feedback mechanism that captures diverse insights for continual enhancement. To uphold transparency and accountability, it is imperative to properly document and address stakeholder complaints, ensuring their thorough follow-up and resolution. Furthermore, the development, implementation, and vigilant monitoring of quality improvement plans, rooted in assessment results and stakeholder feedback, stand as critical factors in propelling the program's advancement. Addressing these highlighted areas with strategic and proactive measures will undoubtedly contribute to a more robust assessment and evaluation system, enriching the overall educational experience of the B.Ed (Hons) Elementary program

R 11 argued, *"The assessment system is NOT FULLY based on the objectives of the program: Enhancing the alignment between the assessment system and program objectives is vital to ensure that evaluations accurately measure desired outcomes"*.

R-21 stated *"There is evidence that the teacher educators/tutors/coordinators and stakeholders monitor and provide NOT constant feedback for regular review and revision of the assessment system: Establishing a consistent feedback loop involving educators, tutors, coordinators, and stakeholders is crucial for refining the assessment system and maintaining its relevance"*.

R-17 stated, *"The assessment system IS ALSO NOT procedures to ensure fairness, accuracy, consistency, and transparency of its procedures and operations: Implementing clear procedures that*

uphold fairness, accuracy, consistency, and transparency within the assessment system is essential for its credibility".

R-20 of the view, "There is NO feedback mechanism that is used by coordinators, teachers educators/tutors, prospective teachers' scholars and other stakeholders: Implementing a robust feedback mechanism involving various stakeholders is necessary to gather diverse insights that lead to continuous improvement"

R-04 stated "Complete record of the stakeholder's written complaints, with their follow-up and resolutions, is NOT PROPERLY maintained: Properly documenting and addressing stakeholder complaints, including follow-up and resolutions, showcases dedication to transparency and issue resolution".

R-16 was of the opinion, "Quality improvement plans are NOT developed PROPERLY, implemented and monitored based on the assessment results, feedback and: Developing, implementing, and closely monitoring quality improvement plans rooted in assessment results and feedback is crucial for driving program enhancement".

Assessment and Monitoring of Prospective Teachers,

The assessment and monitoring of prospective teachers, learners, and scholars within the program are underpinned by systematic, valid, and reliable procedures and tools. These instruments are thoughtfully designed to provide constructive feedback aimed at elevating the overall quality of education. In tandem with this, the program has established mechanisms and procedures to consistently monitor the performance of prospective teachers, learners, and scholars throughout their educational journey. A distinctive aspect of the system is its capacity to assess not only the knowledge and skills but also the research acumen and dispositions of these individuals. Crucially, there exists tangible evidence substantiating the systematic, valid, and reliable nature of the procedures and tools used for the assessment of prospective teachers. Furthermore, this commitment to assessment extends beyond mere data collection, as evidenced by the systematic and regular utilization of assessment data to enhance not only the performance of learners but also the program's overall effectiveness and the broader development of the institution. Through these practices, the program demonstrates its dedication to fostering continuous improvement and excellence at every level. B.Ed (Hons) elementary education program in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the instructional approach leans towards traditional methods. However, concerning the assessment and monitoring of prospective teachers, learners, and scholars, there appear to be gaps in the existing mechanisms and procedures. Currently, a comprehensive system for consistently tracking the performance of these individuals throughout the program is lacking. Moreover, the assessment system's effectiveness in evaluating research capacity, knowledge, skills, and dispositions of prospective teachers, scholars, and learners seems inadequate. Nevertheless, positive evidence emerges in the realm of assessment data utilization. There is demonstrable use of assessment data on a systematic and regular basis to enhance learner performance, improve program effectiveness, and contribute to the overall growth of the institution. Addressing the identified deficiencies with well-defined monitoring mechanisms and refining the assessment system could potentially lead to a more robust and effective educational experience for all involved.

R17 was of the opinion about The Traditional Approach and Assessment Gaps in this way, "In the context of B.Ed (Hons) elementary education program in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the traditional teaching methods are deeply embedded in the instructional approach. However, when it comes to assessing and tracking the progress of aspiring teachers, students, and scholars, it's clear that the current mechanisms have noticeable gaps. The absence of a comprehensive monitoring system throughout the program is a concern that needs immediate attention."

R-18 about Bridging the Evaluation Deficiencies, "While the B.Ed (Hons) elementary program embraces a traditional teaching approach, there's a noticeable shortfall when it comes to evaluating prospective teachers, learners, and scholars. The existing mechanisms for tracking their performance lack coherence. Additionally, the assessment system's capability to effectively measure research abilities.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this research shed light on several crucial aspects of the B.Ed (Hons) Elementary Education program in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly concerning assessment and monitoring practices. The discussion delves into these findings and proposes strategic measures to address the identified deficiencies, thereby enhancing the overall quality of the program. Firstly, the discrepancy between program objectives and assessment practices is a significant concern. It is evident that the current assessment system does not fully align with the intended objectives of the program. To rectify this, there is a need to recalibrate assessment practices to ensure they accurately measure desired outcomes. This could involve revisiting the design of assessment tools, ensuring they comprehensively evaluate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions outlined in the program objectives. Secondly, the lack of consistent feedback loops is another area requiring immediate attention. Feedback from educators, tutors, coordinators, and stakeholders is essential for refining assessment systems and maintaining their relevance. Establishing a structured feedback mechanism that fosters regular communication and collaboration among stakeholders can facilitate ongoing review and improvement of the assessment process. This could involve implementing platforms for feedback submission, scheduling regular meetings for discussions, and incorporating feedback into decision-making processes. Thirdly, the absence of clear procedures to ensure fairness, accuracy, consistency, and transparency within the assessment system undermines its credibility. Implementing robust procedures and guidelines can address these concerns, ensuring that assessments are conducted equitably and transparently. This could include standardizing grading criteria, providing clear instructions to assessors, and establishing mechanisms for quality assurance and oversight. Furthermore, the lack of a comprehensive monitoring system throughout the program raises significant issues regarding the tracking of student progress and program effectiveness. Developing robust monitoring mechanisms that track the performance of prospective teachers, learners, and scholars at various stages of the program is essential. This could involve implementing regular assessments, maintaining detailed records of student progress, and utilizing data analytics to identify areas for improvement. Additionally, deficiencies in evaluating research abilities highlight the need for a more comprehensive approach to assessment. Assessments should not only focus on knowledge and skills but also on research acumen and critical thinking abilities. This could involve incorporating research-based assignments, projects, or presentations into the curriculum and developing assessment tools specifically designed to evaluate research competencies. Despite these challenges, there is evidence of utilizing assessment data to enhance program effectiveness and learner performance. Leveraging assessment data as a tool for continuous improvement is commendable and should be further emphasized. This could involve establishing processes for analyzing assessment data, identifying trends and patterns, and implementing targeted interventions to address areas of weakness. In conclusion, addressing the identified deficiencies in assessment and monitoring practices within the B.Ed (Hons) Elementary Education program in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa requires a multifaceted approach. By aligning assessment practices with program objectives, establishing consistent feedback loops, implementing clear procedures, enhancing monitoring mechanisms, and refining evaluation processes, the program can foster educational excellence and continuous improvement. These strategic measures will not only enhance the quality of the program but also contribute to the professional development and success of prospective teachers, learners, and scholars.

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