

## Assessment in schools in Pakistan

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### Abstract

This study scrutinises the examination and assessment system in schools in Pakistan that is applicable from primary through to secondary education (Year X). It begins with a brief background of the Pakistani examination system established by its colonial masters; it then describes the present education system with special reference to the assessment process of students. An overview of the curriculum development and curriculum reforms in the country expands our understanding of the moribund assessment system in state schools. The primary focus of the study is to contextualise the assessment system in primary and secondary education and to assess the present rectification measures being put in place by the education authorities.

### Historical background of the examination system in Pakistan

Pakistan is governed under the Islamic, Democratic, Federal Constitution of 1973 and the governance extends to four autonomous provinces: Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pukhtunkhwah and Baluchistan. Education in Pakistan is essentially a provincial affair; however, certain educational functions are the responsibility of the Federation via the Federal Ministry of Education.

Examinations in Pakistan are a legacy of the past, inherited from the British system. Following the model of the University of London, an external final examination, called matriculation was instituted at the end of the high school stage in the 1880s (Shirazi, 2004). It was initially administered by the London University. After the establishment of universities in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras in the 1857 the matriculation examination was conducted by these universities. Major features of management and conduct of examinations replicated the University of London examination. Matriculation became a gateway to government service and an entrance to higher education with the promise of a lucrative job throughout life. Another factor which consolidated the hold of external examinations was the system of financial grants-in-aid which was first adopted for the institutions of primary, secondary and higher education, based on the principle of 'payment by results' the amount of grant to be given to an institution depended upon its results in external examinations. The Indian Education Commission (1882) observed that 'the system makes examinations the main object of the thought of pupils and teachers alike'. Thus the examination came to dominate the curriculum and teaching process. It became the main objective of the primary cum secondary school education (GoP, 1971).

The Hartog Committee (1929) exposed the myth of the middle (Grade VII) certificate and matriculation then set a standard of achievement. It rather served both an immediate qualification for service and as a gate to further education. The Committee further observed that the lure of government service through matriculation was still potent. However various curriculum reforms in the pre-independence period failed to dislodge the hold of the external examination. It still holds sway in full force in all the regional Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) and in universities. Since a degree or certificate was a key to a job and further education, the pressure to get a degree somehow or the other intensified. The inadequacies of the pedagogy, lack of proper teachers, poor infrastructure all culminated in encouraging unfair means for getting the certificate/degree (Nurullah and Naik, 1951).

### Post-independence (after 1947)

The function of the external examination and assessment did not change with independence and subsequent developments over the years have strengthened the hold of examinations and assessments in the education system of the country. Immediately after independence, the vacuum created by the departure of Hindus and the need for manning the increasing number of administrative posts further reinforced the position of internal and external examinations and the degree or certificate became the most sought-after document. In 1947 there was no Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education in the country. Later on in 1950 Karachi BISE was established and in 1954 the Lahore BISE (Shirazi, 2004). By the late sixties, ten BISEs were conducting their examination assessments without trained personnel and other facilities (Shirazi, 2004).

The Sharif Commission (1959) introduced the internal examination and assessment system in schools but it did not impact positively on students' performance due to inadequate teachers' training in examination and assessment. The performance of the education system can be measured by its examination results. Our public examination results indicate that out of 100 students entering in Year I only 50% pass in the secondary examination. Out of this 40% pass the higher secondary examination, out of this exceptional group of survivors, only 5% manage to enter higher education, thus leaving behind 95% (GoP, 2007) According to the Ministry of Education during the years 1998-2008 only 70% of school-going children enrolled in primary schools (male 85%/female 57%), 46% in middle schools (male 56%/female 35%). These figures show that less than half of the students in primary schools are retained up to middle and secondary level. Again a number of factors were involved such as a deficient teaching and learning process, the medium of instruction, transition from school to college level, and a poor examination and assessment system are blamed for this wastage (Khan, 2011).

Examinations in Pakistan involve high stakes because they open a gate to move to the next grade, profession and other permanent work. Success in examinations gets glorified while failure is a stigma for life. All doors of opportunity are closed to failed candidates and they become social Pariahs. Since passing examinations is a goal of the Pakistani education system rather than assessing knowledge, all instruction in the schools is geared to that objective (Erfan, 2000). The system is therefore riddled with malpractices which, among others, include; leakage of question papers, impersonation (stand-in candidates), external assistance, smuggling the unauthorised material, copying from a nearby candidate, intimidation, collusion, ghost centres, substitution of scripts and irregularities of supervisory staff by allotting more time to some students. In the context of widespread malpractices it is not surprising that a review of 29 separate government and non-governmental reports and policy papers in Pakistan concluded that the public examination and assessment system 'had become devoid of validity, reliability and credibility' (Erfan, 2000).

### **The present education system in Pakistan**

In Pakistan the education system is divided into five levels: primary schools (Year I-V); middle school (Year VI-VII); high school (VI- X), leading to the Secondary School Certificate); intermediate colleges or higher secondary (Year XI-XII), leading to a FA (Faculty of Arts) or FSc (Faculty of Science) (pre-medical and pre-engineering, certificate) and university programmes leading to undergraduate and postgraduate and doctorate degrees (see table 1 for full summary). Preparatory classes (*kachi*, or nurseries) were formally incorporated into primary school in 1988. All academic and technical educational institutions are the responsibility of the provincial governments. The federal government mostly assists in curriculum development, accreditation and some financing of research.

**Table 1: Classification of the Education System in Pakistan**

Institute	Age	Grade or Year	Certificate/Degree
Primary schools	3-5-11	Nursery( <i>Kachi</i> ) - 5	Promotion to year 6
Middle schools	12-14	6-8	Middle school completion certificate
High Schools	15-16	9-10	Secondary School Certificate (SSC)
Colleges	16-18	11-12	Faculty of Arts /Faculty of Science(FA/FSc)
Degree Colleges	16-22	11-14	FA/FSc – Bachelor of Arts/ Bachelor of Science (BA/BSc)
Post-Graduate Colleges	16-22	11-16	FA/FSc-BA/BSc-MA/MS/MSc
University	18-22	13-17	BS (Four Years)
University	22-31	16-20	MA/MSc-Mphil-PhD

Pre-primary education is functional and managed in schools throughout country. The students attending pre-primary class are called *Kachi*. The Education for All (EFA) Action Plan Policy, 1998-2010 provided recognition to *Kachi* class as proxy for early childhood education. According to National Education Policy (NEP), 1998-2010, the *Kachi* class will be introduced as a formal class in the primary schools. The age group for pre-primary is <3>5. Primary schools consist of five grades (I-V) and they enrol children of ages 5-9 years. Since independence, the policy makers announced that primary education was to be free and compulsory.

The middle schooling is of three years duration and it comprises grades VI-VIII. The age group is 10-12 years. The participation rate at middle school was about 34 percent during 2000-2001. Males were 36 percent and females were 33 percent (UNESCO, 2006).

Secondary education in Pakistan is provided between the ages of 14 to 17 years. In Pakistan, 47.9 % girls and 70.8 % boys attend school at secondary level. The regional BISE conducts the examination. A certificate of secondary school education is awarded to the successful candidates. Vocational Education is normally offered in high schools. Training for a variety of trades is offered to the students and after completion of the course they get jobs as carpenters, masons, mechanics, welders, electricians, refrigeration technicians and they are employed in similar trades. There were 498 vocational institutions with an enrolment of about 88 thousand in 2001-2002 (UNESCO, 2006).

Side by side with modern education system there is also the religious education system (*Madrassah* Education), which provides Islamic education. These institutions have their own management system without interference from either the provincial or federal governments. However, grants-in-aid are provided to these institutions by the government. During 2007 there were 7761 religious institutions with an enrolment of 1034,000, of which 132,000 were female students in 548 institutions (Sherazi, 2004). Efforts have been made by the government to bring the *Madrassah* into the mainstream under Education Sector Reforms. The main purpose of mainstreaming *Madrassah* is to enlarge employment opportunities for their graduates. Pakistan *Madrassah* Education Boards are established to regulate the *Madaris* activities (Shirazi, 2004).

There are millions of people in Pakistan who have no access to the formal education system. It is not possible for the formal system to meet educational needs of the rapidly growing population. A non-formal Basic Education (NFBE) School scheme has been introduced for those who have no access to formal education. This scheme is very cost-effective. Under this scheme a primary education course is taught in forty months. Non-formal schools are opened in those areas where formal schools are not

available. The Government provides the teachers' salary and teaching materials whilst the community provides the school building/room. There are 6371 NFBE schools functioning in the country.

### **Curriculum development in Pakistan**

In Pakistan, curriculum, syllabus, planning, policy centres of excellence and standards of education are on the current list of the Constitution of Pakistan. The Federal Ministry of Education has been empowered through the Federal Supervision of Curricula, Textbooks and Maintenance of Standards of Education Act, 1976 to supervise curricula, textbooks and other learning materials to maintain standards of education. Curriculum development emerged as a national activity in Pakistan in the early sixties and it has been a continuous process since then. In schools, the curriculum is delivered in the form of a syllabus, in which the concepts laid down by the curriculum are isolated in a series of topics and sub-topics that have to be taught during the academic year, which is split into three terms. While the curriculum defines goals and aims of education, both in general and particular terms, the textbooks translate the syllabus part of curriculum into reading materials.

The government announced in 2007 that the new curriculum will be implemented in the new academic year beginning in August 2007 (Jamil, 2009). However, that did not occur as the Ministry of Education, under-estimated the complexities involved in the processes of textbook development and production (Jamil, 2009). In each province the quality challenges are spread across the following institutions:

1. Bureau of Curriculum;
2. Textbook Boards;
3. Teacher Training Institutions (in-service and pre-service);
4. Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) (X-XII); and
5. National Education Assessment System (NEAS) (IV-VIII) and Provincial Education Assessment Centres (PEAC).

The five institutions are present in each province of Pakistan. These institutions are responsible for quality education with direct links to the Ministry of Education on assessing learning competencies, quality learning and teaching processes, textbook development, curriculum and inputs to policy reforms. Provincial Textbook Boards are responsible for Education on assessing learning competencies and quality of pedagogy. Textbooks are often criticised for not reflecting the curriculum, as it requires considerable experience and skill to translate the curriculum into a textbook that covers the objectives; simultaneously takes into consideration the children's language proficiency and background knowledge and concurrently arranges the content in a logical sequence in a stimulating manner (Sarwar *et al.*, 2011). But the all-important self-assessment questions or activities (especially questions focused on higher order skills) are invariably missing (Sarwar *et al.*, 2011).

Examination assessments are based on textbooks and they try to test the knowledge part of the curriculum and to provide evidence of its success or failure. Although the national curriculum has to be followed throughout the country, the language of instruction varies from province to province and so do the textbooks, which have been produced in keeping with the geographical location and local environments of these provinces. Keeping in mind the curriculum, the government generally prescribes textbooks for each class according to its demographic context. In practice, however, there is little uniformity in the use of these books, especially in primary schools (Khan, 2011).

The primary schools' curriculum comprises seven subjects for each grade, such as core subjects; English, Urdu, mathematics and Islamic studies, and other subjects like general science, and social studies, health and physical education and art etc. Ordinarily a Primary school has one teacher, with one class for all subjects, though there are primary schools with only one or two teachers to take care

of all the five classes. Primary Teaching Course (PTC) is a compulsory training for recruiting teachers at primary level in the country.

Teacher's guides are provided for in-services support of primary teachers. The primary and secondary school curriculum covers seven to eight subjects in a 6 day, approximately 26 hours, school week. In primary schools languages and mathematics have 6 hours each, science, Islamic studies and social studies 2 hours each, health and physical education and art 1 hour each. In practice, science and art and some portions of arithmetic are neglected or eliminated because materials are in short supply and teachers are unable to teach the subject. Their needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes). The Primary Education Curriculum Reform Project assisted by UNICEF, introduced an integrated curriculum with focus on language lessons from Year I-III. Relevant concepts of Social Studies, Islamic Studies and Science are integrated into the languages (Urdu and English) lessons.

The secondary schools' curriculum puts the focus on three subject areas, a) science, having seven compulsory subjects and one elective subject from a total of 39 elective subjects, b) humanities, containing six compulsory subjects and two elective subjects from a list of 46 subjects, c) technical, comprising six compulsory subjects and two elective subjects from the list of 37 elective subjects. This plethora of options creates problems for students in selecting a relevant and interesting curriculum<sup>2</sup>. UNESCO (2004) found that the curriculum in Pakistan is gender-biased and residentially biased and has more representation from males and urban residents. Additionally, students in Pakistan find the curriculum boring. It has been recognised that the curriculum in Pakistan does not presently cater for the diverse conditions in the education sector itself (multi-grade groups), as well as the variations within the geographical breadth of the country (GoP, 2009).

### Curriculum reforms

The Education Policy (2009) has accepted the need for curriculum development and assessment along modern lines in order to face the challenges of globalisation and learning as a lifelong process. In 2007 the Ministry of Education undertook a revision and assessment for Basic Science subjects and in 2002 for Social Science subjects. In 2008, the Government announced its intention as part of the Education Sector Reforms Action Plan 2001-2005/6 to undertake a comprehensive assessment and revision of the curriculum after every 5 years. Curriculum revision was to be an institutionalised process of evaluation and development as iterative and concurrent (GoP, 2009).

The present government launched the National Education Policy Reform Process, the National Education Census and expedited a comprehensive review of school curricula in 2010. According to sub-section (1) of section 3 of the Federal Supervision of Curricula Textbooks and Maintenance of Standards of Education Act 1976, the Higher Education Commission is charged with curriculum assessment and revision in all subjects for grade XII upwards (Jamil, 2009).

In 2007, the Curriculum Wing's human resource capacity was expanded and two teams of 3 experts each were added as the 'National Curriculum Council to cover Basic Science and Social Science subjects to review, assess, update and upgrade the National Curriculum from Early Childhood Education to Higher Secondary School level' (Majeed, 2009). The Curriculum Wing undertook comparative reviews of curriculum reforms in different countries. It reviewed the scheme of studies, followed by the revision of curricula for 25 core subjects (grade I-XII), which were notified in 2008. The review of the remaining subjects as listed in the scheme of studies continued until 2009 (Jamil, 2009). Elaborate stakeholder consultations were held 'with teachers, administrators, educationists, curriculum experts and students including field visits and training of working teams through workshops and seminars; reviews of drafts by subject experts and working teachers leading to refinement of contents and preparation of a uniform curriculum format'. (Majeed, 2009:2). These

comprised standards, benchmarks and learning outcomes as vital parts of the curriculum development processes. The key features of the National Curriculum 2007/10 are as follows:

- standards and competencies driven;
- learning objectives correspond to students' learning outcomes (SLOs);
- progressive approaches for primary, middle, secondary and tertiary stages of learning;
- life skills are integrated across subjects;
- vertical and horizontal connections are ensured;
- focus on promoting creative writing and analytical thinking for learners rather than on rote learning;
- detailed guidelines have been provided in the curriculum for textbook writers and teachers for effective delivery of the curriculum; and
- Guidelines have been provided for assessment and evaluation in addition to the learning outcomes specified in the Curriculum. (Majeed, 2009: 5-6).

Therefore it is vital for affective examination assessments in schools that the design of the curriculum should be in accordance with the calibre of students at different levels. The object should be to increase their knowledge rather than to make policies in closed rooms and to re-draft curricula which were followed in the colonial era (Kamrani, 2010).

### **The examination and assessment system in Pakistan**

The concept of examination is as assessment of ability, achievement or present performance in a subject. Instruments of assessment can log in to easy or mixed form of assessment, may be used for qualifying for entrance to professions and higher education (Page and Thomas (1978:17)

Since the time of Pakistan's independence, seven different education policies have been implemented in the country. The main thrust of all these policies was to promote quality education and the improvement of pedagogy. Yet, the improvement in these areas has not been achieved and is quite unsatisfactory (Rizvi, 2000). In Pakistan, assessments do not judge real competence or genuine educational accomplishment of the students. Instead, the Pakistani educational system encourages those who can best reproduce what they have learnt during lessons and fails those who are unable to do that. It seems as if the whole system of education revolves around examinations. Such types of assessment and evaluation are narrow in scope (Khan, 2006).

Examinations and assessments are an integral part of pedagogy which determines the destiny of students and learning for their life career. Assessments are usually held annually, and they are the main criteria to promote the students to higher grades or to retain them in the same grade. However, recently, a system of automatic promotion up-to grade-III has been introduced in some primary schools but not officially implemented. In the primary schools, assessments are conducted by the respective schools for each grade (I-V). However, at the end of the fifth year of the primary stage, a public examination is conducted by the Education Department for promotion to the next grade. Another examination is held for the outstanding students to compete for the award of merit scholarships. Similarly, the assessment in middle schools (lower secondary (VI-VII) is held by the individual schools but there is a public examination at the end of grade VIII conducted by the Education Department for promotion to the next grade and awarding of scholarships. But a study conducted by UNESCO (2007) criticised the primary educational assessment system in Pakistan as it is failing in its primary mandate of teaching children basic skills. The primary reason is, of course, poor teaching and assessment. This is itself a consequence of poor education and training of the teachers, and poor management and supervision. There is no on-going assessment of children in state

primary schools. Whatever assessment takes place is sporadic, subjective, and provides little feedback to children for improvement.

Regional BISE conducts the examinations for the assessing of secondary and higher secondary students. Secondary schools begins from grade VI to X (most of the high schools cover middle and secondary education) and students are required to pass a national examination. Upon completion of grade IX, students are expected to take a standardised test in each of the first parts of their academic subjects. They again conduct these tests of the second parts of the same courses at the end of grade X. At the successfully completion of these two examination assessments; students are awarded a Secondary School Certificate (SSC). This is known as the 'matriculation certificate' or 'matric' for short.

Thus, for stakeholders such as schools the objective is to 'pass the examination with good grades and to bring a good name to the school. For some schools, teachers, and students, passing examinations with highest positions becomes a question of prestige' (Rehmani, 2003:3). To be very specific, Rehmani (2003) identifies the problem that, 'teachers teach for testing, rather than for learning. The assessment system of examinations reinforces approaches to teaching that reward memorization. The more the reproduction, the better and higher are the scores or marks awarded by the examiners'. Consequently, it is presumed that in the current examination system, learners' learning outcomes are absolutely ignored. However, testing of memorization is measured extensively. Accordingly, it is apparent from the above excerpts that the assessment system suffers from multiple deficiencies such as fostering rote-learning, and not adopting critical or analytical approaches for assessing learners. The Ministry of Education (2009: 41), has declared that student performance shall, in future, be based on assessing competence in a specialised area that requires a given skill set. There shall be periodic reviews of the assessment system. Multiple assessment tools in addition to traditional examinations shall be explored, to ensure the right balance between the uses of formative assessment approaches combined with the summative approach of high-stake examinations.

In 2003, BISEs in Pakistan replaced the 'composite scheme' of SSC examination with the 'split scheme'<sup>3</sup>, these are two different types of prevailing examinations in the country. (In the composite scheme, examinations are conducted after two years while in the split scheme, the same examination is split into two parts, Part-I (Grade IX) after first year and Part-II (Grade X) after completion of second year. Under the composite scheme of examination the total marks were 850 and now in the split system of examination the total marks are 1050).

Ahmad and Malik (2011:132) quoting Dar and Bethel (1995), draw attention to the shortcomings of the public examination and assessment system. They argue that the assessment system in Pakistan is defective due to the following: (a).No single body is responsible for assessment at secondary level, and examinations at this level are the responsibility of many Boards. This results in a lack of coordination among the working of these Boards. (b) Papers of different subjects can be scheduled to be written at the same time. (c) Results are not reliable because students use deceitful and indulge in malpractices in the examination. (d) Deficiencies in marking takes place. Qureshi (2005) mentioned that there is some substantiation for the claim that the more regularly the evaluations take place, the more will be the level of student achievement.

Christie and Afzaal (2005) and Shah and Afzaal (2004) revealed that there has been an increase in the incidence of the recurrence of questions and selected material is tested again and again in our public examinations. This leads toward selective studies because the understanding of a little content helps the students to get good marks in the final examination and nobody seems to take this fact seriously. Assessments in examinations mainly focus on easy, straight and very simple questions and they ignore high levels of cognition involved in such items as comprehension, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. In this situation, students keep focusing on retention and rote memorization as examination tactics. Christie and Khushk (2004) stated that in Pakistan only one text book is provided to the primary and

secondary school students for each subject that's why the quality of teachers is not satisfactory and the worth of our output at this level is inadequate. They also suggested that to assess the learning outcome special skills are required.

Although in theory MoEGP (2009) valued the students' performance based on specific skills that should be measured through multiple assessment techniques, in practice there are no such assessing criteria. For example assessing the English language in Pakistan is subjective and it measures pupils' knowledge of the language rather than their performance in it (Warsi, 2004, cited in Khan, 2011). However, the MoEGP (2009) has stated that language teachers should employ both formative and summative forms of assessment. Secondly, teachers should explore the cause of students' strengths and weaknesses and provide helpful and effective feedback to them. Moreover, the teachers should do an item analysis to find out the validity and reliability of the test.

In addition, Khan (2006:6) observes that research in testing highlights the decline in the examination system, its ineffectiveness, and unreliability in diagnosing students' weaknesses and in assessing their abilities. He reiterates that the design and content of the test papers is such that students only have to rely on their memories, and this does not have a beneficial effect, on syllabi and teaching practice. Above all, tests lack validity and reliability (Khan, 2011). Similarly, Ahmad and Malik (2011) also note that testing is not viewed as a vital component of teaching and is considered quite distinct from teaching and learning as well as practice. In terms of reliability and validity of assessment procedures, Rehmani (2003) pinpoints that reliability and validity of examination papers in terms of coverage of curriculum, selection of paper setters, and lack of training or otherwise of the paper setters and examiners, marking system and preparation of results, are considered dubious. Moreover, Khan (2011), Shah and Saleem (2010) also point-out that textbook materials are prescribed by the teacher for their learners to be learnt and explained word by word and sentence by sentence and confined to only one text book. Due to this approach to teaching and learning, students become passive recipients of prescribed content knowledge of the textbooks. Khan (2006) also states that the questions after each lesson of the textbook are based on literal levels that measure only low order thinking skills.

Khan (2006:11) maintains 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.

Accordingly, it is presumed that in order to measure students' comprehension, question types have to test high order instead of low order thinking skills. This will not only require students simply to locate the answer in the set texts using only low order skills, but also to read between and beyond the lines in order to become independent and proficient readers. In addition, they will become proficient in interaction with texts, such as, narrative, expository, argumentative, persuasive, and informative or a combination of text types (Khan, 2011).

Assessment can be used to evaluate the overall system's efficiency as well as students' performance. Secondly, it provides feedback for improvements at all tiers starting from changes in the classroom to improvements in the national systems (MoEGP, 2009: 41). In addition, keeping in view the crucial role in determining the impact of pedagogy, public examinations and assessment in Pakistan have more demerits than merits (Rehmani, 2003). Moreover, modern assessment techniques are not being used to measure students' achievements and hence dependency on traditional learning processes yields a low quality of education in the country (Christie and Khushk, 2004).

Examination questions are repeated at least every three to five years and hence questions can be predicted. There are 'model papers', or 'guess paper guides' available in the market with readymade

answers based on the question papers of the previous five years. Teachers and students tend to rely on such guides and students commit their content to memory. Assessment questions in the papers contain only a combination of objective and subjective types of questions. Regurgitation seems to be the only key for students to pass the examinations rather than creative thinking and independent analyses. The irony is that those students who can reproduce better score higher marks and this affects lecture methods and curriculum-based teaching approaches.

Moreover, Gipps (1994) suggests that the major purpose of assessment is to support the teaching and learning process (cited in Rehmani, 2003). However, in Pakistan only a few teachers have had proper training in designing tests and modern approaches to assessment (Mirza *et al.*, 1999). Kamrani (2010: 7) in an analysis of the present assessment system maintains that we need to over-haul our examination and assessment system at many levels: a) by introducing a variety of assessment tools for evaluation of students' learning and for their capacity for further growth and development. b) by a drastic revision of the present school-based examination and assessment system from grade IV to XII by introducing uniform (across the provincial level at least) and quantitatively verifiable qualitative indicators for the assessment system at primary (grade V), lower secondary (grade VIII), secondary (grade X) and higher secondary stages (grade XII). Assessment of students should cover academic excellence along with analytical and decision-making skills incorporated with the indigenous moral value system.

## **Assessment in the educational system in Pakistan**

### **National Assessment System**

Dissatisfaction with the performance of the schools is ubiquitous and in most countries, people have been expressing concern with the level of competencies demonstrated by school leavers. Since the 1980's, efforts have been underway to develop a coherent system for monitoring and evaluating pupil learning outcomes. This system is referred to as National Assessment System (NAS) (UNESCO, 2007).

The NAS obtains a representative sample of measures of student achievement, in key curriculum areas, at regular intervals, at selected grade levels. The purpose of the exercise is to assess the achievement of the education system through national aggregation of individual student performance. Data on the performance of students on various sub-domains of curriculum can point to strengths and weaknesses within the curriculum areas.

Simultaneously with data on student achievement, information is also collected on correlates of learning outcomes. Any desired combination of correlates may be chosen from amongst student-related, school-related or teacher-related factors. Information on how student outcome is related to these factors can help policy-makers to identify and focus upon those which were likely to contribute to improvements in student achievement levels via examination assessment.

Analyses of data on sub-domains of curriculum and correlates of learning outcomes provide insight into how intended curricula are implemented in schools and into factors affecting student learning. Learning assessment data provides an indication of the state, efficiency, or performance of an education system. Learning assessment serves the following purposes:

- Provides pertinent data to guide policy-makers in selection of priorities in curriculum, in allocation of resources, and in designing teacher-training strategies;
- Provides accurate data on changes in level of student achievement over years to substantiate or refute assertions pertaining to lowering of educational standards;
- Information on manipulatable variables affecting student outcome can help in assessing the impact of in-service training, supervision procedure, emphasis on different curriculum content and language instruction, etc;
- Introduce accountability in the system.; and

- Help bring about cost efficiencies by identifying failing features of the existing system or by providing evidence to support more effective alternatives.

The effectiveness of the NAS depends on the relevance of indicators selected, quality of data collected, and validity of analyses. Examination and learning assessment both collect data on student achievement levels and use it for improvement of examination assessment in education. The examination data is used by teachers both for the grading of students as well as improvement of the quality of their instruction. Learning assessment data, on the other hand, is used by policy makers and planners for improvement of the school system.

### Assessment Studies (AS)

To assist in the formulation of appropriate policies, AS were first conducted in 1983 under the Primary Education Project. This was followed by studies under the “BRIDGES” project of the Harvard Institute of International Development during 1988-89. However, these were one-time, project-driven activities and did not become part of the system. The World Declaration on Education for All drew attention to the need for improving learning outcomes. The Technical Guidelines prepared for the Year 2000 Assessment, stressed the need adequately to assess the level of student achievement within the examination system. Consequently, a number of assessment studies were conducted during the 1990-2005 period with the support of the UN and other international agencies to improve the education system by an affective examination and assessment system. Lack of administrative infrastructures prevented pooling together of national capacity for planning and execution of learning assessment studies and held back progress in this field. Attention is now being focused on development of required infrastructures, both at national and provincial levels, under the Social Action Programme. (For detailed information on the assessment studies conducted in Pakistan See Report of Ministry of Education Government of Pakistan, MoEGP, 2009)

### National Education Assessment System (NEAS)

NEAS was established to undertake systematic evaluations of student learning achievement across Pakistan and to share the analytical results with both policy makers and practitioners to inform the education quality reform process. With data that is comparable across regions and over time, NEAS can identify gaps and bring about improvements in the curriculum, teaching and classroom support practices, as well as in the development of examination and assessment systems. For NEAS to be established as a student assessment system on par with international standards, several key steps towards institutional strengthening, capacity building and improvement in technical quality and processes should be undertaken. The following are required:

- Further investment in the technical proficiency of key staff is required, in both specialized skills (item writing, sampling, test procedures) and core expertise (report writing, comparative analysis);
- This will facilitate improvements in test and instrument design, and will support robust research and analysis. Extending the dissemination of results and findings to primary stakeholders, particularly teacher trainers, textbook developers and policy makers is important; and
- Deeper understanding is needed of the assessment process and stronger linkages between assessment systems and other education sub-departments (such as teacher professional development centres, examination units, curriculum wing, and textbook development) will facilitate better-informed and strategic use of assessment information for improvement in student learning.

The longer term sustainability of NEAS will depend not only on its establishment as an autonomous body and but also on the degree of integration between the federal and regional assessment centres so that cross-learning and implementation of best practice is facilitated. With continuous improvements in test instruments and key technical skills, NEAS will be able to track overall system efficiency as well as individual student performance, and identify key areas for intervention that will lead to improvement in the quality and effectiveness of the education system.

## **Conclusion**

The process of teaching and learning holds a pivotal place in building a quality educational and assessment system; it eventually affects the socio-economic growth of the country. In order to progress towards the development of the country, this aspect should not be ignored. To conclude this study, it can be argued that the assessment techniques employed by schools only judge memory skills of the students and do not assess the affective psychomotor domains. The teachers do not do justice to the work in their marking of answer scripts due to their lack of proper training. Only information is tested and the characteristics of whole personality are ignored. Our examination and assessment system revolves around marks and instead of getting knowledge; students are more interested in unfair means for obtaining more marks. Parents and examination staff are involved in mal-practices. It could further be argued that examinations not only assess the students' performance but the teacher's performance as well, but our examination assessment system lacks such measuring techniques Shirazi (2004). There should be a system of assessing teachers using the same tests as the children, and provide training in weak areas of teaching and assessment by introduce a system of incentives and disincentives (UNESCO, 2005).

The Pakistani education system needs improvement and reforms. It is unreliable in many aspects. Students do not sit in classrooms to understand what they have learned but simply want to qualify for the next grade with passing grades. They are not interested in getting something after a year in one grade, but are eager to gain admission into the higher standard. It is our classroom situation and assessment approach that spoils students' inner charm. It does not provide for us as human beings with innovative ideas, but simply puts the stress upon the studious (Kamrani, 2010).

In a modern educational system, well-designed tests are essential elements of the learning process that strengthen the analytical and problem-solving capabilities of a student. They should test the level of knowledge which has been properly internalised and should act as benchmarks of progress. Pakistani state school's assessment system serves this purpose poorly, resulting in poorly designed test papers that discourage many good students. In the words of Jamil (2009: PAGE REFERENCE NEEDED FOR DIRECT QUOTATION) 'the challenges of learning and education will continue to be shouldered by the citizens of Pakistan, who remain committed to informing and demanding from the state, alternative learning solutions, respecting diversity, promoting peace, progress and human enlightenment.'

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<sup>1</sup> My name is Miss Shabana Gul Khattak, but to acknowledge my grandfather's role in my academic success I want to be known by his name (Miss Shamaas Gul Khattak) in the academic world.

<sup>2</sup> A complete list of secondary subjects is available at GoP (Government of Pakistan) (2007) *Secondary School Curriculum*, Islamabad: Ministry of Education Government of Pakistan.

<sup>3</sup> Although in 2008, the split scheme of examination was reversed back to the composite scheme, and in 2009 the composite scheme of examination was again replaced by the split scheme of examination at the secondary school level in Pakistan (Ahmad & Malik, 2011).