

An overview the present situation of assessment system in secondary school

Introduction and Background

Education is a vehicle of social progress and socio economic transformation. It is the process by which people acquire knowledge, skills, habits, values or attitudes. It is conceived to be an ongoing process. As Students' learning is the main focus of an education system, it develops curriculum, design teaching-learning strategies, and determines learning experiences necessary for students' learning. During this process it is often required to measure the progress of the learners, how far the educational changes occurred among them or how these changes have been organized.

In a formal education system, one of the essential functions is to assess its learners' achievement as a result of study under the education system. Assessment allows one to collect and assess learning evidence and to take decision about learner's achievement. The assessment results are than used by teachers, parents, learners and other relevant groups for meeting multifaceted purposes. This indicates that assessment has 'direct relationship with students' learning' (Begum, 2007).

The curriculum also includes assessment techniques to understand and recognize progress in learning. There exists a direct and strong relationship between assessment of students' achievement and students' learning. Assessment approach shapes and dictates content, ways, process and quality of learning. Gipps (1994) articulates that "there is a relationship between assessment and the way in which subject matter is presented in teaching: this in turn affects- through the tasks in which pupils engage- what and how pupils learn".

Studies about learning reveal that students are predominantly influenced by the assessment they face, rather than by the teaching presented by their teachers in classroom (e.g., Scouller 1995, 1996, 1998; Scouller & Chapman 1999; Scouller & Prosser 1994; Biggs 1999; Ramsen 1992; Thomas & Bain 1984). The process of learning in which students are engaged in is largely dominated by the way they believe that they can meet the demand of particular assessment tasks.

Assessment does play a very influential role for every other components of a curriculum. Realizing the influential role of assessment on teaching-learning, Rowntree (1987) states that "If

we wish to discover the truth about an educational system, we must first look to its assessment procedures”.

Therefore, it can be argued that ‘the nature and quality of assessment is responsible for the quality of learning. This means an effective assessment can turn a student to a good learner’ (Begum, 2007). In contrast, students ‘assessed under an inappropriate assessment mechanism’ may be deprived of meaningful learning.

The system of assessment in Bangladesh has always been guided by curriculum though the system only covered learners’ ability of memorization and comprehension skills. Other categories of skills in the knowledge like application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation are hardly included in the assessment. Besides, some of the essential qualities such as oral presentation, leadership, tolerance, co-operative attitude, school behavior, co-curricular activities, and social values are not included in the assessment system. As a result, learners’ trend to rely heavily on their memorization skill leads them to become crippled lacking required excellence to contribute fruitfully to the society.

In Bangladesh, secondary education is one of the most important and biggest sub-sectors in education having huge number of institutions and teachers. There are various techniques for assessing students’ learning in secondary schools such as Examinations (includes written, practical and viva voce), practical activities, class test, monthly exam etc. Among them Examinations are the most dominating mechanism for assessing students' achievement in the formal education system of Bangladesh.

Therefore, it is necessary to find out real situation of assessment system practiced in secondary level of Bangladesh for its further development and also for making it up to date to meet the need of time and the society. The study tends to know the present situation of assessment system practiced in secondary level of Bangladesh.

Objectives of the study

As the secondary education system is widely spread throughout the country, the study covered all secondary schools of Bangladesh including different tiers and all divisions and disaggregated by urban and rural areas. The overall objective of this study was understand the state of affairs of existing assessment system. The specific objectives were-

- a. Identify the types of assessment mechanism being used in the secondary schools;
- b. Explore the nature of assessment techniques used for assessing secondary students' learning; and
- c. Investigate the objectives for assessing secondary students at school level and national level.

Methodology of the study

The proposed study integrates qualitative and quantitative approaches to find out the real picture of the present situation of assessment system in secondary school through collecting data from primary sources. The data was collected through questionnaire and FGD.

Population of the study

The entire students and the teachers of secondary school in Bangladesh considered as the population of this study. Moreover, the assessment tests used in the secondary schools also be considered as population of the study.

The Sample

The study covered different tiers and all the divisions of Bangladesh. Appropriate sampling techniques were employed to ensure representative sample selection. Thus, the sample categories were as follows:

Division	Upazilas	Schools	Students	Teachers	Stakeholders
7 Administrative Divisions	14 2 from each Division	100 6-8 from each Upazila	1000 2 from each grade from each school (2X5X100)	200 2 from each school	5 At least 1 from each institution/ level (NCTB, BISE, TTC, IER, Project personnel)

- A total of 14 Upazilas (2 Upazilas from each division) were selected randomly. From the divisions, 2 Upazilas were selected randomly which give a total of 14 Upazilas.
- A total of 100 secondary schools were selected maintaining rural and urban areas. At least 2 schools from rural area and 2 from urban areas were selected randomly.
- A total of 200 teachers (2 from each school) were selected randomly in this study. In selecting the teachers gender equality was maintained.
- A total of 1000 students (10 from each school) were selected randomly to search their opinion.
- A total of 10 stakeholders from different level/department/institution were interviewed to find out the level of implementation of the assessment techniques at school level.

Major Findings

Based on the analysis of collected data some findings were emerged considering the perspectives of all groups of respondents. The major findings of the study were the following:

- Data revealed that all the schools practiced classroom assessment to assess students' classroom achievement during and/or after the lessons. The teachers, who taught in those classes during observation, assessed the students in classrooms focusing most of the aspects. Almost all teachers assessed students' knowledge based on previous lessons, asked questions to students orally and invited answers verbally, asked them to write on their note books and blackboard as well. Teachers mainly used creative questions to foster students' creativity which was noteworthy. Aside from the group work, most of the teachers also provided individual work to students during class lessons although this proportion was slightly lower in the schools located in Chittagong and Rajshahi divisions. It was found that most of the teachers provided practical work to students during class sessions, however, in Barisal division only half of the teachers provided practical work. In term of providing assignment to students, the teachers of Sylhet, Barisal and Khulna divisions offered less than that of other four divisions. It was, moreover, found that teachers arranged quiz competitions among the students although to a small extent.

- It was found that majority of the schools practiced weekly examination system to assessed students' achievement and their progresses. However, weekly examination was practiced a bit lower in the schools located in Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions. The schools used different types of tests for assessing students in weekly examinations such as MCQ and creative questions were the main types of questions used in all the divisions for the weekly examinations. Aside from MCQ and CQ, the schools also used 'true/false' questions, 'fill in the gaps', 'short answer' questions and 'essay type' questions in the weekly examinations.
- The duration for weekly examinations varied from school to school in all divisions. Data showed the huge variation in allocating time for examinations as well as marks. The duration of weekly examinations varied from 10 to 60 in minutes and marks allocation was also varied from 5 to 50 in a total.
- Data showed that majority of the schools practiced monthly examination system to assessed students' achievement and their progresses. However, monthly examination was practiced a bit lower in the schools located in Rajshahi and Barisal divisions. The schools used different types of tests for assessing students in monthly examinations such as MCQs and CQs. In particular the proportion of using MCQ was higher in Khulna and lower in Barisal. Similarly, uses of CQ in monthly examinations were higher in Khulna and lower in Rajshahi. Aside from MCQ and CQ, the schools also used true/false questions, fill in the gaps, short answer questions and essay type questions in the monthly examinations. The other types such as 'true/false', 'fill in the blanks', 'short type' and 'essay type' questions were used in the monthly examinations in all Secondary Schools.
- The duration for monthly examinations varied from school to school in all divisions. The minimum duration for monthly examinations was in a range of 30 minutes and maximum duration was 80 minutes. However, 30-45 minutes of time was the most popular duration for monthly examinations all over the country. The range of marks allocated was between 20 to 50.

- All the secondary schools arranged terminal/semester examinations at least two times in a year except final/annual examination. The MCQ, essay type tests, and creative questions were used simultaneously in the terminal examinations. It was found that all the schools used those types of questions to assess students in terminal examinations. However, ‘true/false’, ‘fill in gaps’ and ‘short answer questions’ were rarely used in the terminal examinations in all divisions. It was, moreover, notable that those types of question types were ignored in the schools located in Dhaka division. Meanwhile, ‘fill in the gaps’ was also fully ignored in the schools located in Chittagong and Barisal divisions.
- The schools were practicing school based assessment (SBA) throughout the whole academic year. Emphases on the six essential aspects of SBA were found varied in the secondary schools. In conducting SBA, the schools highly practiced class test, class work and practical work, home work, and group work. On the other hand, ‘assignment’ was not found in all school and it was to some extent ignored by the teachers.
- Final examination and terminal examination were taken for assessment in all the divisions. Most of the cases creative questions in their terminal and/or final examinations were add in all areas. The schools arranged terminal and/or annual examinations allocating 100 marks and 3 hours of duration. In selecting the question types, the schools mainly considered the CQs and MCQs in those examinations. However, some subjects like Mathematics and English CQs were not used in the secondary schools. In Mathematics, all the questions were ‘essay’ type, whereas in English different types of questions like matching, fill in the blanks, and short questions were used. Except Mathematics and English, at least 60% marks were allocated for CQs and 40% marks were for MCQs in most of the subjects of secondary levels.
- Data showed that performances of students based on particular subject contents were ignored in most subjects. Students’ performances only assessed in some subjects especially for science related subjects and which had only 25% marks.

Recommendations

Based on the findings emerged from data analyses and interpretations, the following recommendations have been made for further improvement of the assessment practices at Secondary Education levels. The recommendations are:

- Data showed that creative questions (CQ) and MCQ got the major emphasizes for assessing students' achievement at secondary levels. On the contrary, the other assessment strategies such as essay questions, matching, true/false and fill in the blanks were ignored for most of the subjects. It can be recommended that different types of questioning should be used for assessing students at secondary level so that their diversified learning abilities could be measured.
- Data showed that weekly and monthly examinations were not practiced in all schools across the country. In particular, weekly examinations were found less practiced in Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions although it was recommended by the authority. This scenario demanded the monitoring and supervision of higher educational authorities as well as school administrators to ensure weekly examinations at school level. These practices are important to facilitate student learning and make them perfect in learning. The marks allocation and durations were also found extremely varying from school to school. That's why, it is important to provide a proper guideline for weekly examinations at secondary levels for developing a more uniform system. This guideline will be helpful for the teachers to conduct the weekly examinations with less variation.
- It was found that all the secondary schools arranged terminal and final examinations for assessing students' achievements. The questions used in the terminal and annual examinations were found different among the schools, although, the schools highly emphasized on the types of questions used in national or public examinations as well as different amendments and instructions provided by education board, NCTB and MoE. This situation demanded monitoring and supervision of the education authorities for maintaining the uniformity among the schools as their students attended in the public examinations where a uniform question paper was used.

- The schools practiced SBA with having a variation of emphasizes on the parts of it. It was found that ‘assignment’ did to get much importance to the teachers while practicing SBA. However, this part also had the same importance with others. In this regard, proper instructions and monitoring are needed for ensuring all the activities under SBA at school levels. This will also help to facilitate students’ diversified was of learning and make if more effective.