

# Practices and Challenges of Alternative Assessments at Government Primary Schools in Bangladesh: Teachers' Perceptions

By

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the requirements for the degree of  
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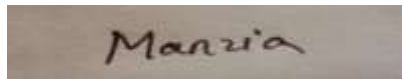
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## Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my/our own original work while completing a degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

**Student's Full Name & Signature:**

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Marzia".

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## Approval

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of Fall, 2021 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Education in Educational Leadership & School Improvement on 25.8.2021.

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## **Ethics Statement**

Throughout this study, I have intentionally tried to keep myself aware of the prejudices, biases and perceptions that might obstruct the objectivity and neutrality of the data. I was cautious while upholding any particular values or ideas. Also I have not made any attempt to omit data that might affect the interpretation of the findings. Therefore, the findings presented here in this study are authentic and without any manipulation. At the same time, I was strict to maintain the highest possible ethical and professional research code of conduct, such as, the willingness of non-participation, the right to remain anonymous, the confidentiality of the research participants etc.

## **Abstract**

Bangladesh's existing summative assessment system, especially in primary education, does not support the students' holistic development. To overcome this barrier, the concept of alternative assessment came into place. However, teachers' perceptions are essential before any reform in education as they will be implementing that in the classroom. Therefore, this study intended to determine the perceptions of the government primary schools' teachers regarding the practices and challenges of alternative assessment. I chose the qualitative research method with purposive sampling for this study. I collected data from 18 teachers of 6 different schools in Dhaka city through individual phone interviews, focus group discussions, lesson planning, and student copies. The data showed that though the teachers are aware of the significance of alternative assessment, they do not have enough knowledge and face numerous challenges while implementing it. The reasons they mentioned are lack of teachers, teacher-student ratio, class duration, workload, parents' pressure for taking summative assessments, and lack of training. Thus, the study proposes for the life-long learning orientation of the teachers along with proper monitoring and evaluation of those learning, besides providing the teachers with adequate support and resources so that they can implement the alternative assessments in their classrooms.

**Key words:** Government primary schools; alternative assessments; teachers' perceptions; practices; challenges.

## **Dedication**

This Thesis is dedicated to my beloved husband, father and mother for their unconditional love and continuous support.

## **Acknowledgement**

I would like to thank Shamnaz Arifin Mim Maám for her insightful guidance and constructive feedback during the research and thesis writing process.

## **Table of Contents**

Declaration.....	ii
Approval .....	iii
Ethics Statement.....	iv
Abstract.....	v
Dedication.....	vi
Acknowledgement.....	vii
Table of Contents.....	viii
List of Tables.....	xi
List of Acronyms.....	xii

### **Chapter - 1: Introduction & Background**

1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Research Topic.....	3
1.3 Statement of the Problem.....	3
1.4 Research Questions.....	4
1.5 Purpose of the Study.....	4
1.6 Significance of the Study.....	5
1.7 Limitations of the study.....	5

### **Chapter - 2: Literature Review**

2.1 Introduction.....	7
2.2 Education system of Bangladesh.....	7



2.3 Primary Education in Bangladesh.....	8
2.4 Concepts of Assessments.....	8
2.5 Primary education assessment system in Bangladesh.....	8
2.6 Alternative Assessments.....	10
2.7 Significance of using alternative assessments.....	10
2.8 Teachers’ perceptions of using alternative assessments: Global Context.....	12
2.9 Challenges teachers faced in implementing alternative assessments: Global context.....	14

**Chapter 3: Methodology**

3.1 Introduction.....	16
3.2 Research Approach.....	16
3.3 Research Site.....	17
3.4 Research Participants.....	17
3.5 Research Method.....	18
3.6 Research Tools.....	18
3.7 Data Collection Procedure.....	19
3.8 Data Analysis Procedure.....	21
3.9 Ethical issues & concerns.....	21

**Chapter-4: Results & Findings**

4. Introduction.....	23
4.1 Practices of alternative assessments at Government Primary Schools in Bangladesh.....	23

4.2 Challenges of implementing alternative assessments at Government Primary Schools in Bangladesh.....27

**Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion & Recommendations**

5.1 Introduction.....31

5.2 Discussion.....31

5.3 Conclusion .....34

5.4 Recommendation .....34

References.....36

Appendices.....40

## **List of Tables**

Table 1: Research participants

Table 2: Data collection procedure

## **List of Acronyms**

1. FGD: Focus Group Discussion

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction & Background

### 1.1 Introduction

In the education system, assessment plays a vital role in informing and improving the ongoing learning process (Tosuncuoglu, 2018). According to Pierce (2002), assessment is the most significant component of any teaching and learning process. Thus, it is used by the instructors in various forms to assess, measure, and report the scholarly status, learning progress, and expertise that a student obtains through the teaching-learning process. This is a systematic approach to collect information regarding students' learning as a part of the evaluation (Amua-Sekyi, 2016). Besides informing the instructional decisions based on the result of the assessments and finding out students' strengths and weaknesses related to classroom instruction, it also helps the teachers to provide differentiated learning support to the students by giving them specific feedback (Tosuncuoglu, 2018). Two kinds of assessment systems are prevalent in the current education system: formative or alternative assessment and the other is summative or traditional assessment (O'Leary, 2006). Through the summative or traditional assessments, teachers gather information on students' progress at a particular point of time by using selected-response items (e.g., multiple-choice), brief constructed-response (e.g., short answer questions), and essay questions (Yang, 2007). On the other hand, formative or alternative assessment requires gathering information regularly and improving the teaching-learning processes. It inspires the students' higher-order creative and critical thinking skills where they have control of their learning (Yang, 2007).

However, the way standardized or traditional assessment (paper-and-pencil test) is being utilized to evaluate students is not correctly fitting in many contexts, especially in Bangladesh. The situation is even worse in primary education in Bangladesh (Mukut, 2012). John B. Biggs, one of the renowned educational psychologists, said the students learn what they think they will be assessed on, not what is in the academic plan or curriculum (as cited in Mukut, 2012). Bangladesh's primary education assessment system ultimately represents the scenario of the assessment of learning in the form of summative assessment (Mukut, 2012). Although the development of all the language skills is crucial for the early learners to get the desired learning outcome, this written exam or summative assessment essentially assesses the writing skill, leading to rote learning. The other language skills, i.e., listening, speaking, and reading, are not evaluated in the overall assessment system in Bangladesh. Among the advantages of using summative or written-based assessments, its development in comparatively less time and effort and its economical nature to administer is prominent (Mukut, 2012). In addition to this, the desire for getting more A's has suppressed the learning of the students, and as a consequence, parents started putting more load on the teachers to have a good result. Due to the burden, the teachers focus more on the teaching materials and contents for the test. As a result, accomplishing and mastering the creative and critical thinking competency is gradually diminishing as a learning target for the students and teaching instructions for the teachers (Islam, 2019). Although there have been several attempts to eradicate and reform the existing assessment system, few are achieved because of numerous hindrances. To get rid of the demanding situation caused by traditional assessments, one of the approaches is enforcing alternative assessments. The concept of alternative assessments refers to engaging the learners in the learning process and implementing critical thinking skills from both the students' and teachers' sides. The alternative assessments will be utilized successfully in the

classroom only when the teachers will understand them properly. So, it is essential to know what the teachers know about alternative assessments and their perceptions and challenges in implementing alternative assessments in the classrooms.

## **1.2 Research topic:** Practices and Challenges of Alternative Assessments at Government Primary Schools in Bangladesh: Teachers' Perceptions

As a teacher spends thirty to fifty percent of their classroom time assessing their students, which is one of the crucial skills of a teacher (Stiggins, 1999), the teacher should know about appropriate assessments strategies. Similarly, the policymakers and teacher educators should support them in realizing the importance of their understanding of the assessment strategies and provide them with proper professional training for the betterment of the students (Stiggins, 1999).

## **1.3 Statement of the problem**

The prevailing summative assessment system in primary schools in Bangladesh cannot measure the holistic learning outcomes of the students. To overcome the challenge, we need alternative assessments instead of summative assessments (Islam, 2019). As the teachers are the ones who are there to implement any new educational reform in the classroom, we need to find out their current practices of assessments, their perceptions, and challenges they are facing in implementing the alternative assessments in the classrooms (Rahman, 2018).

Although assessing students' performance is considered one of the crucial responsibilities of teachers; unfortunately, most of the teachers of our primary school are not aware of the different or alternative forms of assessments, and many teachers feel underprepared for that (Al-Nouh et al., 2014). Research findings over the last two decades have reported that teachers' assessment skills are generally weak (Al-Nouh et al., 2014). Besides, teachers' perceptions of assessment are also

crucial, as it has a significant connection to their willingness to implement it. The situation is nothing different in our country. Additionally, instead of motivating the students to learn and grow, the prevailing assessment system of our country, especially primary education, is pushing them to rote memorization from the book and is limiting students' ability to judge and evaluate anything (Mukut, 2012). Thus, the system is gradually creating an adverse impact on students' achievement and motivation. Consequently, students are disinterested in the study, which will leave the nation with no leaders who will advocate for society (Islam, 2019).

Moreover, getting rid of this situation has become a necessity of the time, and the nation needs support from teachers in doing so. According to Ogan-Bekiroglue (2009), teachers' knowledge and attitudes towards educational assessment should be considered when introducing reforms in the educational systems. Besides, Podham (2009) adds that teachers' lack the knowledge and positive attitudes towards assessment affect the quality of assessment outcomes (as cited in Al-Nouh, 2014).

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

1. How do the teachers at Government Primary Schools in Bangladesh practice alternative assessments?
2. What challenges do the teachers face in implementing alternative assessments to improve students' learning at Government Primary Schools in Bangladesh?

#### **1.5 Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to find out government primary school teachers' practices of alternative assessments in the classroom to improve students' learning. This study also wants to explore the



government primary school teachers' perceptions of their role and their challenges in implementing alternative assessments in the classroom.

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the teaching-learning pedagogy has evolved and taken new forms in the classroom in different countries worldwide. However, it is a matter of regret that the scenario is still the same in our country (Islam, 2019). Although many educators have manifested that learning takes place in social interactions, our classes are still traditional, where the teacher lectures. The role of the learners is to listen to those lectures passively. Students do not get any scope to interact with their teachers and peers (Rahman, 2018). In addition to that, the existing assessment system only evaluates students' memorizing skills; no analytical or critical thinking skills are being assessed in the prevailing assessment system. However, using different types of alternative assessments can bridge the gap, and it would be the responsibility of the teachers to implement the system into the classrooms. Thus, it is crucial to know their practices and challenges (Mukut, 2012).

Furthermore, the study will hope to bring light on the issue and its effectiveness that may lead to further research on this topic.

## **1.7 Limitations of the study**

This study was planned before the COVID-19 hit Bangladesh, so I changed the data collection process. Due to the COVID-19 breakthrough, all the schools have been closed since March 17, 2020 (Rahman & Ahmed, 2021). As a consequence, I had to bring several changes to the data collection process of the study. For example, the initial plan of the study was to observe classes to find out the actual scenario of the classroom; however, due to COVID-19, as the schools were

closed, I had to collect lesson plans from the teachers instead of observing the classes. Then, many of the teachers were not willing to share their lesson plans as most of them had their materials and resources in the school.

Moreover, to overcome this challenge, I planned to collect students' assessment scripts from cross-checking with the lesson plan and finding out the practices of assessments. However, managing students' writings was also another limitation. As most of the students of Government primary schools do not have smartphones and access to the internet; thus, it was difficult for me to collect students' scripts from cross-checking with the lesson plans, even the pictures the students have sent was challenging to decode due to their blur and unclear picture quality. Finally, several pieces of research on the use of alternative assessments have been conducted on secondary and higher secondary education in Bangladesh; very little is done on the use of alternative assessment in primary education, especially the significance of using alternative assessment from teachers' perspectives.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In the literature review, I am presenting some authentic and relevant information from different books, articles, newspaper writing, and other documents. I have researched and reviewed those to understand and explore more about my research topic on the practice of alternative assessments at government primary schools and teachers' perceptions. I have organized the literature review under the following aspects: 1) Education system of Bangladesh, 2) Primary Education in Bangladesh, 3) Concepts of Assessments, 4) Primary education assessment system in Bangladesh, 5) Alternative assessments, 6) Significance of using alternative assessments, 7) Teachers' perceptions of using alternative assessments around the world, and 8) Challenges teachers are facing in implementing alternative assessments around the world.

#### **2.2 Education system of Bangladesh**

In Bangladesh, the mainstream education system is broadly spread into three main phases: Primary, Secondary, and Higher Education. Primary schools provide elementary and primary education, secondary education is provided in High Schools and Intermediate Colleges, and higher or tertiary education is provided in Degree Colleges and Universities (Khan & Akter, 2011). Primary education is a 5-year system, and secondary is 7 years which is divided into three parts: junior secondary (3 years), secondary (2 years), and higher secondary (2 years). At the higher education stage, it takes 5/6 years for students to pass Bachelor and Masters degrees (Khan & Akter, 2011).

### **2.3 Primary Education in Bangladesh**

According to Prodhan (2016), the Primary education system in Bangladesh is diversified and manifold because of several factors, such as economic, socio-cultural, political, regional, and religious. It is a centralized system, where the government controls more than 75% of schools, and around 83% of the total children enrolled in the primary level educational institution go to these schools. More than 70% of primary teachers are working in government-controlled schools. Besides, there are nine other types of primary schools monitored and maintained by different authorities in Bangladesh.

### **2.4 Concepts of Assessments**

Among the components of the teaching and learning process, assessment is the prominent one that intends to bring development for the students. It is one of the practical approaches to enhance the quality of education as it can enrich life-long learning skills in the learners (Taras, 2010). In addition to that, Belk and Calais (1998) stated that assessment supports the teachers by collecting information about the students' progress, program goals, and how the methods of delivering the lessons and instructions are helping the students achieve the mastery of the content and desired competency.

### **2.5 Primary education assessment system in Bangladesh**

Besides the other integral components, such as aims, goals, and objectives, an effective assessment system is also vital for a curriculum. Students' learning determines the significance of the curriculum, and traditionally students' learning is being evaluated through assessments (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018). In terms of the assessment system in Bangladesh, assessment of learning is

generally being used in the form of summative/traditional assessment, where the emphasis is given on the assessment rather than on the students' learning. Our teachers and students focus more on the contents or lessons that are possibly important for the examinations. Therefore, this system leads to the tendency of rote learning, surpassing the significance of developing all language skills, i.e., listening, speaking and reading, and writing, especially for the early learners at the primary level (Mukut, 2012). At the primary level, according to the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), 50 Terminal Competencies (TC) are to be completed after finishing the five years of schooling, and these competencies are spread into grade and subject-wise learning outcomes in different textbooks (Islam, 2019). However, the prevailing "pen and paper" based summative/terminal examinations at each grade and the "Shomaponi" (familiar with the name of PSC) examinations are not likely to assess these TCs and learning outcomes, instead of on the assessment papers, students need to answer some memory-based informative questions (Mukut, 2012).

Furthermore, human beings use multiple intelligences while learning. Therefore, to evaluate a student's performance, we need to set an assessment paper based on the combination of all the intelligence (Islam, 2019). If we could use formative/alternative assessment regularly in our education system, we could have different types of learning and teaching culture in our education system (Islam, 2019). Therefore, at the primary level, we need to develop an alternative and appropriate assessment system that will be able to consider all the TCs and skills of language (Mukut, 2012). Emphasis should be given more on formative/alternative assessment and using assessment as learning and transfer our existing teaching-learning system into one that provides an opportunity to explore multiple intelligence in the classroom and support each student to learn in their own way (Islam, 2019).

## **2.6 Alternative Assessments**

Alternative assessment has spread over the last 20 years across educational systems in different contexts. It has emerged against the notion of traditional assessment (paper-and-pencil tests), where students' knowledge is only being evaluated (Rudman, 1989). As multiple intelligences suggest that students do not learn in the same way, thus if they are assessed using the same way, then they are not being assessed in a fair way (Brualdi, 1996). Therefore, alternative assessment is considered by many educators as a milestone in education (Crossouard & Pryor, 2012 as cited in Kelvin, 2012). The purpose of alternative assessment is not to test students' knowledge; instead, it is a continuous process with consistent support to develop the learning strategies that will be used beyond school years (Kelvin, 2012). According to Britton (2011), alternative assessments require collecting information on the students' academic progress and levels of understanding so that the teachers can support them based on their learning needs. Puhl (1997) added that alternative assessments permit students to showcase their mastery of the content they have learned in class (as cited in Nasri et al., 2010).

According to Knight and Mantz (2003), alternative assessment techniques are fieldwork, lab work, posters, presentations, article review, concept maps, roleplay, projects, and portfolio (as cited in Nasri et al., 2010).

## **2.7 Significance of using alternative assessments**

The alternative assessment aims to represent the actual scenario of the growth of the learners in acquiring the desired competencies as mentioned in the syllabus. Therefore, alternative assessment plays a crucial role in reducing the failure rate among learners, as it helps the teacher get an idea of the students' learning progression (Blondin & Giot, 2011). Additionally, alternative assessments

permit the students to be more aware of their learning progress and set their learning goals accordingly (Blondin & Giot, 2011). In this instance, teachers' practice of using alternative assessment inspires the students to demonstrate their learning and enable collaboration in the classroom and provide opportunities for students to peer and self-evaluate. Students get the scope to realize their role in their assessment. One of the essential features of alternative assessment is that students take ownership of their learning and become more responsible (Clarke, 2012). Thus, the responsibility of constructivist educators is to assist and facilitate students in their building knowledge (Clarke, 2012). These features of alternative assessment can resemble the theory of constructivism, as it suggests that students learn from active participation and constructive classrooms provide the opportunity to discover meaning through discussion, debate, and inquiry (Stiggins, 1999). At the same time, it also helps the students to understand their capability as they receive constructive feedback from their classroom assessment (Stiggins, 1999). Stiggins (1999) stated,

Research shows that learning is improved due to alternative assessments if students comprehend the expected learning and assessment objective if students are given feedback that is meaningful, detailed, and most importantly, if students are engaged in their learning process. (p. 25)

Moreover, assessment should accommodate learning styles and learning abilities for all students, as all students are capable of learning. Teachers should be resourceful when developing assessments and meet the academic needs of each student they teach (Brown, 2004). Brown (2009) explained,

Students learn information in different ways. Differentiation expects teachers to have apparent learning objectives grounded in content standards and created to ensure student engagement and comprehension. (p. 254)

Furthermore, alternative assessments help the students during their learning in comprehending the contents that are taught in the classroom and support their performance of evaluation (Blondin & Giot, 2011). Vygotsky's (1978) 'zone of proximal development' also suggested teachers to actively collaborate with students during the instruction to produce the best performances in students (Trumbull & Lash, 2013). It also talked about what a child can do independently and what the child can do with the help of an adult or a more skilled peer (Trumbull & Lash, 2013).

However, before implementing the new approach of alternative assessment into the school system, it is very crucial to collect and analyze information on teachers' perceptions on alternative assessment as the responsibility of the implementation at the classroom level is on them (Dowrich, 2008). Teachers' acceptance or positive perceptions of alternative assessment will indeed support the assessment and make sure the alternative assessment succeeded in reality (Dowrich, 2008).

## **2.8 Teachers' perceptions of using alternative assessments: Global Context**

The way traditional or summative assessment evaluates learners was not appropriate enough to represent learners' multiple intelligences, as it was solely based on rote memorization (Al-Nouh et al., 2014). Thus, considering the current global trends and practices in the last three decades, there have been changes in the assessment system in education reform. Several countries worldwide have responded positively to these global developments by revising their assessment systems (Al-Nouh et al., 2014). According to Dowrich (2008), teachers' roles, perceptions, and concerns should be taken into consideration before changing anything in the education system, as



they are the ones who are directly engaged with the change. Besides, research has also shown that almost all primary school teachers understand the effectiveness of alternative assessments in improving teaching and learning (Al-Nouh et al., 2014). According to Nasri et al. (2010), “alternative assessment supports a teacher in collecting information about the students’ progress, program goals, and objectives, as well as the effectiveness of the applied methods in achieving these goals” (p. 39).

Additionally, survey results from a study conducted by Wikström (2007) showed that teachers know the significance of alternative assessment as a vital component in the teaching and learning process and mentioned that it helps students develop their critical thinking skills by relating the lessons with the real-life learning experiences. Teachers in that study have noted that students can be actively involved and receive feedback through alternative assessments, engaging a wide range of backgrounds and collaboration with their peers. There are various types of assignments that teachers can use to encourage authentic learning. As a consequence, according to Wikström (2007), “students are given a diversity of learning opportunities that help them apply knowledge and connect their learning to real-life situations displaying critical thinking skills” (p. 42).

However, somewhat negative attitudes towards the significance of alternative assessments are also found in some studies; as Metin (2011) mentioned,

This trend was not supported by most teachers, who found trouble integrating alternative assessment in their teaching strategy without being adequately trained. The nature of alternative assessment by itself holds vast demands on the role of the teachers. (pp. 275)

According to Puhl (1997), the concept of alternative assessment demands the competency of the teachers in high-order creative and critical thinking skills, as it includes the cognitive, affective,

and behavioral outcomes of the learners (as cited in Uiseb, 2009). As a result, teachers must have the orientation to continuous learning, re-learning, and molding their perspectives and focus in terms of the necessity of the learners (Yao, 2015). Buyukkarci's (2014) study on the assessment beliefs and practices of language teachers in primary schools in Turkey found that "the teachers had agreed with the idea of alternative assessment and feedback, they rarely used that in the classroom or even if they used it but not in an appropriate way" (p.115). Therefore, Greenstein (2010) suggested different professional development activities/training for the teachers on the concept of alternative assessments and how to develop those alternative assessment skills by practicing those in the classrooms.

## **2.9 Challenges teachers faced in implementing alternative assessments: Global context**

As the intention for using alternative assessment differs from teacher to teacher, thus the practice also varies, and sometimes it becomes inconsistent (Abejehu, 2016). For instance, some of the primary school teachers in the study conducted by Abejehu (2016) found alternative assessments to recognize students' learning interests and difficulties; on the contrary, some others have used it to assign marks to students learning achievement. In addition, some primary school teachers still use only paper-and-pencil tests as a continuous tool, as the constant assessment means continuous testing (Abejehu, 2016). In another study conducted by Brumen et al. (2009) on 108 primary school teachers in Slovenia, Croatia, and the Czech Republic, it is found that the teachers were not familiar with the notion of using self-assessment and portfolios as a form of alternative assessments. They have demanded more knowledge and training on alternative assessments, as inadequate and lack

of training has compelled them to use the summative form of assessment (as cited in Al-Nouh et al., 2014).

Furthermore, in a survey of first-to-sixth grade EFL primary school teachers in Taiwan to explore their classroom assessment practices, Yang (2007) found that teachers are more confident and skilled in implementing summative assessment than alternative assessment. Among the reasons for preferring the summative assessments, they have mentioned several challenges of implementing alternative assessments, such as time constraints, the difficulty of classroom management, the subjectivity of grading, heavy workloads, inadequate training, large class size, etc. (Yang, 2007).

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In methodology, I am presenting the information I planned to collect data for my study. The methodology part of this study includes the following aspects: 1) Research approach, 2) Research site, 3) Research participants, 4) Research method, 5) Research tools, 6) Data collection procedure, 7) Data analysis procedure, and 8) Ethical issues & concerns.

#### **3.2 Research Approach**

This study has used the qualitative approach to determine the practice, teacher perceptions, and implementation of the alternative assessments at the Government Primary Schools in Bangladesh. Using the qualitative paradigm came into consideration from the concepts of the qualitative research approach by Creswell (1998) and Merriam (1998). According to Creswell (1998), qualitative research is a procedure to make sense of a social or human problem based on the data found from different methodological investigations. In the qualitative study, the researcher tries to bring the meaning of the context by analyzing words and reports prepared with participants' views. Similarly, Merriam (1998) mentioned that qualitative research is based on the idea that individuals make interactions with the social worlds to construct reality. Therefore, the paradigm of the qualitative approach allows the researcher to understand the meaning individual means and how they make sense of their world and their experiences. Since this research aims to identify the practice of alternative assessment and understand teachers' opinions on the implementation of alternative assessment, qualitative methods are essential for the investigation.

### **3.3 Research Site**

As a data collection site, this study has chosen Dhaka city, the capital of Bangladesh; Dhaka city was selected using purposive sampling as this is the largest and metropolitan city of Bangladesh. There are various primary schools in Dhaka city, and collecting data from Dhaka can give a representative picture of the overall system of alternative assessments' practices and challenges from the teachers' perspectives. There are approximately 295 government primary schools in Dhaka city (MOPME). For data collection, I have chosen 6 schools from different locations of Dhaka city to get a representative picture of the practices and challenges of alternative assessments in primary school classrooms.

### **3.4 Research Participants**

Participants for the study have been chosen purposely. Generally, in a qualitative study, purposive sampling is used to identify and select participants to make the most effective use of limited resources (Palinkas et al., 2013). At the same time, according to Palinkas et al. (2013) mentioned,

Purposive sampling not only involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals who are familiar with the content of the research study and are experienced or interested in that particular topic, but it also emphasizes the availability and willingness of the participants to participate and to contribute in the study by sharing their thoughtful opinions and perspectives. (p.539)

Data has been collected from 18 government primary school teachers from 6 Government Primary Schools from Dhaka city. There were 3 teachers from each school. The teaching experiences of the selected teachers have ranged from 5-10 years. According to McMillan and Schumacher

(2001), purposive sampling is considered the best technique while choosing small participants who are likely to be knowledgeable and who have required a level of understanding about the area of research interest.

### **3.5 Research Method**

As mentioned earlier, this study has used qualitative research methods for collecting data to answer the research questions. According to Stuter (2006), a qualitative research helps gather in-depth and vital information and understanding of the participants regarding the study's research questions.

### **3.6 Research Tools**

In-depth semi-structured interviews in the form of focus group discussions with the participants and classroom observations of the selected teachers were supposed to be used to collect data for the study. FGD was chosen because it allows the participants to interact and develop new ideas; as Carey & Asbury (2012), focus group discussions provide opportunities for interaction among the group members to enhance their understanding of that particular topic. Semi-structured questions have been formed according to the different themes, namely practice of the alternative assessments in the classroom, teachers' concerns with regard to the alternative assessment, and its significance.

Qualitative data collection usually depends on face-to-face interviews, FGD, and fieldwork; however, there are numerous ways to collect data virtually (Jowett, 2020). For collecting data online, the most used tool is video-calling (e.g., Skype/zoom/google meet) or the use of text-based instant messaging (e.g., WhatsApp) instead of the face-to-face interview or focus group (Jowett, 2020). In this study, data has been collected using virtual FGD, 2 FGDs have been conducted to

collect data from 12 participants, 2 assistant teachers have been selected from 6 different schools of Dhaka city in Bangladesh. In addition, qualitative phone interviews have been used as Key Informant Interviews; 6 head teachers from 6 schools have been selected as the participants for phone interviews. Telephone interviews provide the best source of information when the researcher or the participant does not have direct internet access (Greeff, 2020). Besides, lesson plans and student scripts from the assistant teachers have been collected as document analysis from the 12 assistant teachers. The purpose of compiling lesson plans and students' writings from the participants is to observe the assessments used within each lesson. The participant's list is given below;

School Number	Number of Participants/school	Total Participants
School 1	3 ( 1 Head teacher and 2 assistant teachers)	18
School 2	3 ( 1 Head teacher and 2 assistant teachers)	
School 3	3 ( 1 Head teacher and 2 assistant teachers)	
School 4	3 ( 1 Head teacher and 2 assistant teachers)	
School 5	3 ( 1 Head teacher and 2 assistant teachers)	
School 6	3 ( 1 Head teacher and 2 assistant teachers)	

Table 1: Research participants

### **3.7 Data Collection Procedure**

To collect data from the selected participants, I took permission from the school's head teachers. Then, after explaining the purpose of the study, I first set a convenient time for the qualitative phone interviews with the head teachers. I took prior consent from the head teachers to record the

call for further reference, informing them about the time commitment. Interview questions included the simple and shortened yet important questionnaire directly relevant to the central research questions of the study. The intention was to reduce time commitment as participants are more likely to hang up or not complete more extended interviews. Research shows that phone interviews should take approximately 15 minutes to ensure meaningful engagement from participants (Greeffe, 2020).

Then, for the focus group discussions, I communicated with the assistant teachers about the time and platform of the debate. Zoom was used for the FGDs. The time duration for each FGD was about 1 hour and 30 minutes. The practice was done with each participant to avoid technical errors in the main call. Prior permission was taken from them to record the call for further reference that their identity would remain confidential and the information would be used solely for the research purpose. The notes were taken by the researcher as well. The participants were requested to have the video contact to be visible, and then at least some possible non-verbal cues can be determined to facilitate the interaction. Finally, lesson plans and students' scripts were collected from the participants via email or WhatsApp/IMO communication. The following is the detailed table of the overall data collection procedure.



## Data Collection Procedure:

Data Collection Tools	Participants	Procedure
Qualitative Phone Interview	6 Head Teachers	First of all, the researcher set a convenient time for the qualitative phone interview with the head teachers. Prior consent was taken from the head teachers to record the call for further reference, and they will also be informed about the time commitment for 15/20 minutes. Interview questions included the simple and shortened yet important questionnaire directly relevant to the central research questions of the study.
2 FGDs	12 assistant teachers (2 from each school)	Zoom was used for the FGDs. The time duration for each FGD was approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes. A practice call was done with each participant to avoid technical errors in the main call.
Lesson Plans and students' scripts for document analysis	12 assistant teachers	Lesson plans and students' scripts were collected from the participants via email or WhatsApp/IMO communication.

Table 2: Data collection procedure

### 3.8 Data Analysis Procedure

As part of the data analysis procedure, I have transcribed the recorded data. After that, the transcribed data were coded, categorized, and ordered to determine emerging themes and patterns. In the next step of the analysis, data were examined to find out similarities and differences within the categories. Then, data obtained from the focus group discussions, qualitative phone interviews and lesson plans, and students' scripts were analyzed. Data triangulation was also applied through the collection of data by individual interviews, FGDs, and teacher lesson plans/students' writings.

### 3.9 Ethical issues & concerns

I have taken prior consent from all the study participants before recording their phone interviews and FGD discussions. Then, the confidentiality of the participants is strictly maintained throughout the whole study. Pseudonyms have been used while quoting the participants. Before

giving any opinion on a particular topic, I have tried to uphold my biases regarding that topic and went with the study's findings.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Results & Findings**

#### **Introduction**

In this section, the researcher presents the findings of the qualitative data analysis. This section gives an overview of the Bangladeshi government primary school teachers' perceptions, practices, and challenges of using alternative assessments in facilitating students' learning, along with a complete description and analysis of the collected data. Semi-structured telephone interviews with the Head Teachers, FGDs with the assistant teachers, and teacher lesson plans and students' scripts were collected in response to finding out the practices of alternative assessment by the teachers and the challenges teachers face in implementing alternative assessments to improve students' learning at Government Primary Schools in Bangladesh.

After cataloging and analyzing the data, two themes in alignment with the two research questions are developed based on the responses from the participants. The themes include 1. Practices of alternative assessments at Government Primary Schools in Bangladesh, 2. Challenges of implementing alternative assessments at Government Primary Schools in Bangladesh. In the following section, these two themes, along with the sub-themes, are discussed.

#### **4.1 Practices of alternative assessments at Government Primary Schools in Bangladesh**

In answer to this research question, the participants have shared positive responses on the significance of using alternative assessments in the classrooms. One of the participants, Shajahan from phone interview # 2, 25.8.2020; has mentioned,

"If we want to achieve all the stated terminal competencies in the curriculum prescribed for primary school, we need to evaluate the students using different types of assessments other than the summative one, it can be through music or anything else, and to make sure that students are learning, use of different types of activities is important."

So, it has been found that only summative assessments cannot measure the students' learning outcomes; we need alternative assessments to evaluate their continuous growth and support their learning accordingly.

Similarly, another participant Hayat from phone interview #5, 25.8.2002; has mentioned,

"students feel afraid with the name of assessment, whereas students find alternative assessments interesting."

Furthermore, the participants have shared several practices of alternative assessments in the classrooms. Such as,

**4.1.1 Oral Assessment:** Participants of the study mentioned that they take an oral assessment at the end of each chapter to check students' progress, check their attention in the classroom, and ensure their active participation in the school.

**4.1.2 Role-play:** Teachers also involve students in roleplaying, especially in social science class. One of the participants, Salma from FGD#1, 26. 8. 2020; shared one of her real-life experiences related to the summative form of assessments and mentioned that students stopped coming to the school for fear of giving summative assessments. However, when she started using roleplaying as a form of assessment to evaluate their understanding of the contents taught in the classroom, students felt interested and actively participated in the activity. So, it can be said that

there is a fear of assessment among the students due to the rigid concept of summative assessment. On the other hand, students feel interested and motivated when alternative assessments are being conducted in the classroom. It also helps to increase the attendance and class participation of the students.

**4.1.3 Group work:** Participants also mentioned group work as a form of alternative assessment. They said that often in the classroom, they create mixed groups consisting of the lower, middle, and high competent students to help each other in learning. One of the participants from FGD#2, 27.8.2020; Beauty mentioned,

"Group work allows the students to develop their team working ability; it also helps them connect as well." This data can be related to constructivist learning theory as it says that students learn in interaction, not in isolation.

**4.1.4 Class observation:** Participants have mentioned that they perceive classroom observation as a form of alternative assessment. One of the participants, Shima from phone interview # 6, mentioned that she observes the class. At the same time, the students are involved in the group/pair work to check their participation in the activity. She also added by saying,

"I observe classes to see whether students are involved in their classwork to evaluate their participation in the class activity."

At the same time, participants also stated that they use the findings of their classroom observations while giving a score that remains in teachers' hands in the examination paper.

**4.1.5 Science fair:** According to the teacher, alternative assessment is essential because sometimes some part of the lesson seems not apparent to the students, but if we take some alternative assessment, like a science fair, students feel motivated to participate in all those, and

learning happens automatically. One of the participants Sufia from FGD #2, 27.8.2020, has shared her personal classroom experience of taking science classes through an alternative assessment form. According to her, most of the lessons in our primary science books includes content related to real life, so when she implemented science fair as a form of alternative assessment, students worked on the content, presented their learning in front of others, and in this way their learning happened automatically. She believes that it will last for a more extended period because they have manipulated the objects by themselves, have real-life experience related to it, and answer any questions related to that topic, which cannot be done if they have only been assessed through written or summative assessment. She mentioned,

"Rote memorization does not last long; students forget the content after a certain period when they rotely memorize from the book without understanding."

Moreover, the lesson plans' data were analyzed to see the effectiveness of using alternative assessments in lesson planning. However, data from reviewing the teacher lesson plans revealed that although all the participants in the study discussed the efficacy of alternative assessments, the assessments used by these teachers to assess their students were still mainly traditional. Similarly, the students' scripts have shown that either they have written the content from the book by rote memorization, or they have written short/broad questions' answers in their scripts based on a given topic.

These findings lead to the next theme of the study, where the participants have mentioned some challenges that they face while implementing the alternative assessments in the classrooms which

## **4.2. Challenges of implementing alternative assessments at Government Primary Schools in Bangladesh**

Several challenges were mentioned by the participants when they were asked about them. They are the following;

**4.2.1 Teacher shortage in the primary schools:** All the participants from the phone interview have mentioned that there is a teacher shortage in the primary schools. One of the participants, Mitu from phone interview #6, 25.8.2020, has said that she has more than 2000 students in her school, whereas she has only 5 teachers (Head Teacher). Consequently, it becomes difficult for the assistant teachers to be prepared to execute different forms of alternative assessments. In addition, they have a considerable workload, including some administrative work from the government, and they do not get enough time to prepare themselves for implementing alternative assessments in their classrooms. One of the participants from FGD# 1, 26.8.2020, has mentioned,

"alternative assessments require a preparation from teachers' end that they cannot do due to the other work priorities."

As the government primary school teachers have to do other administrative work, they get very little time to prepare for the class. Thus it brings the issue of lack of teachers in the schools, besides the willingness of using different forms of assessment for the betterment of the students.

**4.2.2 Classroom size is significant in primary schools:** There are considerable students in classrooms, so it is not possible for them to assess the students using different sorts of assessments and record that; instead, the teachers evaluate the students relying on their results from the summative assessments. They have mentioned that the teacher-student ratio is not appropriate

in primary schools. They feel pressured to maintain such a massive class of 100+ students. One of the participants Salma from FGD#2, 27.8.2020; has mentioned,

“If all the students cannot participate in all the given classroom activities, then they feel unmotivated and lose interest. It becomes difficult for the teachers to involve more than 100 students in different sorts of classroom activity”. The classroom size is a considerable obstacle for the teachers to implement alternative activities in the classroom. Due to the classroom size, teachers face challenges in keeping track of all the students and their continuous progression through alternative assessments.

**4.2.3 Short class duration:** According to the participants, class time is another obstacle in implementing alternative assessments in the classroom. The class duration is only 45 minutes for each period. So it is difficult to check the progress of all the students by using an alternative way as it requires continuous monitoring and tracking, and recording the data.

**4.2.4 Parents’ pressure for taking summative assessments:** Participants have mentioned that if there is no written assessment in the classroom, the parents start giving complaints. As the prevailing education system is based on summative assessments, they do not understand the evaluation process through other assessments. One of the participants, Rumpa from FGD#1, 26.8.2020, has mentioned,

"although I get some subject-specific training, however, I cannot implement those learnings in the classrooms due to the community pressure, as the parents only demand their children's summative result."

**4.2.5 Students’ socio-economic background hinders the impact of alternative assessments:** According to the participants, alternative assessment is practical, but it depends on which group of students we apply it. In the government primary schools in Dhaka city, most of



the students come from lower socio-economic backgrounds. In most cases, they do not get learning support from their families. At the same time, some of the students go to work after or before school to support their families financially. Consequently, they cannot give their time for study at home. In contrast, alternative assessments require students to work independently at home, such as projects, presentations, and wall magazines.

**4.2.6 Lack of teachers' training on alternative assessments:** As mentioned earlier, the government primary school teachers receive some sort of training; however, rarely do they get any training on alternative assessment planning and execution. As a result, they lack proper knowledge on the concept of alternative assessments and how to incorporate those in their classrooms. One of the participants from FGD#1, 26.8.2020, mentioned,

"We do not get subject-specific training, and we also do not get any specific training on alternative assessment."

**4.2.7 Lack of resources and school infrastructure:** Teachers do not have enough resources to prepare alternative classroom materials. Although in the textbooks and teachers' guides, it is mentioned that teachers need to take speaking tests, reading tests, however, the primary schools' poor infrastructure does not allow any such test. There is no science lab, computer lab, not even a small library in the schools. One of the participants from FGD #2, 27.8.2020, has mentioned, "in the English textbook, there is an audiobook attached to it for taking listening tests of the students. However, we do not have enough resources for taking listening tests of the students".

**4.2.8 Lack of teachers' motivation and willingness to implement alternative assessments:** Some participants have shared no alternative for summative assessment.

According to them, if the students do not practice written assessments, they usually have bad handwriting. One of the Roze, from FGD #1, 26.8.2020; mentioned,

"our education system is written based, so students will have to write in the upper grade, alternative assessments cannot prepare them for the written assessment."

So, it can be said that teachers also lack knowledge on the concept of alternative assessments, as alternative assessments can also be taken using written aspects, such as students can be engaged in a discussion on a topic in the group. They can write their reflection in written form based on their group learning experience. Some have also mentioned that students' performance cannot be evaluated without written assessment because there is no competition.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Discussion, Conclusion & Recommendation**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In this last chapter, the researcher discussed and gave some concluding remarks on the findings and recommendations of the study conducted on the perceptions of Bangladeshi Government primary school teachers regarding their practices and challenges of using alternative assessment to facilitate students' learning in the classrooms.

#### **5.2 Discussion**

Alternative assessment is an essential component in effective teaching-learning (Rahman, 2018); however, alternative assessment as a tool for learning was limited in this study. The findings from the first research questions showed that most of the participants in the survey mentioned the effectiveness of alternative assessments. It is also found from the interview and FGD data that the participants were aware of the significance of alternative assessments on student learning; however, the data from the lesson plan and students' scripts showed that teachers were prominently using traditional/summative assessments. Similarly, data from a study conducted by Wright (2015) showed that teachers are certain that alternative assessments are crucial in addressing their students' individual needs. However, as alternative assessments take a lot of time to create and grade and require collecting data from students and analyzing those data to support their learning needs, the participants preferred using traditional/summative assessments as they are comparatively easy to create and execute.

Then, it is also found from the study that not all teachers are motivated to implement alternative assessments in the classroom. They do not feel comfortable implementing alternative forms of assessments in their classroom. They possess a fixed mindset, with the concept of summative assessment being the best and easiest one to assess students' learning. These findings are supported by Schoenfeld (1999), as he argued that before evaluating students' knowledge on something, a teacher must understand what it is they are assessing because undeniably, the success of assessment depends on teachers' will, abilities and skills.

In addition, Uiseb (2009) mentioned that the concept of alternative assessment demands the role of a teacher to be the one who supports the learners by engaging in conversation or activities with them to find out their current level of performance on any task. It also requires the teacher to explore the best possible ways to improve students' performance. Consequently, a teacher must have the mindset to learn and re-learn things and must-see assessment as a continuous and interactive process that measures the learner's achievement to support the students' learning based on their needs. A similar result is also found in this study. The teachers mentioned that though they know the significance of using alternative assessments, they rarely can do it as they need to do much other administrative work besides teaching. As a result, they do not get the time to prepare themselves for administering alternative assessments in the classrooms.

In alignment with the findings mentioned above on teachers' mindset and perceptions of alternative assessments, it is found from the study that the teachers rarely get any training to conduct and implement alternative assessments in their classroom. As a result, they lack proper knowledge on the concept of alternative assessments and how to incorporate those in their classrooms. A similar effect is found in the study conducted by Uiseb (2009). He mentioned that, as alternative assessments could be a new way of assessment for many teachers, they need in-serving training to

be familiar with the concept of alternative assessments. However, data from his study showed that the participants mentioned they rarely receive any kind of training for their personal growth. In addition to that, data from the survey conducted by Clark (2011) provided evidence for the need to continue professional development training for the participants, as the participants from the study stated about their need for professional development training to keep them updated on the current trend of alternative assessments to facilitate students' learning.

Furthermore, the concern that teachers lack the necessary skills and competencies to implement alternative assessments in the classroom, the data from the study also showed some challenges that the teachers face while implementing alternative assessments. Among the many challenges that the teachers face, overcrowded classrooms are the major ones. This finding is supported by the study results conducted by Uiseb (2009), where the study participants mentioned similar responses. Besides the classroom size, the duration of the classes is identified as another significant challenge that teachers face while implementing alternative assessments in the classrooms. A study by Wright (2015) also found a similar result that time affected the participants' decisions regarding incorporating and routine use of alternative assessments in their classrooms.

Besides, the participants of this study considered the poor infrastructure of the schools as one of the barriers to implementing alternative assessments in the classrooms. This data is backed up by the findings of a study conducted by Belachew (2017). It was found that besides recommending in-service teachers' training, the researcher recommended improving the infrastructure of the schools so that the teachers can easily do the alternative assessments in the schools.

Moreover, along with the classroom size, class duration, and infrastructure of the schools, the study participants mentioned not getting support from the parents and community while implementing

alternative assessments for promoting students' learning. This result is supported by the study's findings conducted by Ashita (2013), where it was found that the parents and students felt uncomfortable with the concept of alternative assessments as they were not familiar with the idea.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

This study aimed to find out Bangladeshi government primary school teachers' perceptions of the practices and challenges of using alternative assessments in classrooms. To that extent, this study was successful as it generated some findings based on the current rules and challenges of the teachers in implementing alternative assessments in the classroom to facilitate students' learning. The classroom assessment practices that came out of the data from the study are mainly focused on traditional methods of assessing students' learning, mainly summative assessments. The assessment practices emphasize students' results rather than their learning. Moreover, in facilitating students' learning through alternative assessments, the role of the teachers cannot be ignored, as teachers' willingness and skill to implement alternative assessments define the success of the assessments. Thus, the result of the study provides the necessary information to reconsider the importance of teachers' training on alternative assessments to increase their understanding of the concept and significance of alternative assessments.

### **5.4 Recommendation**

Following are some of the recommendations which the study would like to provide. These recommendations emerged as a result of this study, and they have emerged directly from the teachers' responses to the questionnaires.

- The school authorities and governments should consider the importance of the lifelong learning of the teachers; thus, they should be provided with sufficient in-service training

programs for professional development. Also, there should be separate training on subject-based alternative assessment strategies to familiarize teachers with the concepts and implement them in the classrooms.

- After the teachers receive the training, there should be proper monitoring and evaluation of whether they can implement it in their classrooms. Teachers should track their progress on the significance of using alternative assessments for students' learning and submit these records to the proper authority to take further steps based on the findings.
- The challenges teachers mentioned, such as large class size, insufficient class time, and poor infrastructure that create obstacles for them to implement alternative assessments effectively, need to be considered. Government should hire more teachers for the schools so that the class size can be decreased and teachers get enough time to be prepared for implementing alternative assessments in the classrooms.
- Then, the teachers should have the growth mindset of learning and re-learning and always keep the individual student's needs in mind. Therefore, they should design the teaching-learning process that includes the learning needs of all students and assess them using different forms of alternative assessments.
- Finally, there should be a collaboration between the government and teachers so that teachers get proper support from the government in terms of training, monitoring, and other infrastructural issues. Then, collaboration should be between the teachers, students, and parents to understand the significance of using alternative assessments in improving their children's learning and support the teachers accordingly.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Letter of consent

This questionnaire has been developed for the purpose of a research project carried out in the Brac Institute of Educational Development, Brac University, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

The questions here are related to a study titled **“Practices and Challenges of Alternative Assessments at Government Primary Schools in Bangladesh: Teachers’ Perceptions.”**

*Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you will be affected neither socially, financially, legally nor physically. You may withdraw yourself from the study at any point without giving any explanation. The information collected from you will be use anonymously and with full confidentiality.*

### Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Male/Female: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of the School: \_\_\_\_\_

Designation: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Teaching Experience: \_\_\_\_\_ year/s Academic qualification: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade(s) which you are currently teaching: \_\_\_\_\_

Subject(s) which you are teaching: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant’s Electronic\* Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher’s Electronic\* Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 2: Qualitative individual phone interview questionnaire for the head teachers**

1. How do you and other teachers at your school assess learners?
2. How would you define alternative assessments or non-traditional assessments?
3. What types of alternative assessments (non-traditional) is currently incorporated in your school?
4. How effective do you consider alternative assessments as a teaching strategy?
5. How do you use the results of alternative assessment to make useful decisions for your students?
6. How much collaboration with colleagues do your teachers engage in for the implementation of alternative assessment strategies?
7. What support and training are provided in incorporating alternative assessments in your school?
8. What are the challenges teachers face in implementing alternative assessments in the classrooms?
9. Any other comments/thought you would like to share.

### **Appendix 3: FGD Guideline questionnaire for the assistant teachers**

1. How do you assess your students?
2. How often do you assess your learners?
  - i) I always assess students' learning progress in every lesson.
  - ii) I always assess students' learning once a week.
  - iii) I always assess students' learning only once every two weeks.
  - iv) I always assess students' learning once in a month
3. What do you know about alternative assessments?
4. Do you use any kind of alternative assessments in your classroom? What are they?
5. According to you, what are the benefits of using alternative assessments in the primary level classrooms?
6. Do you think that alternative assessments can facilitate students' learning?
7. What are the roles a teacher can have in implementing alternative assessments in the classroom?
8. What are the challenges teachers face in implementing alternative assessments in the classrooms?
9. Do you need any kind of training to understand and implement alternative assessments to promote students' learning in the classroom?

#### **Appendix 4: Lesson plans (as document) analysis rubric**

##### **a) Teaching-learning activities used in the classroom**

- Teacher mentioned learning objectives in the lesson plans.
- Teacher connected the topic according to the learning objectives.
- Teacher had the space to explore prior knowledge of students in the lesson plans.
- Teacher used multiple teaching methods and aids in teaching learning activities.

##### **b) Classroom assessment practices**

- Teacher had the scope for encouraging students to ask questions in the lesson plans.
- Teacher used self-assessment/peer assessment technique to assess students.
- Teacher had the scope in the lesson plans for assessing students through problem solving/investigation work.
- Teacher had the scope in the lesson plans for assessing students orally.
- Teacher had the scope in the lesson plans for assessing students' knowledge through individual work or group work.
- Teacher had the scope in the lesson plans for assessing students' lower order learning (Knowledge, understanding, application).
- Teacher had the scope in the lesson plans for assessing students' higher order learning (Evaluation, analysis, synthesis).

##### **c) Feedback provided by the teachers during classroom assessment**

- Teacher had the scope in the lesson plans for providing feedback during teaching learning activity.
- Teacher had the scope in the lesson plans for providing feedback individually/to whole group.

Appendix 5: Sample lesson plan collected from the assistant teacher

Class: 5	Subject	Learning outcomes
5.220	English unit-3 lessons (1-2) Saikats family (F, G)	<p><u>Listening:</u></p> <p>1.4.1: recognize and use intonation patterns for yes/NO and wh questions.</p> <p><u>Speaking:</u></p> <p>1.1.1: Say words, phrases and sentences with proper sounds and stress.</p> <p>3.1.1: ask and answer wh questions.</p> <p><u>Reading:</u></p> <p>1.6.1: recognize and read statements, commands, greetings, questions and answers.</p> <p>5.1.4: read silently with understanding personal letters and other texts materials.</p>

2020/11/2 12:26



Appendix 6: Sample Student's script

