

The Perspective of Government Primary School Teachers on Alternative Assessment Practices: Challenges and Prospects in Bangladesh

By

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the requirements for the degree of

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing 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.

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Ethics Statement

Ethical concerns related to confidentiality, consent, and participant comfort were addressed in the study. Participants received assurance that their personal information will be kept confidential and would not be disclosed. This assurance is upheld by the fact that no traceable participant information has been shared publicly. A formal consent procedure was employed to collect participant consent. Each participant received a comprehensive consent letter explaining the purpose and significance of the study. Participants were given sufficient time to review the information, ask questions and sign the letter indicating their informed consent. Participants were free to skip sensitive questions to ensure their comfort, and the questions were rearranged as needed. To preserve accuracy and prevent bias, all the data were accurately transcribed after being recorded. Before conducting the study, ethical approval was obtained from Brac University.

Abstract

Assessments are vital for determining the students learning outcomes and the most effective techniques of instruction. The existing assessment system in primary education of Bangladesh is largely summative in nature. Traditional evaluation system falls short in supporting students' holistic development. Adaption of alternative assessment tools could be a possible solution to this issue. As teachers are directly responsible for implementing these strategies, their perception is crucial for successful implementation.

This study explored the perception of government primary school teachers, potential challenges, and prospects. It was conducted in two government primary schools of Chandgaon Education Thana, Chattogram. The research approach was qualitative and in total 12 participants participated in this study. Data were collected through phone interviews and focused group discussions. To analyze the data thematic analysis was employed. The findings revealed that although the teachers are aware of the significance of alternative assessments, they face several barriers including teacher shortage, high teacher-student ratios, lack of training, and limited resources etc. This study recommends, fostering continuous professional development of the teachers, effective monitoring, and allocating the required resources for successful implementation of alternative assessments.

Key Words: Alternative assessment; primary schools; teachers' perception; challenges; prospects

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents for their unconditional love, continuous support, and encouragement.

Acknowledgement

I am immensely grateful to my supervisor, Nazmin Sultana, whose unwavering guidance and encouragement made it possible to complete this journey.

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List of Acronyms

ATEO	Assistant Thana Education Officer
URC	Upazilla Resource Centre
GPS	Government Primary School
HT	Head Teacher
FGD	Focused Group Discussion
NCTB	National Curriculum and Textbook Board
PTI	Primary Teachers Training Institute

Disclaimer

This study was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021, as partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Education in Educational Leadership & School Improvement. The thesis could not be completed and published earlier, due to some unavoidable circumstances. Please note that, since the study's completion, curriculum, perceptions, and practices in the field may have evolved over time.

Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

The primary education system in Bangladesh plays a critical role in determining the nation's future. For a large proportion of the population, government primary schools are essential to provide education; hence, it is crucial to ensure the quality of education. Evaluating student learning and the direction of instruction techniques largely depend on assessment practices. Alternative assessment practices are being explored as the traditional assessment methods often fall short to adequately capture the range of skills and abilities of the students.

Alternative assessments are an alternative to standardized tests and examinations, which allows getting a true evaluation of what students have learned in terms of the application of their acquired knowledge (Paulina, 2018). These types of assessments are intended to challenge a student's thinking pattern and how they approach a problem, thus helping them learn and use their knowledge better. That is why alternative assessments play a significant role in the development and future of education, and it is encouraging educators and researchers to come up with different forms of assessments (Frank, 2014) to better teach our future generation. Over the past decades, alternative assessments have received much more attention and show promise of a better education system due to their usefulness as a vital instrument for change in educational institutions around the world. However, these new tools and methods are fairly new and lack the long-term research to identify long-term effects, if any, for educators and students. We need to address and plan for these concerns while trying to implement these new alternative assessment tools in rural primary

school classrooms of Bangladesh, We cannot assume that the native educators will immediately understand and accept these new approaches to assessment, including the change in the education system and curriculum. We need concrete development and implementation strategies to better train the teachers and help them to reshape their perspective and relieve them of any concerns (UNICEF, 2020). This study will prompt us to understand the perspective of these teachers/educators and come up with suggestions that will help to develop better strategies collaboratively. Consequently, we can have a better understanding of the probable implementation process, the barriers, and other prospects.

1.2 Research Topic

The topic of this study is “Alternative assessment practices in Primary Schools of Bangladesh.”

Research Title

The perspective of government primary school teachers on alternative assessment practices: challenges and prospects in Bangladesh.

In addition to helping teachers evaluate how well they are teaching, student assessment helps them come up with the best teaching strategies for the classroom. Brookfield asserts that a teacher who engages in critical reflection is in a far better position to explain their practice’s reasoning to the students, colleagues, and even themselves (Brookfield, 1995). Assessment holds such a high value in their pedagogical design that their approach “encourages teachers and curriculum planners to first ‘think like an assessor’ before designing specific units and lessons and thus to consider upfront how they will determine if the students have attained the desired understanding” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Despite having the potential benefit in promoting deeper learning, fostering student engagement, and accommodating a range of learning needs, a number of barriers prevent teachers from the adaption and utilization of alternative assessments. A significant obstacle is the widespread use of traditional summative assessment, such as exams and standardized tests, which place more emphasis on rote learning and memorization than on critical-thinking and problem-solving abilities. According to Mukut (2012), “In many situations, notably in Bangladesh, the way traditional assessment (paper-and-pencil-test) is used to evaluate students is not appropriate. The situation in primary education is considerably poorer.”

The prevalence of summative assessments not only restricts the range of possible student evaluations but also upholds a narrow pedagogical approach that is unable to fully evaluate the holistic growth of the children. These written tests or summative assessment basically examines the writing skill, leading to rote learning, even if the development of all language abilities is vital for the early learners to attain the intended learning outcome. The assessment system of Bangladesh as a whole does not test the other language abilities of speaking, listening, or reading. The fact that summative or written-based assessments can be developed in a relatively short amount of time and effort and easy administration are prominent among several benefits (Mukut, 2012).

Enhancing the teaching-learning process and collecting data on a regular basis are necessary for formative or alternative assessments. When students are in charge of their own learning, it encourages higher-order creative and critical thinking abilities in them (Yang, 2007). The effective use of alternative assessment in the classroom will depend on how well teachers comprehend them.

Therefore, it is crucial to understand the teachers' perspective on alternative assessment, as well as the difficulties they encounter when practicing them in the classroom.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the existing practices regarding the alternative assessment tools in the government primary schools?
2. What are the challenges the teachers might face in terms of using alternative tools?
3. How can the different alternative assessment tools be adapted in government primary schools in Bangladesh?

1.5 Purpose of the Study

The government of Bangladesh has taken many initiatives to strengthen the primary education system. However, in terms of assessments, the age-old traditional assessment and summative assessment tools are still frequently used and promote rote learning (Amin, 2012). The COVID-19 pandemic has already disrupted regular academic activities. Governments across the globe have been confronted to rethink access to academic education and ensure quality academic activities since health and safety are now top priorities. The new reality now requires alternative approaches to address the crisis (Eusuf, & Islam, 2020). The study aims to understand government primary school teachers' perspectives on using alternative assessment tools, as they will be the ones to execute any educational interventions. Correspondingly, to find out how to implement any interventions, the challenges need to be identified first. This study will investigate the challenges

that the teachers might have had before the pandemic started and the challenges that may occur after the pandemic with the added conditions of maintaining social distance and hygiene protocols.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Due to the pandemic, the schools had been shut down for a very long time. To cope up with the new normal, classroom teaching shifted from in-person interaction to online platforms and then again to the usual forms. However, during the closure, assessments were on pause as traditional assessments cannot be taken under such circumstances in the case of government primary schools. Alternative ways of assessments need to be identified that could be implemented during emergencies and even in normal situations to help promote holistic learning of the students. Before finding appropriate alternative assessment tools, this research will provide an understanding of the perspectives of the teachers who will be implementing these tools in the context of the government primary schools. This study will also significantly identify the barriers like the number of students, availability of resources, etc. Therefore, the results might help the policymakers who can incorporate a plan to address those challenges. Additionally, this study will assist in integrating the feedback obtained from the participants into the monitoring and training procedures. Most significantly, it will help higher authorities to understand their roles and responsibilities in supporting the teachers to implement alternative assessment methods.

1.7 Summary

This chapter emphasizes the critical role of primary education in Bangladesh, particularly in government schools, and the need for quality assessment practices. Alternative assessments that promote critical thinking and deeper learning are being explored since traditional methods fall short in evaluating students' broader skills. However, there are challenges in putting these methods in practice, particularly the widespread use of summative assessments and a lack of familiarity.

Understanding government primary schools teachers' perspectives on alternative assessment methods, identifying challenges, and exploring adaption strategies are the main goals of this study. The main obstacles include the emphasis on memorization in traditional assessments, resource constraints, and the necessity of teacher training. The study aims to investigate how alternative assessment tools could possibly be better in evaluating students' holistic development.

Through the identification of practical strategies for incorporating alternative assessments, this study aims to support the initiatives to improve primary education. This involves addressing challenges, ensuring preparedness of the educators, and involving policymakers in developing supportive frameworks. It intends to support educators and other stake holders to enhance the teaching-learning process and promote a more holistic and equitable education system.

Chapter 2

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

A significant amount of literature from a range of sources, including books, peer-reviewed articles, newspaper articles, and relevant websites, has been reviewed and explored in order to obtain adequate understanding on the research topic. The information gathered during the literature review are organized under the themes- assessment, alternative assessment, significance and disadvantages of using alternative assessment tools, teachers' perception, challenges in practicing alternative assessment, assessment in primary education of Bangladesh, prospects of alternative assessment tools in emergencies.

2.1 Assessment

The significance of assessment lies in its' ability to monitor students' learning process and offer feedback during the learning process. It also outlines how students use their time, what they consider important, and how they view themselves as learners. The fact that assessment gives students feedback makes it crucial as well. The teachers' response to students' work is feedback (Spanella, 2008). According to McAlpine (2002), the purpose of assessment in education is to give teachers and students "communication and feedback" so they may both understand "where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go, and how best to get there" (ARG, 2002).

Assessment helps improve the quality of education. According to Taras (2010), it can improve students' lifelong learning abilities, making it one of the useful approaches for enhancing the quality of education. Additionally, assessment provides teachers with support by gathering data on student progress, program goals, and how the instruction and lesson delivery strategies are

assisting students in achieving the necessary competency and desired mastery (Belk & Calais, 1998).

2.2 Alternative Assessment

Alternative assessment, referred to as classroom-based, qualitative, informal, or performance assessment, is a way to gauge student learning other than formal testing. It is based on a constructivist view of learning and projected on the view teaching process equals the learning outcome (Hoffman, Assaf, & Paris, 2001).

According to the theoretical framework, using alternative assessment requires considering learners as constructors of knowledge, developing authentic materials and activities, engaging dynamic, constant evaluation of the tools, and empowering students. Instead of testing students' knowledge, alternative assessment aims to establish learning techniques that they will utilize outside the classroom through a continuous process with consistent support (Kelvin, 2012).

If these ideas are put into practice, individual qualities of creativity, selection, vision, self-discipline, empathy, belief, and spontaneity can be promoted in the students of the primary education sector.

According to Knight and Mantz (2003), some of the alternative assessment techniques are as follows (as cited in Nasri et al., 2010):

Presentation: Students are encouraged to enhance their oral communication skills through this activity. They can be genuine and also encourage peer evaluation, which provides teachers with more information to use in their grading.

Fieldwork/lab work: When conducting fieldwork or lab work, teachers should choose to sample in order to prevent an excessive amount of data that needs to be reviewed.

Posters: A useful tool for observing how well students comprehend complicated content and relationships of components. Group work is ideal for this assignment because students can learn from each other's posters.

Role-play: In role-playing exercises, students assume the roles of particular characters in for specific scenarios. This assignment could serve as a useful tool for determining how well students comprehend various perspectives.

Projects: Tasks that are both authentic and challenging. To do the activity, students might need to apply a variety of concepts and abilities.

Portfolio: Provide students the freedom to validate their own claims to achievement by utilizing the best available evidence, in their opinion.

Article review: This kind of work promotes analytical, critical, and evaluative thinking.

Concept maps: Students use concept maps to highlight the key ideas in a system, argument, point of view, assertion or notion. Subsequently, they will arrange similar points in a manner that illustrates their connection. This method effectively illustrates how students grasp conceptual relationships.

2.3 Significance and disadvantages of using alternative assessment tools

Alternative assessments provide a means of assessing valued skills that cannot be directly assessed with traditional tests. They provide a more realistic setting for student performance than traditional tests and focus on student performance and the quality of work performed by students as well. Established learning outcomes can easily be aligned with alternative assessments (BYU). According to Blondin and Giot (2011), the alternative assessment seeks to capture the real-world experience of students in obtaining the desired competencies as outlined in the curriculum. As a

result, as a result, alternative assessment is essential for lowering student failure rates since it gives teachers valuable insight into the learning progression of the students.

Alternative assessments give students the opportunity to demonstrate their learning in a constructive way as it requires them to think, analyze, innovate, and apply. It enables educators to collect real-time information that can help to improve the teaching method. In addition, it is much easier to grade students while being transparent and fair (Frank, 2014). Moreover, alternative assessments enable students to better understand their own learning progress and adjust their learning goals accordingly (Blondin & Giot, 2011). Students taking ownership of their learning and developing greater responsibility is one of the key components of alternative assessment (Clarke, 2012).

According to Brown (2004), since every student has the capacity to learn, assessments should take consideration of their individual learning style and level of competence. When creating assessments, teachers should use their creativity and tailor them to the academic needs of each student they teach.

Students benefit from ongoing assessment rather than summative or end-stage assessment because it clarifies expectations for them before they begin work and provides feedback at different points during the learning process (Butler, 1997). The teachers' role in alternative assessment shifts; instead of serving as a knowledge repository, they now assist students in learning (Butler, 1997). Alternative assessment helps teachers to understand how students are thinking, develop the capacity to non-threatening questions that prompt clarifications and expose misconceptions, enhance learning skills by being non-judgmental and demonstrating respect for their students, promote respect for diversity, and raise questions that inspire students to construct and

communicate their own understandings and reinforces the decision to break the idea of “teaching as telling” (Stenmark, 1991).

Moreover, alternative assessment has the potential to encourage empathy, vision, trust, and spontaneity in students as well as to turn around their passivity and replace it with initiative, self-discipline, and choice. “The lack of tools that can demonstrate students’ real improvement and their strong strides, and the dissatisfaction of implementers about prevalent assessment tests” led to the development of alternative assessment (Balliro, 1993).

Alternative assessment can also have adverse effects on students and can affect their self-esteem if not implemented correctly (Frank, 2014). The major disadvantage of this process is that it can be costly in terms of time, effort, equipment, materials, facilities, or funds, and the rating process is sometimes more subjective than traditional examinations (BYU). Some of the other disadvantages of using alternative assessment tools are as follows:

- Performance assessment suggests that occasionally 8 to 16 trials of student performance may be required in order to obtain a reliable conclusion (Alaska Education, 1996).
- Teachers may encounter difficulties in obtaining comparative data (Alaska education, 1996)
- Since alternative assessment offers students flexibility and choice and can be implemented across a heterogeneous device, it is easy for irrelevant variables to be used when evaluating their performance (Maclellan, 2004)
- It can be challenging to guarantee that the assessment task elicits the skills necessary for the performance in the relevant domain in order to validate the task (Alaska Education, 1996)

- Alternative assessments are construct-driven, where knowledge and abilities to be tested determine the selection of the task and scoring processes. When one interpretation of a performance assessment is accepted rather than another, there is a significant possibility of confusion (Maclellan, 2004).

2.4 Teachers' perception

In the past, the main goals of assessment were certification and accountability; however, these days, a much wider range of objectives are now addressed. The difference between assessment of learning and assessment for learning (Dysthe, 2004). Dysthe (2004) further states that learning cultures are progressively changing as a result of shifting perspectives on teaching and learning as well as increased societal demand for students' skills and knowledge. It is necessary to adapt assessment procedures to new or emerging learning cultures.

The traditional method of assessment, which emphasizes students' knowledge, is not very effective for several reasons. In contrast, alternative assessment uses direct and comprehensive assessments of students' knowledge to focus on students' learning techniques, problem-solving abilities, and task completion. In addition, alternative assessment methods highlight students' strengths and abilities rather than focusing on their flaws and ignorance by employing tasks that uncover, "what students are able to do with the knowledge and skills obtained through learning" (Oliver, 2015).

It is vital to gather and examine data regarding teachers' perceptions of alternative assessment prior to introducing the new method in the education system, since it is the teachers' responsibility to execute it in the classroom (Dowrich, 2008). In addition, according to Dowrich (2008), the adoption of alternative assessment by teachers and their positive perspective towards it will provide support for the assessment process and ensure its success in practice.

According to survey data from a study by Wikström (2007), teachers are aware of the value of alternative assessment as a crucial step in the teaching and learning process. They also mentioned that by connecting the lessons with real-world experiences, alternative assessment fosters students' critical thinking abilities. Teachers in that study have observed that alternative assessment allows students to participate actively and receive feedback while interacting with others from a variety of backgrounds and working cooperatively with their peers. It enables teachers to utilize a range of assignment formats to promote authentic learning. Thus, "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" (Wikström, 2007, p. 42).

Nevertheless, some studies also reveal a rather unfavorable perspective regarding the importance of alternative assessments; as noted by Metin (2011), most teachers did not agree with this trend, finding it difficult to incorporate alternative assessment into their lesson plans without the necessary training. The very nature of alternative assessment places heavy expectations on teachers' roles (Metin, 2011, p. 275). Alternative assessment is perceived to entail entirely new methods that have not been explored and are not backed by research. Furthermore, there are no strict methods for developing, implementing, or making decisions regarding tests (Brown et al., 1998, as cited in Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2018, p. 1).

2.5 Challenges or barriers in practicing alternative assessments

A study conducted by Nuttall and McLean's (1992) account of British teachers' reaction to the 1991 national trials of elementary school performance assessments stated some challenges that were found in the country. Some probable barriers to alternative assessment practices according to the study are mentioned below:

Emphasis on learning activities rather than outcomes: The most significant barrier to developing and implementing alternative assessments is probably the persistent tendency of teachers to focus on classroom activities rather than student outcomes. The study shows that the teachers were able to brainstorm their general goals for students, but they were unwilling to articulate specific student outcomes to be measured. Even for this innovative school, the faculty found it easier and more comfortable to focus on learning activities rather than learning outcomes.

The study also displays that the teachers who used portfolios exhibited much the same inclination, focusing on what interesting activities might be documented in the portfolios rather than what goals would be achieved as a result of these instructional activities.

Difficulties specifying criteria for judging student work: The nature of performance assessment requires that teachers articulate the criteria by which student work will be judged, but many teachers in the study were not comfortable with judging in a rigorous manner or with being held accountable for those judgments.

Assessment anxiety: 'Assessment anxiety' is another basic barrier in the development and implementation of alternative assessments and one closely related to difficulties in articulating outcomes and criteria. Assessment implies judging and being judged, the consequences of which are intimidating for both teachers and students, so many teachers seek to avoid it.

Lack of time: According to the study, very few teachers or administrators themselves articulated the three barriers discussed above: reluctance to focus on outcomes, difficulties specifying criteria, and assessment anxiety. These were barriers that were observed. However, there was strong consensus across the teachers in all the sites we studied that lack of time.

Need for training and ongoing support: The need for training is another barrier that is closely tied to time. Teachers and administrators in this study agreed that training in new approaches to assessment is very important and that they wanted more than was readily available to them. However, sufficient information, practice, models, feedback, and encouragement were actually needed to help teachers hold the notion of some new assessments, such as portfolios, and attempt to use them in their classes.

Reluctance to change: This human characteristic was mentioned by several of the participants in this study as a significant barrier to implementing new assessments. One administrator mentioned that too much pressure from administrators might kill teachers' interest in alternative assessments. On the other hand, several teachers mentioned that their administrators had not bought into the new assessments yet, and implied that they were not about to invest themselves in it too deeply as long as they lacked administrative support.

Lack of a long-range implementation plan: A knowledgeable administrator in the study pointed out the desirability of having a long-range development and implementation plan but said that few districts developed such plans due to a variety of factors, such as not knowing how big an assessment reform project would become, dealing with competing urgent problems that absorb time for planning ahead, and lack of readily available implementation models for alternative assessments.

During a transition from the familiar to new ways of assessing and teaching students, educators normally need to assess the change for its genuine possibilities and possible consequences for their own self-interest, confront the loss of the familiar and embrace the new, unlearn old beliefs and behaviors and learn new ones, move from anxiousness and uncertainty to stabilization and

coherence (Fullan & Miles, 1992). A plan for dealing with this very long process, coupled with support throughout, is critical to successful reform.

2.6 Assessment in primary education of Bangladesh

When it comes to Bangladesh's assessment system, evaluation of learning is typically conducted through summative or traditional assessment, where the focus is more on the assessment than the learning of the students. The topics or lessons that could be crucial for the examinations are given additional attention by both teachers and students. Eventually, this approach leads to the tendency of rote learning and suppresses the importance of acquiring all the language skills for the early learners at the primary level- that is, listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Mukut, 2012).

The NCTB mandates that, at the primary level, students complete 50 terminal competencies (TC) after completing their five years of education. These competencies are divided into grade and subject-specific learning outcomes in various textbooks (Islam, 2019). However, it is unlikely that the current "paper and pencil"-based summative/terminal examinations at each grade level and the 'Shomaponi' (commonly known as PSC) examinations will evaluate these terminal competencies and learning outcomes. Instead, students will be required to respond to a few memory-based informative questions on assessment papers (Mukut, 2012).

Moreover, according to Islam (2019), when learning, human beings employ multiple intelligences. As a result, we must assign an assessment paper that takes into account all of the intelligence in order to evaluate a student's performance. As a result, we must create an appropriate and alternative assessment system at the primary level that can take all the terminal competencies and language skills into account (Mukut, 2012). Islam (2019) stated that it is important to place more emphasis on formative and alternative assessments, as well as using assessment as a tool for

learning. Additionally, we should also change the way we currently teach and learn to create a classroom environment that supports students' individual learning styles and allows the exploration of multiple intelligences (Islam, 2019).

2.7 Prospect of alternative assessment tools in emergencies

Global education systems were shocked by the COVID-19 pandemic, which had an impact on students' learning environments, interactions with classmates and teachers, and monitoring and support systems (Luna-Bazaldua, Liberman, & Levin, 2021). Eusuf and Islam (2020) discussed in their article that, as countries all over the world had to shut down schools since March 2020 due to the Covid-19 outbreak, most of them had to adopt new protocols for distance learning. Likewise, new protocols for assessments had to be adopted to assess the students and the new distance learning method. Many countries with already existing technology and resources had shifted to online or computer-based tests. Nonetheless, countries with limited resources struggled to move to online assessments for equity considerations. After schools reopen, in the new normal situation, schools should be encouraged to adapt low-stake alternative or formative assessment tools to evaluate students. Furthermore, assessing students is important to collect data on the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process and the progress of the students. Instead of taking high-stake summative assessments, the government can support districts with necessary resources so that they can review the traditional assessments and create contextualized assessment tools. As we had to move to distance learning, we needed to look for ways to assess students using this modality. According to Jones (2002), the assessment techniques to be used depend majorly on the availability and accessibility of resources to the educators.

2.8 Conceptual framework

In line with Bangladesh's competency-based curriculum, the conceptual framework highlights the importance of alternative assessment practices in promoting holistic learning. In addition to meeting a range of learning goals, these methods seek to improve critical thinking, creativity, and student involvement by implementing instruments like portfolios, project-based exams, and peer evaluations. These techniques may reduce the stress that comes with traditional examinations and improve primary school retention rates (Black & William, 1998; Brown, 2004).

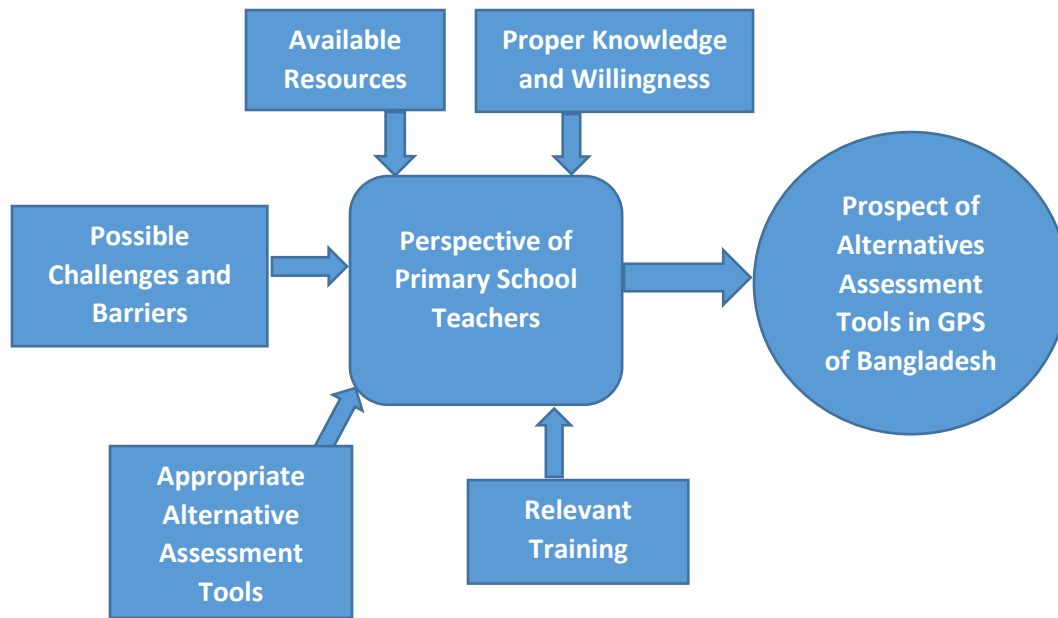


Figure1: Conceptual Framework

When it comes to the use of alternative assessments, the perspectives of teachers are vital. To ensure successful implementation, their expertise, openness to adapting new approaches, and availability of resources are crucial. Progress can be hindered by obstacles like limited awareness, resistance to change, time limits, and institutional challenges like the emphasis on high-stakes testing. Proper training programs and opportunities for collaborative learning may provide teachers the abilities

and self-assurance they need to successfully incorporate these techniques into their teaching (Pellegrino, Chudowsky & Glaser, 2001). In order to empower educators and to guarantee the long-term viability of these innovative approaches, systematic policy support and professional development programs are essential.

2.9 Summary

In order to provide a thorough understanding of alternative assessment, the literature review explored a variety of sources and organized the findings into major themes. Monitoring learning, providing feedback, and enhancing the quality of education through communication and student progress are all attainable by assessment. Based on constructive learning theory, alternative assessment emphasizes performance-based, classroom based evaluation techniques such as portfolios, role-play, and concept maps. Through dynamic, tailored approaches, these tools enable teachers to assess students' progress while fostering creativity, critical thinking and active learning. They also assist students in applying knowledge in real-world scenarios.

Significant benefits of alternative assessments include encouraging students to take ownership of their own learning, facilitating critical thinking, and matching academic knowledge with practical abilities. However, they also come with drawbacks, such as requirement for teacher training, time and resource demand, and subjectivity in grading. When implementing these strategies into practice, teachers' perceptions and readiness are vital because successful implementation is directly impacted by their positive outlook and adaptability. Nonetheless, obstacles still remains in the form of institutional support, resistance to change, and an emphasis on traditional testing.

In Bangladesh, where there is heavy reliance on traditional tests, integrating alternative assessments has become increasingly relevant. Alternative approaches have demonstrated flexibility in times of crisis, like the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the necessity of creative and adaptable strategies to guarantee continuity and equity in education.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The methodology employed in this study presents a framework for exploring the perspective of government primary school teachers on alternative assessment practices in Bangladesh. Employing a qualitative approach and adhering to ethical standards, the research aims to generate valuable insight and contribute to the understanding of assessment practices in the primary education system.

3.1 Research Approach

This research has been conducted through a qualitative approach. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), the objective of qualitative research is multimethod, with an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. They further elaborated that qualitative researchers investigate phenomena in their natural environments with the goal of interpreting or making sense of events based on the meanings that individuals assigned to them. In addition, knowledge produced by qualitative technique is highly descriptive and exploratory (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). As the research aimed to explore and understand the participants' perceptions, challenges, and opportunities of alternative assessment in government primary schools of Bangladesh, the qualitative approach was taken to be most appropriate.

3.2 Research Site

The study was conducted in two government primary schools of Chandgaon Education Thana, Chattogram, Bangladesh. Also, both of the schools were located in the same community. The major reasons behind the selection of the site were accessibility and relevance. It was a purposeful

sampling considering the chance to have better understanding. These schools were located in a semi-urban area, and the socio-economic background of the students is similar, as they are from lower to lower-middle-income families. Thus, the research site will help the study to identify the context of the major portion of the population in Bangladesh.

3.3 Research Participants

Participants were selected based on their willingness to participate and their relevance to the study. 10 government primary school teachers and two head teachers from two government primary schools were chosen for the study, in total 12 participants. Two participants were selected for the in-depth interviews, who were the head teachers of the two schools. The criteria for selecting participants for the in-depth interviews were mainly completion of all major training programs, including PTI, teaching and learning methods, subject-based trainings, etc. Ten assistant teachers from the two schools were selected for the 2 FGDs. The participants were chosen based on the fact that they have 5 plus years of teaching experience. Also, an approximately equal number of male and female teachers were chosen for the study. The inclusion of teachers with a range of experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives were ensured by the selection criteria, which improved the data's representativeness and richness.

3.4 Sampling Procedure

Participants for the study were selected through purposive or purposeful sampling. Purposive sampling involves locating and selecting participants for a given study who are particularly aware and experienced on the topic (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). According to Kelly (2010), “to select respondents that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information” is the purpose

of purposeful sampling. Thus, participants were chosen with experience in teaching and assessing students.

In addition, Patton (2002) states:

In qualitative research, purposive sampling is a commonly employed strategy that facilitates the identification and selection of information-rich cases, hence optimizing the utilization of limited resources. There were no biases for the participant selection, and consent was taken before proceeding with the study.

(p. 275)

3.5 Data Collection Methods

The research questions demand in-depth information collection. Therefore, interviews with an open-ended set of questions with the two most experienced participants, the HTs of the two schools, were conducted. 2 focused group discussions with the assistant teachers were conducted through semi-structured group interview questions. The selection of in-depth interviews was based on the rationale that interviews facilitate the expression of participants' perspectives on the matter and the narrative approach's use of their experience (Creswell, 2002). Nevertheless, because FGDs are group processes, it is possible to explore a greater range of perceptions in a single elicitation as additional data is obtained when participants build on each other's comments (Barbour et al., 2017). Therefore, focused group discussion was selected to utilize the available time and resources efficiently (Nyumba et al., 2018).

Research Tool: An open-ended set of questions for the one-to-one interviews and semi-structured group interview questions were formulated for the FGD guideline. According to Glaser and Strauss

(1967), the semi-structured data collection method is comparatively flexible and can also direct the researcher's exploration with some specific questions.

The research tools were developed based on the following themes:

1. Practices of assessment and alternative assessment tools in the primary education sector of Bangladesh.
2. Benefits and disadvantages of using alternative assessment tools.
3. Challenges or barriers in practicing alternative assessments in the context of Bangladesh.
4. Prospects of alternative assessment tools in government primary schools of Bangladesh.

Data Collection Process: The outbreak of COVID-19 and lockdown did not allow face-to-face data collection. The interviews and FGDs were conducted through phone conversations and Zoom meetings. Every interview call and focused group discussion had a time slot, which was decided upon in advance after discussing with the participants. An emergency, network issues, or call drop had all been factored in the schedule planning.

The head teachers of the schools were reached out to make a schedule for the interviews and take permission to contact other participants for the focused group discussions. The purpose of the study, probable time duration of the interviews, and confidentiality and anonymity matters were explained to each participant beforehand. The time duration for one-to-one interviews was approximately half an hour. On the other hand, the time duration for FGD's was 2 hours, which included five assistant teachers for each discussion. Prior permission was taken from all the participants to record the calls and meetings.

3.6 Role of the Researcher

My role in this study was as a facilitator, data collector, and observer being the primary person to collect and analyze the data. As a facilitator, I was responsible for establishing rapport and building trust with the participants, which helped to create a safe space for sharing the real scenario. In order to collect data, I had to take interviews and conduct focused group discussions. To ensure the authenticity and reliability of the collected data, careful attention to details, accuracy, and objectivity was required during the process. I have teaching experience of two years in a government primary school in Bangladesh, located in a semi-urban area. It allowed me to have first-hand observation and understanding of the actual scenario of the assessment practice in government primary schools. Naturally, I had some biases based on my experience. As a result, it was a challenge to overcome the established mindset and act as a neutral data collector or researcher. During the study process, I made an effort to overcome those biases and act as an impartial observer. Finally, in my role as an analyst, I employed a suitable analysis procedure to determine the research outcome.

3.7 Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis, an established method in qualitative research. The flexibility of this method and its ability to find, arrange, and analyze themes and patterns in qualitative datasets resulted in its selection (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To make sure that the analysis was in line with the goal of the study, it was organized according to the predetermined themes listed in the research tool section.

The procedure followed a methodical, step-by-step approach. The first step was to verify accuracy and a thorough understanding of the material by transcribing the collected data. Transcription of

data is a step that facilitates familiarization of data, which is a crucial step in thematic analysis that allows researchers to completely immerse themselves in the data (Nowell et al., 2017). Following transcription, the data were inductively coded, with significant segments of text grouped under the appropriate themes. The richness of the data was preserved while complexity was decreased due to this coding process (Clarke & Braun, 2014).

To make sure that the coded data were correctly categorized and consistently aligned with the themes, they were reviewed and refined. Improving the thematic framework's accuracy and reliability was the main purpose of the validation phase (Guest et al., 2012). Finally, in order to derive core insights and draw significant conclusions, the data arranged according to each theme was analyzed. This systematic analysis made sure that the conclusions were supported by the data and relevant to the goal of the research.

3.8 Trustworthiness and Rigor

It is essential to address neutrality, dependability, and credibility in qualitative research in order to ensure trustworthiness and rigor. These standards are crucial for assessing the reliability and efficacy of qualitative data and interpretations. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), rigor involves employing systematic and transparent methodologies, whereas trustworthiness means making sure that results accurately reflect the experiences of participants.

The two main techniques employed to ensure trustworthiness were triangulation and member checking. To validate findings and provide a thorough grasp of the phenomenon, triangulation involved using multiple data sources, methods, and perspectives. Findings and interpretations were

shared with participants as part of the member checking process to confirm accuracy and to make sure it aligns with their experiences.

By reducing researcher bias and upholding impartiality during data collection and analysis, neutrality was attained. Recording the research process meticulously allowed for uniformity and replicability over time, ensuring dependability. Credibility was built by thoroughly analyzing the data using a systematic coding approach and devoting sufficient time. In addition to the data, research questions, and findings being closely connected, the research process was transparent. This methodology guaranteed that results were insightful and trustworthy.

3.9 Ethical Issues and Concerns

Before recording any of the participants' phone interviews or the focused group discussions, consent of the participants was obtained. The participants' confidentiality is preserved rigorously throughout the research project. None of the participants' names were mentioned while quoting. Prior to expressing any view on a topic, preconceived notions about it were maintained, and the study's conclusion was accepted.

3.10 Limitations of the study

Following are the limitations that were encountered while conducting the study.

Communication with the participants: It was not possible to communicate with the participants face-to-face because of the pandemic. It was overwhelming for the participants and me as well to communicate over the phone and online platforms.

Difficulty in data collection: It was not possible to reach a large number of participants due to the pandemic, which in turn reduced the sample size. This limitation created an obstacle to collect the required information in some cases.

Limitation in first-hand observation: As the lockdown situation stretched and school closure had prolonged, it was not possible to observe real classes to practically witness assessments while they were being taken.

Chapter 4

Results

4.1 Introduction

The major purpose of this research was to understand the perspective of government primary school teachers of Bangladesh on using alternative assessment tools and to identify the challenges and resource requirements to implement them in the assessment system. The other purpose was to understand the perspective and readiness of the students regarding alternative ways of assessment.

Teachers' perception of alternative assessment practices may be influenced by a variety of factors, such as their degree of training and familiarity with these techniques, the institutional support and available resources, assessment norms in the society and culture and their individual pedagogical beliefs and preferences.

Overall, the experiences and feedback of the participants added insight to the research questions and by analyzing them valuable information was obtained to answer the research questions. In this chapter, the three research questions are addressed with supporting quotations and feedback from the participants which were collected through semi-structured phone interviews and FDGs.

Practices of assessment and alternative assessment tools in the primary education
Benefits and disadvantages of using alternative assessment tools.
Challenges or barriers in practicing alternative assessments
Prospects of alternative assessment tools

4.2 Existing practices regarding assessment and alternative assessment

In the current assessment system in government primary schools, summative assessments are mostly conducted to assess the students, along with less frequently used formative assessments. The teachers are mostly trained on conducting summative assessments, with less training on formative assessments.

Student participants from the focus group discussion mentioned that they have to sit for 3 terminal exams, including the final examination.

Summative examinations are emphasized more than formative assessments. “Summative assessments are well structured, easy to take and less time-consuming. Formative assessments need more time and effort as it is a continuous process.” (Personal communication: Interview# 1, Date: March 4, 2021)

However, recently the government is planning to introduce alternative assessments in the system. “There will be no summative examinations until grade 3 and other ways of assessments will be added in the system.” (Personal communication: Interview #2, Date: March 7, 2021)

During the FGDs, after introducing the participants with the alternative assessment tools, the participants showed positive response in terms of implementing these techniques to assess GPS students. Through these discussions, the participants suggested some alternative assessment tools that can be practiced in government primary schools in Bangladesh.

Most of the participants suggested that it would be better to use tools that do not require participants to work on them at home. They suggested taking presentations, group projects, observation, in-class peer assessment, etc. would be appropriate in the context of government primary school. One of the students from focused group discussions mentioned that “There might

be chances of misconduct like taking help from others, copying, or not being honest if we are asked to take the assessment at home or prepare something.” (Focus group notes #2, Date: March 20, 2021)

The alternative assessment tools that the participants suggested would be appropriate are presented below.

Presentations and Oral test: Teacher participants mentioned that they are taking oral tests in their classrooms. This way they can assess student’s language proficiency, and their progress after each lesson. At the same time, active participation of the students can be ensured.

In the discussion, it was suggested that the oral tests can be taken to the next level as presentations. For example, students will be given topics on which they will need to talk for 5 minutes. They can also be allowed to use props or draw on the boards to present their topic in front of the class.

Group projects: Some participants mentioned that alternative assessments like group projects, science fairs are crucial. They added that since these kinds of projects encourage students to participate, that may not immediately be evident to them as a task. As a result, learning occurs naturally.

From the discussion, it appeared that all the participants are against rote memorization. One of the teachers shared, “When students memorize something without practical knowledge or fully absorbing it, it does not last long. Eventually, they forget what they have learned.” (Focus group notes #1, Date: March 10, 2021)

Project-based assessments require students to participate in lengthy, inquiry-based projects, which call for them to apply their knowledge and abilities to activities or issues that arise in the real

world. Participants agreed to the point that project-based assessments provide students with the chance to showcase their critical thinking, peer collaboration, and effective communication skills.

Classroom Observation: It has been mentioned by the participants that they view classroom observation as an alternative method of assessment. One of the participants mentioned that he observes his class to assess the involvement of the students in a particular task during peer or group work. Simultaneously, participants mentioned they can employ the result of observations to determine a score that will be retained by the teachers for the exam papers as an implementation of alternative assessment techniques.

Group Work: Group work is also mentioned by the participants as an alternative method of assessment, which some of them are already practicing in their classrooms. They claimed that in order to support one another's learning, teachers frequently form mixed groups in the classroom from lower, intermediate, and high competency students.

Learning occurs when students engage with others rather than alone. Students can pick up knowledge from their fellow students and gain from the group's experiences, expertise, and skills when working in groups. One of the participants mentioned, "Group work help the students connect, as well as develop their teamwork ability." (Focus group notes #2, Date: March 20, 2021)

Role-playing: As mentioned by the participants, they use role-playing as a mode of learning in their classrooms, mostly during language lessons. One of the participants from the FGDs mentioned, "Students seem more engaged and participate actively whenever I call for a role-play in my classroom." (Focus group notes #1, Date: March 10, 2021)

In government primary schools in Bangladesh, role playing can be a very effective tool of alternative assessment. Subjects like language, social studies, science, and even mathematics can

incorporate role-playing to assess students. It will allow teachers to evaluate students' comprehension, application, and communication abilities across a range of subject areas, as agreed by the teacher participants.

Self-assessment and Peer-assessment: Some of the participants mentioned that they sometimes instruct their students to check their own classwork copies and sometimes their peers' copies to encourage self-evaluation and taking ownership of their learning. One of the participants stated that "Students feel very interested while they are asked to check their own copies or one another's copies during class. It ensures engagement and also saves time in a large classroom size." (Focus group notes #2, Date: March 20, 2021)

Self-assessment and peer assessment can provide students with more control over their learning and have insightful information about their own progress. Further agreement came from the participants that students can develop metacognitive skills, reflective practices, and a clearer grasp on their strengths and areas of growth by participating in self and peer assessment activities.

4.3 Challenges in terms of using alternative assessment

Despite the fact that there is an emerging recognition of the importance of alternative assessment techniques, teachers' opinions on the current practices differ. While some teachers support alternative assessment techniques as useful instruments for encouraging deeper learning and evaluating the range of students' needs and abilities, others have concerns or difficulties in putting these techniques into practice. Through the discussions with the teachers, several challenges were derived. They are as follows:

Teacher-student ratio: The first challenge to implement alternative assessments will be the teacher-student ratio. There are teacher shortage and very large classroom sizes in most of GPSs. All the participants mentioned that in government primary schools, the teacher-student ratio is high. They added that it is already very challenging for them to conduct regular classes and formative assessments; adapting alternative assessments will take more time if teacher availability and the problem of high teacher-student ratio is not resolved.

The participants suggested that the teacher-student ratio needs to be reduced. 3 of the participants mentioned that a 1:40 teacher-student ratio would be appropriate while conducting alternative assessments. One of the participants added, “This ratio would be suitable for regular lessons and class activities as well.” (Personal communication: Interview #1, Date: March 4, 2021)

In reality, for the majority of the GPSs of Bangladesh, the teacher-student ratio is 1:70, and it can go up to 1:90 or more. Therefore, the teachers are bound to evaluate students based on their outcomes from summative assessments, as they are unable to test students using alternative methods and keep records.

On the other hand, it becomes difficult for the students to participate in the class activities, and teachers also face difficulties in ensuring 100% student engagement. Eventually, due to lack of attention, the students might feel demotivated.

Duration of the class: The short duration of the periods can be another challenge to practicing alternative assessment techniques, as mentioned by 90% of the participants from the interviews and focused group discussions. Alternative assessments can be time-consuming as they require the teachers to frequently monitor the students, tracking their progress and keeping records. The class

duration being 45 minutes makes it almost impossible for the teachers, especially in large classrooms.

Limited resources and poor school infrastructure: Significant obstacles stand in the way of successful adaptation of alternative assessments in government primary schools due to resource constraints. Access to technology, materials, and other resources that are not usually available in resource-constrained environments might be required by alternative assessment methods. For instance, access to multimedia resources, lab equipment, or art supplies might be required for performance or project-based assessments. Although some of the GPSs have multimedia projectors available, they lack other equipment and supplies. As mentioned by a participant, “Most government primary schools have very limited resources, and most of the students are from an underprivileged background. They might not be able to bear the expenses.” (Personal communication: Interview #2, Date: March 7, 2021)

All the participants suggested that the available resources would not be sufficient to implement alternative assessments effectively. There will be a need for extra materials and funding. Therefore, the major challenge for implementing alternative assessments will be the availability of resources.

Lack of teachers’ training: Another challenge to implementing alternative assessments will be providing training to the teachers. All the participants admitted that they receive some training from time to time on some particular aspects, but they did not receive any training on taking alternative assessments until now.

It appeared from the discussion that inadequate training could make the teachers feel unprepared to create, carry out, and assess alternative assessments, which could result in inconsistent assessment methods and decreased efficacy in assessing student learning.

Learning gap of the students: The learning gap might create an obstacle while implementing alternative assessments. Participants mentioned a large number of students lag behind. They do not have reading competencies, proper knowledge on the subjects, and skill development that are required for their respective grades. One of the participants added, “Some students might not understand what to do or will not be able to check correctly because of the learning gap in case of peer assessments.” (Personal communication: Interview #2, Date: March 7, 2021)

Moreover, the learning gap that was already present has been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic for those populations who are marginalized and vulnerable. The implementation of remote learning, school closures, and modifications to traditional assessment practices has increased the inequalities in learning outcomes and wide gaps in educational access. The participants agreed to the point that, in order to address all the needs of the students, teachers must be mindful of these differences and implement inclusive and fair assessment techniques.

Resistance to change: The effective implementation of alternative assessment procedures in government primary schools might be hindered by the teachers’ resistance to change. From the focused group discussion, it is apparent that it will be difficult to get used to or comfortable with the alternative assessment system for both the teachers and the students. The majority of the teachers view traditional assessment techniques like exams and standardized tests as the standard since they are deeply ingrained in the education system. Some participants mentioned that students seem to be comfortable with the summative assessment system as they can prepare easily by

following the suggestions from the teachers, practicing the classwork given before the terminal exams, and memorization.

During the focused group discussion, 50% of the teachers admitted they are more comfortable with the current system, as well as the students and students' community. One of the participants mentioned, "I am worried that the students would not be able to get good grades with the new type of tests, like presentation, portfolio or journal if marks are assigned on them and counted with the final marks." (Focus group notes #1, Date: March 10, 2021)

Socio-economic and cultural aspects: The cultural and socio-economic background can also challenge the adaption of alternative assessment tools, as apparent from the data collected. The participants mentioned that in government primary schools in Bangladesh, most of the students come from a lower socio-economic background. These students do not get any support regarding their learning from their households, whereas some of them have to work after school to financially support their families. As a result, they are unable to dedicate their time to studying at home. On the other hand, alternative assessments like group work, projects, or presentations will require more of their time invested in learning with additional support.

Moreover, the participants also mentioned that they get pressure from the parents or the students' community to evaluate the students with written exams. They added that the parents only rely on the exam results to track and understand their children's progress. Being a part of a certain socio-economic and cultural group, and due to lack of proper knowledge, they perceive summative assessment as the only way to assess students in the current educational system.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

The findings of the research provide insight into the opinions of Bangladeshi government primary school teachers on the adaption of alternative assessment methods. The results reveals that there is a complex interaction between a number of variables that affects how prepared and willing teachers are to use the alternative assessment tools. While some of the teachers are ready to explore the alternative methods to foster deeper learning and meet the varied needs of their students, others have resistance or encounter difficulties in putting these strategies into practice.

Existing Practice Regarding Alternative Assessment

The participants seemed not to be reluctant about the implementation of alternative assessments but mentioned that summative assessments are a must. Moreover, they mentioned students to be more comfortable with the current system. Adaption of alternative assessment procedures can be significantly hampered by teachers' and students' resistance to change. Participants agree that existing evaluation techniques are deeply ingrained in the education system and exhibit reluctance to adapt new approaches. As stated by Rudman (1989), paper-pencil-assessment or traditional evaluation methods solely look at students' knowledge. Whereas, according to Abdul Rahim and Sulaiman (2006), alternative evaluation methods promote higher-order creative and critical thinking where students have more control over their learning. Developing a culture of creativity and experimentation within the schools, offering support and resources for implementation, and actively communicating the advantages of alternative assessment methods are all necessary to overcome resistance to change.

Challenges in Implementing Alternative Assessment

The participants identified the high teacher-student ratio that exists in government primary schools as one of the main challenges. According to Wiggins (1993), teachers can modify the mode of instruction as needed by using alternative assessment to track how well their lessons are understood by their students. Therefore, adapting alternative assessment calls for individualized attention and constant feedback, which is hampered by teacher shortages and associated large class sizes. In regards to the limited time and resources available for instruction, teachers expressed concern about the feasibility of adequately monitoring and evaluating student progress.

Additionally, apart from the guided FGD questions, participants also mentioned that government primary school teachers are assigned loads of official duties and documentation tasks other than teaching and assessments. That might be one of the reasons behind accepting the new methods, where they will need to invest additional time and effort. Also, it seemed that there is a lack of regular monitoring and accountability of the teachers.

In light of the disruption brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, addressing learning gaps among students comes up as another important factor in the discussion. The growing gaps in academic achievement and the difficulties in evaluating student learning in non-traditional learning environments are concerns raised by the participants. For all kids to have equitable access to high-quality education, learning gaps must be filled with focused interventions, more resources, and support. To fulfill the varied needs of the students, this may entail implementing remedial programs into place, offering individualized support, and encouraging a culture of continuous development. Additionally, since each student learns differently, it is impossible to evaluate them in a uniform method alone (Brualdi, 1996). Therefore, in order to help students' learning according

to their needs, teachers must have the perspective that learning is a continuous and dynamic process that involves assessing students' learning outcomes accordingly.

Adaption of Alternative Assessment

In order to facilitate the implementation of alternative assessment methods, the study also emphasizes addressing the resource constraints and improving the school infrastructure. The participants shared their concern about not having access to tools, technology, and supplies needed to carry out project-based activities or performance-based assessments. Insufficient resources will make it difficult for teachers to design engaging lessons that help the students comprehend concepts on a deeper level. In order to educate students for the workforce in the real world, alternative assessments can place a strong emphasis on 'real-life' abilities like problem-solving and decision-making (Brualdi, 1996). This quote backs the importance of addressing the concerns of the teacher on improving resources and school infrastructure.

The results also emphasize the importance of professional development and teacher training to support the adaption of alternative assessment methods. Participants emphasized the necessity of training programs that will equip the teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and confidence to successfully plan, carry out, and assess alternative assessments. In order to improve teachers' ability to successfully implement alternative assessment practices, professional development initiatives should be customized to the unique needs and context of government primary schools. These initiatives should offer teachers opportunities for peer collaboration, practical training, and ongoing support. According to Schoenfeld (1999), educators' willingness, aptitude, and skills are what makes assessments successful undoubtedly, thus, before assessing students' understanding of a subject, they must grasp what it is they are assessing.

Lastly, the discussions with the participants emphasized the influence of cultural and socio-economic factors on teachers', students', and student communities' views on assessment practices. Participants highlighted the difficulties experienced by underprivileged students, who might not have access to resources or the support system they need to participate in alternative assessment activities successfully. In order to address the socio-economic gaps and cultural misconceptions regarding assessment, a holistic approach that engages parents, communities, and stakeholders to build consensus and support for educational changes is needed. This strategy should also encourage inclusive and equitable assessment practices.

In conclusion, the research data suggests that there has not been any practice of alternative assessment tools in government primary schools. There is a lot of room for improvements in terms of infrastructure, funding, human resources, and the mindset of the stakeholders. Stakeholders, including HT, teachers, students, the student community, and policymakers, should work collaboratively to establish a supportive environment for the effective adaption of alternative assessment approaches. As a result, in government primary schools throughout Bangladesh, this will contribute to promoting deeper learning, student participation, and educational equity.

5.2 Conclusion

This study concludes with by highlighting the wide range of challenges that the teachers of government primary schools must overcome in order to implement alternative assessment practices. The importance of alternative assessment techniques for fostering deeper learning and evaluating a wide range of student needs and abilities is becoming increasingly acknowledged. In order to realize their full potential considerable obstacles must be addressed. After analyzing all the data derived from the interviews and focused group discussions, it can be stated that alternative

assessments have a good prospect in the context of government primary schools. It would not be possible to bring about the changes overnight, but gradual changes and implementation will make it possible and effective. In order to address the issues raised, the results also highlighted the necessity of focused interventions. These interventions should aim to lower the teacher-student ratio, enhance school resources and infrastructure, provide teachers with relevant and comprehensive training, address learning gaps, and promote an innovative and experimental culture in the classrooms. To further encourage the widespread adaption of alternative assessment tools, it is imperative to address socio-economic and cultural issues as well as challenges with change resistance.

5.3 Recommendations

The research's findings lead to the following recommendations. These are proposed to ensure successful and effective implementation of alternative assessment methods, which have been derived considering the responses of the participants throughout the survey.

- **Baseline/diagnostic Test:** Implementing baseline or diagnostic tests at the beginning of the academic year for the students will help the teachers to find out remedial needs. This information can guide the teachers in planning targeted interventions and improve the overall learning process throughout the year.
- **Gradual implementation:** Given the need for teachers and students to become familiar with different assessment tools, a gradual implementation approach is recommended. This phased approach will allow for the gradual integration of alternative assessment practices into existing assessment systems, providing adequate time for adjustment and refinement.

- **Blended Assessment System:** Adapting a blended system of summative and alternative assessments can provide a comprehensive picture of student learning outcomes. By combining traditional summative assessments with alternative methods such as presentations, group projects, and in-class activities, teachers can assess a diverse range of skills and competencies effectively.
- **In-class Activity:** In-class activities or assessments are deemed more appropriate than take-home tests or alternative assessments like portfolios or journals, especially considering the lack of guidance available to students at home. Conducting assessments within the classroom environment ensures greater consistency and supervision, leading to more reliable assessment outcomes.
- **Decreasing Teacher Workload:** Reducing the workload of teachers is essential to enable them to devote more time and effort to improving the teaching-learning process and assessing students effectively. Streamlining administrative tasks and providing adequate support can help alleviate the burden on teachers, allowing them to focus on their core responsibilities.
- **Strengthening Monitoring System:** Strengthening monitoring systems is crucial to ensuring accountability and regularity in the implementation of alternative assessment practices. Effective monitoring mechanisms can help identify challenges, provide support where needed, and ensure adherence to established guidelines and standards.
- **Teacher Training:** Providing teachers with specific training on alternative assessment tools is essential to enhance their understanding of the assessment process, evaluation criteria, and marking techniques. Tailored training programs should focus on building teachers' capacity to design, administer, and evaluate alternative assessments effectively.

- **Peer Collaboration and Discussion:** Facilitating group discussions among teachers and peer training on assessments can foster a collaborative learning environment and encourage the exchange of creative and contextual ideas. Peer collaboration can also help minimize training costs and promote the sharing of best practices among teachers.

In addition to these recommendations, collaboration between the policymakers, ATEO, URC instructors, HT, teachers, students, and parents is essential to address systemic challenges and ensure the successful implementation of alternative assessment practices. This collaborative approach can involve hiring more teachers to reduce class sizes, providing support for teacher training and infrastructure improvement, and fostering understanding and support for alternative assessments among stakeholders. By working together, government primary schools can create an inclusive and equitable assessment system that promotes deeper learning and enhances student outcomes.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Letter

Dear Participant,

Greetings!

I am Fahmida Sultana. As a requirement for completion of my Masters in Education (M.Ed) degree at BRAC University, I need your support in conducting a research titled “The Perspective of Government Primary School Teachers on Alternative Assessment Practices: Challenges and Prospects in Bangladesh.” In this regard, I would like to take interviews to collect data. You are cordially invited to participate and bring your generous support by sharing your valuable thoughts. All the information provided by you will be recorded and kept strictly confidential. Your identity will not be revealed under any circumstances. Participating in this study is completely voluntary, and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any point without any explanation. Please sign below if you agree to participate.

Thanks in advance,

Fahmida Sultana

M.Ed Student, BRAC University

Email: fahmida.sultana@teachforbangladesh.org

Phone: +8801723 764537

Interviewee name: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix B: FGD Guideline

FGD No. _____ Date _____ Time _____ Duration _____

FGD Guideline Questions

1. Could you share the methods you currently use to assess the learning progress of your students?
2. How frequently do you assess your students?
 - a) After every lesson b) Weekly c) Bi-Weekly d) Monthly
3. What is your understanding about the term “alternative assessments”?
4. In your classroom, do you use any alternative assessment tools? Could you provide some examples if the answer is yes?
5. What are the main advantages of using alternative assessment tools in primary-level classrooms, in your opinion?
6. Do you think that using alternative assessment tools can improve the learning outcomes of students? What’s the reason?
7. What challenges do teachers face while using alternative assessments in the classrooms, based on your experience?
8. In your opinion, how might these challenges be resolved or reused?
9. What roles should teachers play in successfully implementing alternative assessments in primary schools?
10. Do you think additional trainings or resources are required to understand and use alternative assessments more efficiently? If yes, what sort of training or support would you suggest?

Appendix C: Individual interview questionnaire

1. At your school, how do you and your colleagues currently assess the learning outcomes of your students?
2. How would you define non-traditional or alternative assessments in your own words?
3. Could you describe the types of alternative assessments that are currently used at your school?
4. In your opinion, how effective are alternative assessments as a teaching method? Could you provide examples and experiences that support your opinion?
5. In what ways do you utilize the outcomes of alternative assessments to support decisions that are beneficial to your students?
6. When introducing alternative assessments, what challenges do teachers in your school experience?
7. In what ways do you and your colleagues try to overcome these challenges?
8. To what extent do teachers in your school collaborate to implement alternative assessment strategies?
9. In order to help teachers successfully integrate alternative assessments, what kind of assistance, resources, or training are offered?
10. What could be done additionally to enhance the use of alternative assessments in government primary schools, in your opinion?
11. Would you like to share anything else about your thoughts on alternative assessments or your experience with assessment practices?