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A Comparative Study of Formative Assessment Practices in Public and Private Secondary Schools of District Gujrat, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined formative assessment practices among the secondary school teachers in public and private schools of District Gujrat. Using descriptive survey method, a structured Likert-scale questionnaire was prepared and used to collect data from 400 teachers (200 public and 200 private) using quantitative research design. The study looked at both implementation and perceived effectiveness of formative assessment practices—consisting of learning targets, ongoing assessment, and feedback for instructional adjustment. The findings indicated that teachers in both sectors are actively engaging in formative assessment with levels of implementation of it being slightly higher among public school teachers than private school teachers. However, the perceived effectiveness of the practices was high and comparable across the sectors. The conclusion of the study was that although the levels of implementation may differ, formative assessment is perceived by teachers as an effective tool and is widely accepted as a tool for enhancing student learning outcomes. Recommendations were formed based on the findings which were on the need to improve teacher training, to have formative assessment embedded systematically in curricula, to have resource support, and to have a monitoring system to improve assessment practices.

Keywords: Formative Assessment, Secondary School Teachers, Public Schools, Private Schools, Student Learning, District Gujrat

Introduction

Education is generally acknowledged as one of the core catalysts for social and economic development and that assessment plays a key role in the quality of education (Black & Wiliam, 2003). The education system of Pakistan is marked by dichotomy of the public and the private schools, with the two varying in terms of resources, curricula and pedagogy. One of the major differences between these schools is the use and adoption of formative assessment as the process of assessing learning while instructing (Sadler, 2008). Unlike summative assessment, where the assessment is done at the end of a course with an aim of measuring learning outcomes, formative assessment is interactive and dynamic, with the aim of supporting learning as it is taking place (Brookhart, 2017).

Formative assessment has been proven to have a large impact upon improving student learning outcomes by identifying learning gaps, encouraging self-regulation and encouraging higher engagement in the learning process (Black & Wiliam, 1998). In secondary schools, its role is even more important as students are confronted with more and more complex concepts and skills. The literature of Pakistan states that the effective use of formative assessment has various degrees of implementation across public and



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private educational institutions because of the varying levels of teacher training, class size, availability of resources, and institutional support (Shaikh et al., 2020; Laghari & Solangi, 2022).

District Gujrat, which is situated in Punjab, is home to schools of various kinds of secondary education. Public secondary schools are state sponsored and mainly serve students of different socio-economic classes. They commonly struggle with a lack of instructional materials, overcrowded classrooms and limited professional learning opportunities for teachers that prevent the regular use of formative assessment. In contrast, the quality of services in private schools is usually higher, classes are smaller, and there is more flexibility in the implementation of innovative teaching and evaluation practices (Jafar, 2017). Although these are the benefits, there is still not much empirical evidence in the comparison of the formative assessment practices within public and private secondary schools in District Gujrat, which is therefore considered an important research gap.

Formative assessment not only gives important feedback to students, it's also a means for teachers to modify instructional strategies on the fly. Research has shown that formative assessment (FA) when well designed can enhance student achievement, active learning and teacher-pupil interactions (Nazeef & Fareed, 2024). For example, a research conducted in District Sanghar, Sindh, showed that formative assessment practices in private schools were effective for student performance because they allowed for targeted feedback and interventions for learning. Laghari & Solangi (2022) and showed that in public secondary schools, formative assessment strategies when properly and systematically employed within classroom instruction improve the students' academic performance significantly.

The current study aims at bridging the research gap by carrying out a comparative study of formative evaluation practices in the public and private secondary schools of District Gujrat. This research is significant for educators, policy makers, and stakeholders in Pakistan. By revealing gaps and best practices, the study will promise to deliver actionable insights that can be applied when developing teacher training programs, the curriculum, and policy development. Not only will more robust formative assessment practices boost student outcomes, but will also help advance educational equity by ensuring all students have access to effective mechanisms for feedback on their learning no matter what type of school they attend.

Formative assessment is an important element of effective teaching and learning and it can be used by teachers as a way to keep track of progress, catch learning gaps and communicate with their students. The findings of this study describing and analyzing formative assessment practices of public and private secondary schools of District Gujrat are helpful to understand the effects of formative assessment practices on students' learning and to determine strategies through which assessment practices could be maximized in different educational settings.

Statement of the Problem

Assessment is a key part of the teaching and learning process and helps to give feedback that informs both teaching and student learning. Formative assessment in particular is intended to track student progress on an ongoing basis, to diagnose gaps in learning and to provide timely feedback to enhance outcomes. Although important, implementation of formative assessment in secondary schools of Pakistan has not been uniformly applied with considerable differences in public and private institutions. The District of Gujrat has a higher number of public secondary schools that suffer from a lack of resources, large class sizes, outdated curricula, and a lack of teacher training that is impeding the meaningful use of formative assessment practices. Private schools, on the other hand, tend



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to have better buildings, smaller classes and more freedom to innovate assessment methods. However, little is known about the magnitude of the use of these practices and the impact on student learning outcomes. Furthermore, there is a dearth of comparative studies looking at the variation in formative assessment practices of public and private secondary schools within the district. Most existing research addresses either type of school separately or in other regions and there is a gap in understanding the local context. Thus, this study is aimed at analyzing and comparing the practices of formative assessment in government and private secondary schools of District Gujrat. It aims to understand the strategies employed by teachers, the level of their success in the enhancement of student learning, and the difficulties encountered in their application. Filling these gaps will yield important information for reform in assessment practices and student achievement in both sectors.

Objectives of the Study

To find out the formative assessment practices in secondary public and private schools of Gujrat district.

To find out the effectiveness of formative assessment practices of secondary public and private schools of district Gujrat.

To compare the prevailing formative assessment practices in the secondary public and private schools in district Gujrat.

To compare the practicing effectiveness of formative assessment in secondary public and private schools of district Gujrat.

Research Questions

What type of formative assessment is happening in the secondary public and private schools of district Gujrat?

Are the common formative assessment practices of secondary public and private schools effective for teaching learning process in district Gujrat?

Are the formative assessment practices the same in district Gujrat in the public and private secondary schools?

Is there any difference in the effectiveness of formative assessment practices adopted in secondary public and private schools of district Gujrat?

Review of Literature

Formative assessment is an ongoing process that yields prompt feedback to students and teachers about learning. Unlike summative assessment that assesses the performance of students at the end of a learning cycle, formative assessment is embedded in daily instructional activities and is intended to enhance learning while it is happening. Heritage (2010) asserted that formative assessment helps the teachers to find out areas of gap in students' understanding at the very instant, so that immediate corrective measures can be taken to cater to the individual learning needs of the students. Wiliam (2011) goes ahead to advise that formative assessment engages the students in active participation, promotes self-regulated learning and enables the teacher to refine instructional strategies based on the performance and understanding of the students.

Formative assessment can include many different forms such as quizzes, questioning of the child, peer and self-assessment, homework and observational evidence. Successful formative assessment depends on clear learning goals, timely and effective feedback and student engagement (McMillan & Hellsten, 2010). As formative assessment helps to identify learning gaps early, it also minimizes learning anxiety and encourages students to interact with the subject matter on a deeper level. Moreover, it facilitates the development



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of metacognitive skills among learners so that they can reflect on their performance and take corrective steps on their own (Panadero 2017).

In the context of Pakistan, there are structural problems that are intrinsic to public secondary schools that make effective formative assessment difficult. Challenges include large class size, teaching resources, outdated curricula and limited professional development opportunities for teachers. Consequently, teachers in public schools typically use traditional teaching and summative assessment techniques like end of term examinations, which do not give them continuous feedback to guide the learning. Ishaq (2020) stated that although some public schools make use of quizzes and homework checks, the feedback is not timely, unclear or not actionable and as a result, it is not effective in improving student performance. Similarly, Laghari & Solangi (2022) noted that teachers are not confident and trained enough in the usage of formative assessment tools, which leads to little diagnostic feedback and the underuse of assessment information for instructional change.

Private secondary schools, on the other hand, are generally smaller, better resourced, and more flexible in terms of the curriculum to implement, making it easier to implement practices around formative assessment. Teachers in private schools tend to use various assessment techniques such as interactive activities, oral questioning, peer assessment, project-based assessments to increase the continuous tracking of learning of the students (Manzoor et al., 2023). More personal feedback and closer monitoring of learning progress: Private institutions can give more personal feedback and monitoring of learning progress, which means higher academic performance, engagement, and motivation (Ferdous, 2024). In addition, professional development programmes in private schools are developing teachers' capacity to implement formative assessment techniques effectively, giving them the skills to give immediate, specific and actionable feedback.

A number of studies have reported differences between private and public schools relative to formative assessment. Rafiq et al. (2022) concluded that private schools have a systematic way of giving regular and actionable feedback, while public schools concentrate on formative assessment on an irregular basis and without any consistency. The differences are usually explained by differences in administrative support, teacher training and resources. Public schools are strict with curriculum and control while private schools have the freedom to innovate in methods of teaching, assessment schedules, and feedback points (Ali et al., 2021). In public schools, professionals have little access to professional development opportunities that raise their awareness of formative assessment implementation.

The effects on student learning outcomes of formative assessment are well documented. Sadler and Good (2006) reported that students who are provided with continuous formative assessment show higher achievement levels than students assessed by summative means alone. Effective formative assessment improves comprehension, retention and application of knowledge as well as skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving. It also facilitates motivation and engagement because students are given opportunities to reflect on their performance and take corrective measures (Panadero, 2017). These gains are especially apparent in private schools where formative assessment practices are purposefully embedded in the teaching and learning process.



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Despite the evident advantages, there are many challenges to formative assessment in the Pakistani education system. Public schools are plagued by overcrowded teaching ratios, lack of instructional materials, lack of professional growth for teachers and an over-reliance on summative assessments. The reality is that teachers don't always have the time or capacity to meaningfully implement formative assessment. Whereas the conditions in the private schools are more favorable in terms of quality of resources and class sizes, the weaknesses in the private schools are the inconsistency of teacher content, inconsistency of quality of assessment, and lack of uniformity. Furthermore, the predominance of summative over formative assessment practices is generally attributed to the widespread adoption of exam-driven pedagogy and parental expectations where a heavy focus on overall achievement is placed (Hussain & Kwek, 2024).

In short, the literature suggests that formative assessment is an important way to enhance teaching and learning outcomes. Both public and private schools acknowledge the importance of formative assessment, but private schools do a better job of implementing it because of smaller class sizes, better resources and more structured professional development. Adoption in the public schools is very hard, due to systemic limitations, lack of training and inflexible curricula. Teacher training, administrative support, and curriculum change are all ways that the identified gaps can be addressed to make formative assessment procedures more effective and consistent for all types of schools, which in turn can help improve student learning outcomes.

Although there is a fair amount of research in Pakistan on formative assessment, there is a dearth of studies in which a direct comparison of public and private secondary schools within a particular district is done. Especially, District Gujrat is underexplored. Most studies are restricted to individual schools or other areas, leaving a paucity of information concerning how formative assessment practices differ among school types locally. This study attempts to bridge this gap by analyzing and comparing the practices, efficacy and the problems of formative assessment in public and private secondary schools of District Gujrat.

Research Methodology

The present study was quantitative in nature and used descriptive survey design to examine the objectives of the research. It was felt that the most suitable method of research was survey research because it enables the systematic investigation of a large number of respondents to describe and analyze their perceptions and practices. The study was designed to collect quantitative data to provide objective information relating to formative assessment in secondary public and private schools of District Gujrat. The population of the study was all the teachers working in secondary public and private schools of District Gujrat. Simple random sampling was used to assure representative sampling and to minimize sampling bias. A total of 400 secondary school teachers were chosen as respondents, which consisted of 200 teachers from public schools and 200 teachers from private schools. This sampling approach allowed for the gathering of valid and generalizable data about the practices associated with formative assessment for both types of schools.

Instrumentation

A five-point Likert scale questionnaire (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) was designed with the assistance of the supervisor of the researcher in order to gather data from the secondary school teachers. The instrument, comprised of 48 items, was broken into two categories: (1) Identification of Prevailing Formative Assessment Practices, and (2)



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Effectiveness of Prevailing Formative Assessment Practices. For validation, three experts checked the questionnaire in terms of content, vocabulary and sentence structure, followed by a pilot test of the questionnaire on a small sample of 50 teachers (25 from public and 25 from private elementary schools) for clarity and reliability. Data from the pilot test were analyzed and endorsed the reliability of the instrument and its suitability for use in the main study.

Data Analysis and Results

The data collected were subjected to descriptive and inferential statistical methods as a way of meeting the research objectives. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated to find out the general formative assessment practices and perceived effectiveness in public and private secondary schools. Independent samples t-tests were used to determine points of difference between public and private school teachers' responses.

Table 1: Formative Assessment practices used by secondary school teachers in district Gujrat

Strategies	Teachers, N=400	
	Mean	SD
Learning targets regarding formative assessment	3.883	.678
Continuous practices for formative assessment	3.735	.575
Feedback and adjusting instruction	3.873	.672
Overall formative assessment practices	3.830	.574

The results show that the secondary school teachers of District Gujrat are very active in formative assessment. Of the specific strategies, teachers' ratings of learning targets were slightly higher on formative assessment ($M = 3.883$, $SD = 0.678$) and feedback and adjusting instruction ($M = 3.873$, $SD = 0.672$), indicating their awareness of how to effectively guide students' learning. The mean score for classroom assessment showed a slightly lower score for continuous formative assessment ($M = 3.735$, $SD = 0.575$) indicating that although teachers are employing ongoing assessment techniques there may be opportunity for more consistent use of continuous assessment. Overall, the average score of formative assessment practices was 3.830 ($SD = 0.574$), which implies a relatively high level of involvement. The comparatively low standard deviations on all measures indicate that teachers responded in a relatively homogeneous fashion, indicating that the perception of formative assessment practices was similar throughout the sample.

Table 2: Formative Assessment practices used by public secondary school teachers in district Gujrat

Strategies	Public, N=200	
	Mean	SD
Learning targets regarding formative assessment	3.941	.729
Continuous practices for formative assessment	3.868	.621
Feedback and adjusting instruction	4.033	.728



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Overall formative assessment practices	3.947	.596
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The findings show that the public secondary school teachers of District Gujrat were highly engaged in practices of formative assessment. Teachers rated the practice of feedback and adjusting instruction the highest ($M = 4.033$, $SD = 0.728$) followed by the practice of learning targets ($M = 3.941$, $SD = 0.729$), and the practice of continuous formative assessment ($M = 3.868$, $SD = 0.621$). Based on the overall mean score ($M = 3.947$, $SD = 0.596$), it appears that the public-school teachers practice formative assessment strategies on a regular basis in their classrooms. The moderate standard deviations show some difference in responses, but perceptions are largely consistent among the teachers sampled.

Table 3: Formative Assessment practices used by private secondary school teachers in district Gujrat

Strategies	Private, N=200	
	Mean	SD
Learning targets regarding formative assessment	3.827	.642
Continuous practices for formative assessment	3.608	.518
Feedback and adjusting instruction	3.718	.594
Overall formative assessment practices	3.718	.506

The findings showed that District Gujrat private secondary school teachers were moderately engaged in formative assessment practices. Learning goals were ranked highest for formative assessment ($M = 3.827$, $SD = 0.642$), followed by feedback and modifying instruction ($M = 3.718$, $SD = 0.594$) and ongoing formative assessment practices ($M = 3.608$, $SD = 0.518$). The overall mean score ($M = 3.718$, $SD = 0.506$) indicates that even though private school teachers are employing formative assessment strategies, it is at a slightly lower level of implementation than public school teachers. The relatively low standard deviations suggest that responses were fairly consistent across sampled teachers.

Table 4: Comparison of Overall formative assessment practices Used by Secondary School Teachers in Public and Private Schools of district Gujrat

Aspect of Assessment	Sector	N	Mean	S. D.	t-value	Sig.
Overall formative assessment practices	Public	200	3.947	.596	4.10	.000
	Private	200	3.718	.506		

From Table 4 below, it was shown that there is a significant difference in public and private secondary schools teachers' levels of overall formative assessment practices, with public secondary school teachers having a significantly higher level ($M = 3.947$, $SD = 0.596$) than private secondary school teachers ($M = 3.718$, $SD = 0.506$). The difference of the two groups is statistically significant ($t = 4.10$, $p = 0.000$), which suggests that public school teachers are more consistent and are actively involved in implementing formative assessment strategies than private school teachers. The outcome indicates a marked difference in assessment practices between the two school sectors, and indicates that public schools might be more engaged in continuous assessment and feedback practices in their teaching.

Table 5: Comparison of Effectiveness of Overall formative assessment practices



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Used by Secondary School Teachers in Public and Private Schools of district Gujrat

Aspect of Assessment	Sector	N	Mean	S. D.	t-value	Sig.
Overall formative assessment practices	Public	200	4.266	.385	.432	.666
	Private	200	4.249	.371		

Table 5 shows that public and private secondary schools have the same perceived effectiveness of overall formative assessment practices ($M = 4.266$, $SD = 0.385$ and $M = 4.249$, $SD = 0.371$ respectively). However, there is no statistically significant difference ($t = 0.432$, $p = 0.666$) between the two groups, meaning that teachers in both sectors think that formative assessment practices are equally effective in helping students learn. The low standard deviations indicate that responses were consistent across teachers, indicating a shared belief among teachers in regards to the positive impact of formative assessment practices across school types.

Conclusions

The study concluded that very generally speaking, secondary school teachers in District Gujrat are conducting formative assessment practices at a high level with the most common strategies being the learning targets and feedback. Public school teachers indicated more implementation of these practices than private school teachers, indicating that more focus on continuous assessment is a feature of public schools. However, in both sectors, teachers viewed formative assessment as very effective in improving student learning outcomes. In summary, the findings reveal that though level of implementation might differ, formative assessment is known and appreciated by the teachers for enhancing instructional quality and student learning.

Discussion

The results of the study show that secondary school teachers of District Gujrat are actively using formative assessment practices, especially in setting learning targets and feedback for the guidance of the students. This is consistent with the work of Black and Wiliam (1998), who stressed that formative assessment provides increased engagement and facilitates instructional modification for students. The study also found out that the usage of formative assessment was slightly higher for public school teachers than for private school teachers, which might be related to the existence of institutional support and teacher training that is in most cases structured for public schools (Jafar, 2017). In line with previous research that found formative assessment to be effective in enhancing student learning outcomes and positively affecting academic achievement, motivation, and self-regulated learning (Brookhart, 2017; Laghari & Solangi, 2022), teachers in both sectors perceived formative assessment to be effective. Despite the relative consistency of the responses by teachers, this appears to indicate an understanding of the significance of formative assessment in the teaching-learning process and how it is a crucial element for the continuous improvement of the instructional process (Shaikh et al., 2020).

Recommendations

Professional development on formative assessment approaches to enhance teachers' skills in implementing continuous assessment, effective feedback, and modifying instruction based on student needs should be an ongoing process in teacher education. Integrate formative assessment strategies into the teaching and learning process by embedding the use of learning targets, regular checks for understanding and feedback. Private schools



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need to be equipped with resources and guidance to implement formative assessment, and allow teachers to embrace innovative and effective strategies employed by public schools. School administrators should put in place regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to determine the efficacy of formative assessment practices, recommend areas of improvement and facilitate the sharing of best practices among teachers.

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