

EFFECT OF ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT METHODS ON DIVERSE LEARNERS AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL

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Abstract

This study was conducted to examine the effect of alternative assessment methods on diverse learners at university level. The objectives of the study were: i) To determine the learners' perceived alternative assessment methods commonly used at university level, ii) To assess the needs of diverse learners at university level & iii) To evaluate the effect of alternative assessment methods on diverse learners at university level. This study used a quantitative approach with a descriptive research design to examine the selected issue. Data were collected through a cross-sectional survey conducted among Bachelor of Science students at the University of Kotli Azad Jammu and Kashmir (UOKAJK). All BS students were considered as the population of the study. From this population, a sample was selected using convenience sampling, allowing the researcher to include both male and female students who were easily accessible. A structured questionnaire was developed as the main tool for data collection. It was based on a five-point Likert scale and organized into three sections to cover different aspects of the study. To ensure the validity of the instrument, it was reviewed by two experts in the field of education. For this purpose, 30 questionnaires were distributed among students, and their feedback helped refine the instrument. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure reliability of instrument which was .711. The researchers collected data personally. The response rate was 100%. The data were analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Science Software (SPSS). The researchers applied mean score. Results indicated a positive adopting alternative assessment strategy can help reduce these barriers, promote fairness, and enhance student engagement. Universities should increase the use of diverse alternative assessment methods to address different learning needs. Hence it is recommended to teachers should emphasize project-based, peer, portfolio, and observational assessments for better student engagement. Continuous feedback mechanisms should be strengthened to improve student learning outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

Effective assessment not only benefits educators by providing insights into student progress but also supports learners in developing crucial skills and

improving their performance across various educational contexts. Conventional standardized assessments, such as pencil-and-paper tests, have long

been used due to their ease of development and administration, as well as their straightforward interpretation (Agrey, 2004). These assessments are designed to evaluate cognitive skills and often produce critical thinking.

In contrast, alternative assessments encompass a variety of tools and techniques that aim to engage students in higher-order thinking and authentic problem-solving tasks (Adelabu & Alex, 2023; AlMahrooqi, 2018). Unlike traditional assessments, alternative methods emphasize the process of learning rather than merely assigning grades. They provide students with opportunities to demonstrate their understanding through creative and critical thinking tasks, thus reflecting their learning in more meaningful ways (Öcal Dörterler & Akay, 2022; Puhl, 1997). Research indicates that alternative assessment techniques encourage student autonomy, creativity, and critical thinking, allowing learners to exercise greater control over their educational experiences (Gcabashe, 2024; Majola, 2023; Suzieleez et al, 2006). Despite the recognized benefits of alternative assessments, challenges remain in their implementation. Considering the pivotal role that alternative assessment tools play in enhancing the learning experience for students with special needs, it becomes essential to investigate their effectiveness. The importance of this study lays in its potential to provide insights into how these assessment tools can be utilized to better support the educational development of students with special needs. By focusing on the implementation and outcomes of alternative assessment methods, this research aims to contribute valuable knowledge to the field of special education, ultimately assisting educators in adopting strategies that are more inclusive and effective in meeting the diversity needs of students.

Despite the recognized benefits of alternative assessments, challenges remain in their implementation. According to (Yao, 2015), while teachers generally hold a positive attitude towards alternative assessment methods, they often revert to traditional assessments due to perceived difficulties and preferences for established practices. Rahman, (2018) further notes a discrepancy between teachers' positive perceptions of alternative assessments and their actual classroom practices. Considering the potential of alternative assessment tools enrich the

educational experience for students with special needs, it is essential to examine not only how these tools are used but also their impact on learning outcomes. This study is significant as it seeks to provide insights into practicalities and benefits of alternative assessment tools for special education. By exploring both implementation strategies and their effects on learning, this research aims to enhance the inclusivity and efficacy of assessment practices, contributing valuable findings to the field of special education. The purpose of this study is to examine how alternative assessment tools are used in supporting the learning processes of students with special needs, along with analyzing the impact of these tools on educational outcomes. By understanding the extent of their use and their effectiveness, this research seeks to offer practical insights for educators looking to adopt more inclusive and effective alternative strategies.

Objectives

Following are the objectives of the study.

1. To determine the learners' perceived alternative assessment methods commonly used at university level.
2. To assess the needs of diverse learners at university level.
3. To evaluate the effect of alternative assessment methods on diverse learners at university level.

Research Questions

1. What types of alternative assessment methods are commonly used at university level?
2. To what extent students at university level need alternative assessment methods?
3. What are the significant effects of alternative assessment methods on diverse learners at university level?

Problem Statement:

At the university level in Kotli AJK, traditional assessment methods mainly focus on written exams, which may not effectively address the needs of diverse learners with different abilities and learning styles. This can limit students' opportunities to fully demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Although alternative assessment methods are considered more inclusive and supportive, their effectiveness in this

context is not well understood. Therefore, it is important to examine how alternative assessment methods affect the learning outcomes of diverse students at the university level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Growing diversity in university classrooms, linguistic, cultural, cognitive and socio economic has promoted educators to reconsider traditional examinations that often privilege to certain learners. Alternative Assessment Methods such as portfolios, performance assessments, reflective journals and project based tasks offer more flexible and authentic ways for students to demonstrate learning . This literature review synthesizes key finding on how these assessments influence diverse learners in higher education. Alternative Assessment Methods are grounded in constructivist learning theory which emphasize knowledge construction through active engagement (Vygotsky,1978) . This also align with universal design fir learning (UDL), which advocate multiple ways for representing knowledge and expressing understanding (CAST,2018).

Effects on Academic Performance of Diverse learners:

Research consistently shows that alternative assessment enables students especially multi lingual learners, first generation students and students with disabilities to demonstrate deeper conceptual understanding (Hayward and Hedge ,2021).

High stakes fixed exams tend to disproportionately affect learners with anxiety, ADHD, or limited English proficiency. Alternative Assessment reduce these barriers by allowing more control over pacing and expression (Putnam et al,2020).

Traditional tests often reflects cultural and linguistic assumptions that disadvantage minority learners. Alternative assessments enable students to integrate their backgrounds and perspectives, enhancing inclusive education (Gray ,2018).

Support for students with disabilities:

Alternative assessment methods incorporate flexibility, they lessen the need for special accommodations. This supports inclusive practice and reduce stigma (Ferguson,2019). Students are used to traditional exams may initially find open-

ended assessment tasks ambiguous or overwhelming. Orientation and scaffolding instructions are essential (Gikandi & Morrow,2016).

Teachers attitude towards alternative assessment:

Research on teachers attitude towards alternative assessment methods reveals a range of perspectives students showed that, while some teachers recognized the benefits of alternative assessment methods such as enhancing creativity and critical thinking, others face challenges related to implementation and administrative burden (Flowers et al,2005). Teachers need more professional development to effectively use alternative assessment methods and integrated these in to their teaching strategies (Smith-woo Fter,2010).

Literature Gap:

There is substantial research on alternative assessment in primary and secondary education but fewer studies focus specially on diverse learners of university level. Additional research is needed to examine long term outcomes such as graduation rates, retention and career readiness.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative approach with a descriptive research design to examine the selected issue. Data were collected through a cross-sectional survey conducted among Bachelor of Science students at the University of Kotli Azad Jammu and Kashmir (UOKAJK). All BS students were considered as the population of the study. From this population, a sample was selected using convenience sampling, allowing the researcher to include both male and female students who were easily accessible. A structured questionnaire was developed as the main tool for data collection. It was based on a five-point Likert scale and organized into three sections to cover different aspects of the study. To ensure the validity of the instrument, it was reviewed by two experts in the field of education. In addition, a pilot study was conducted before the actual data collection to check the clarity, reliability, and usability of the questionnaire. For this purpose, 30 questionnaires were distributed among students, and their feedback helped refine the instrument. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure reliability of instrument which was

.711. The response rate was 100%. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for data analysis .

RESULTS

Following are the results of the study on the basis of objectives and research questions

Table 1

S. No	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I feel more engaged during assessments based on collaborative tasks.	3.58	1.384
2	Project based assessments help me demonstrate my understanding better.	4.16	0.897
3	Peer assessments activities encourage meaningful collaboration with classmates.	4.10	1.119
4	Self-assessment tasks help me reflect on my strengths.	3.89	1.249
5	Our teacher assess students through systematic observation during class.	4.11	1.036
6	My collection of work over time shows my progress.	3.97	1.160
7	I can explain clearly through presentations.	3.85	1.168
8	I can visually organized concepts to show understanding.	3.92	1.144
9	I feel more confident when I know the criteria for grading my assignments.	3.96	1.036
10	Semantic differential scales make it easier to express my opinion.	3.75	1.342

The data indicate that students generally perceive the use of various alternative assessment methods at the university level, as reflected by mean scores ranging from 3.58 to 4.16. Among these, project-based assessment appears to be the most prominent, with the highest mean score, suggesting that students find it particularly effective for demonstrating their understanding. Teacher observation and peer assessment also show relatively high mean values, indicating that collaborative and continuous evaluation practices are commonly applied. In addition, approaches such as maintaining a collection of work over time, clarity in grading

criteria, visual representation of ideas, and self-assessment are moderately emphasized, highlighting the presence of reflective and performance-based assessment strategies. On the other hand, methods like presentations, semantic differential scales, and collaborative task-based engagement receive comparatively lower mean scores, though they are still positively rated. Overall, the findings suggest that a range of alternative assessment methods is being implemented, with greater focus on project-based, peer, observational, and portfolio-based practices, while some techniques are used less frequently.

Table 2

S. No	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I sometime face difficulties completing assessments due to my learning style.	2.87	1.218
2	The pace of instruction supports learners with different abilities.	2.88	1.330
3	Time limitations in assessments are not suitable for my learning needs.	2.49	1.318
4	Cultural differences affect how I interpret assessment instructions.	2.93	1.793
5	The university provides adequate support for students with disabilities.	2.36	1.260
6	Language and learning support services are available for diverse learners.	2.56	1.350

7	Academic pressure causes me significant stress.	2.62	1.423
8	My learning needs are considered in content design.	1.92	0.922
9	I have experienced bias or discrimination on campus.	2.39	1.616
10	Large class size makes it hard for me to actively participate in discussions.	2.48	1.275

The table presents students’ perceptions regarding the needs of diverse learners at the university level. Overall, the mean scores range from 1.92 to 2.93, indicating generally low to moderate agreement with the statements. Students reported moderate challenges related to learning styles (M=2.87) and instructional pace (M=2.88), suggesting that current teaching methods only partially support diverse abilities. Concerns such as cultural differences (M=2.93) and academic stress (M=2.62) also highlight barriers affecting learning experiences.

Lower mean scores for institutional support, including support for students with disabilities (M=2.36), language assistance (M=2.56), and consideration of learning needs in content design (M=1.92), indicate dissatisfaction in these areas. Additionally, issues like perceived bias (M=2.39) and large class sizes (M=2.48) further limit active participation. Overall, the findings suggest that universities need to improve inclusive practices, support services, and teaching strategies to better address the diverse needs of learners.

Table 3
ANOVA

Program

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	160.638	22	7.302	12.044	.000
Within Groups	175.205	289	.606		
Total	335.843	311			

The table presents the results of an ANOVA test conducted to evaluate the effect of alternative assessment methods on diverse learners at the university level. The findings show that the difference between groups is statistically significant, as indicated by the F-value (F = 12.044) and the significance level (Sig. = .000), which is less than 0.05. This means that alternative assessment methods have a meaningful impact on diverse learners. The between-group variance (Mean Square = 7.302) is much higher than the within-group variance (Mean Square = 0.606), suggesting that the variation in students’ responses is largely due to differences in the assessment methods rather than random factors. Therefore, it can be concluded that alternative assessment approaches significantly influence the learning experiences and outcomes of diverse learners at the university level.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that alternative assessment methods are widely used at the university level and are generally viewed positively by students. Approaches such as project-based, peer, observational, and portfolio assessments are the most effective in enhancing understanding, collaboration, and continuous evaluation. Although other methods like presentations and self-assessment are used, they receive less emphasis. The findings highlight that these alternative strategies significantly improve learning experiences for diverse learners compared to traditional methods. The traditional assessment methods may not equally support all learners, while alternative approaches better address diversity in learning needs. However, challenges related to learning styles, cultural differences, and limited institutional support still exist. These issues suggest that current systems are not fully inclusive.

Therefore, adopting alternative assessment strategies can help reduce these barriers, promote fairness, and enhance student engagement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following are the recommendations on the basis of results.

1. Universities should increase the use of diverse alternative assessment methods to address different learning needs.
2. Teachers should emphasize project-based, peer, portfolio, and observational assessments for better student engagement.
3. Training programs should be provided to faculty to effectively design and implement alternative assessments.
4. Institutions should promote inclusive assessment practices that consider cultural and learning differences.
5. Greater focus should be given to underutilized methods such as self-assessment and presentations.
6. Universities should provide adequate academic support services to help students cope with assessment challenges.
7. Flexible assessment strategies should be developed to reduce academic pressure and support diverse learners.
8. Continuous feedback mechanisms should be strengthened to improve student learning outcomes.
9. Policies should be revised to integrate student-centered assessment approaches at all levels.
10. Further research should be encouraged to explore innovative and effective assessment practices.

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