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# STUDENTS LEARNING OUTCOMES BASED ASSESSMENT AT SECONDARY LEVEL IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA: EXPLORING CHALLENGES FACED BY TEACHERS

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## Abstract

The current qualitative study aimed to explore the barriers regarding the newly implemented Students Learning Outcomes Based Assessment (SLOBA) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The population consisted of all the secondary schools' teachers of district Peshawar. Drawing on semi structured in-depth interviews with 32 public and private schools' teachers selected by purposive sampling technique and two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with 10-12 SSTs each, the study captured the practical realities and challenges in implementing SLOBA. The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis technique. Findings of the study revealed significant challenges including overcrowded classrooms, time constraints, workload, resistance to change, diverse learning abilities and lack of training and resources. These barriers collectively hindered the effective implementation of SLOBA.

**Key Words:** SLOBA, Challenges, Overcrowded Classrooms, Workload, Resistance to Change, Diverse Learning Abilities

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Assessment in education is a comprehensive term. For Lacy and Williams (2018), assessment involves the systematic use of methods and tools by educators to evaluate and document academic achievements and skills development. For Stassen (2001), assessment is the systematic collection and analysis of information about the learner to improve his learning. Miller, et al (2009) have defined it as an integrated component of education to determine the nature and extent of students learning and development. Assessment is a very important component of any educational setup, as it makes it successful in achieving its goals. Since the nature of education is flexible and dynamic, emphasizing the need for adoptability, innovation and continuous change. So, in due course, the changing needs of education and technology require the assessment techniques to evolve and go beyond the traditional methods. Almost all nations of the world are navigating the complexities of educational transformation and are grappling with the challenges of implementing educational reforms. Outcomes Based Education (OBE) is the most prominent educational change that enables the learner to apply knowledge in different areas and situations (White, 2000). This approach has a focus on the end results of each process, called learning outcomes. The assessment component of this new educational approach is called outcomes-based assessment or Students Learning Outcomes-based Assessment (SLOBA). Traditionally, assessment focused on rote memorization and recall, with an emphasize on old-style tests and exams. However, with the increasing recognition of the importance of skills like critical thinking, creativity and problem solving, assessment practices have changed to have deeper learning outcomes. The focus has shifted from simple content knowledge to assessing students ability to apply analyze and evaluate information. This shift has led to the adoption of more reliable and immersive assessment methods. One significant trend or shift that is happening today is a transition or move towards students learning outcomes-based education (SLOBE) and assessment (SLOBA).

In contrast with traditional assessment methods, SLOBA approach lays great stress on the learning strategy where clearly defined and specific objectives are described to the students enabling them to set personal targets and strategies to achieve them. Hence, in this approach, students are responsible for their own learning and assessment is based on the outcomes rather than content being taught (Hung, 2021).

In Pakistan the secondary level students have to pass a standardized board exam managed by the regional Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE). The BISE conducts examinations annually and achievement of 40% marks is the criterion of passing examination (Shah, 2003). This external examination system is inherited from the British system (pre-independence time) and it did not change even in post-independence times and the consequent developments have reinforced this hold of exams in the education system of the country (Khattak, 2012).

The most prominent step in transition towards alternative methods at secondary schools level in Pakistan is adopting SLO based curriculum in 2006 and SLOBA for secondary level classes in 2021. The Inter Boards Chairman Committee (IBCC) recommended all BISEs to implement SLOBA for secondary level aiming shift from rote learning to concept based learning. In response to this, Federal, Punjab & Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa BISEs initiated the process of adopting SLOBA and developed model SLO based papers. In this regard BISEs of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa claimed that 2022 and onward examinations will be SLO based in the light of developed model papers. In addition to model papers, a document was uploaded explaining the three levels (Knowledge,

understanding, Application) of cognitive domain, along with examples from relevant syllabi.

Researches have shown the significance of teachers' perceptions in effective implementation of any approach, underscoring their crucial role in determining its success. Positive perceptions are linked to increase adoption and effective implementation (Khan, 2006). Similarly, negative perceptions have shown to hinder the effectiveness, leading to resistance and decreased motivation (Rehmani, 2011). Therefore, understanding teachers' perceptions is essential to address the challenges regarding SLOBA.

Teachers face different challenges while implementing assessment processes. As revealed by different researchers at international level. However little work seems to be done in Pakistan, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. For example, Norah (2007) conducted a research study in South Africa about perceptions of educators regarding SLOBA and concluded that the factors affecting implementation of SLOBA are inadequate training, absence of institutional support and guide, insufficient resources, overcrowded classrooms and time constraints. Time management, lack of training and overcrowded classrooms were three major challenges in SLOBA, stated by Chana, et al (2023).

Similarly, other challenges associated with SLOBA, documented by various studies include lack of faculty training (Yasmin & Yasmeen 2021) and resource constraints (Son & Lee 2020). Ahmad and Malik (2019) have identified that proper theoretical knowledge & practical training should be provided to teachers for the implementation of SLOBA. Hung (2021) stated that SLOB approach has gained very much attention in many parts of the globe. Teachers show positive perceptions towards SLOBA despite some challenges like mixed level of learners and the level of difficulty of SLOs for weaker students. Jacob (2001) conducted a study about outcomes-based approach in Johannesburg and stated that an important point of criticism on SLOBA is that the assessment practices are unclear. He further stated that SLOBA is all about higher order thinking skills as well as decision making skills that are particularly difficult to assess when using a formal system. He stated that in the current school settings, the implementation of SLOBA is unclear. Warnich, et al, (2014) conducted another study in South Africa and conducted a national survey amongst the stratified random sample of history teachers in South Africa to explore their perceptions of SLOBA practices. Findings of the study revealed that factors such as inadequate training, the lack of resources and other support material, an increased workload and a lack of support from curriculum experts contributed to the perception that there was insufficient support for effective SLOBA implementation. On the other hand, inadequate knowledge and in effective understanding of SLOBA practices were also stated as implementation issues.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

While SLOBA has been widely adopted in higher education institutions, its implementation in schools remained limited. Now, when this approach is adopted by BISEs, the post implementation results are alarming, which indicates that there must be challenges for teachers which may hinder its potential to improve student learning outcomes. These challenges can result the gap between the intended & actual implementation of SLOBA. This study aimed to investigate the challenges of secondary schools' teachers in Distt. Peshawar regarding SLOBA, in order to identify the barriers to effective implementation of SLOBA.

### **1.2 Significance of the Study**

Globally, researchers are focusing on SLO based teaching and assessments due to its importance, but very little significant work has been done in Pakistan specially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Hence this study will address this gap and will contribute to the existing literature in SLOBA, providing fresh perspectives from teachers in district Peshawar and enriching the national discourse on educational assessments. The study will provide a contextualized understanding of the challenges acknowledging the factors influencing SLOBA in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. By exploring the challenges faced by teachers, the study can inform strategies to enhance assessment practices ultimately improving students learning outcomes and leading to more effective teaching and learning by providing a guide line regarding SLOBA. Lastly, the current study can lay ground work for future researches on SLOBA, enabling further exploration about the topic.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In order to answer the research question, the researcher managed to design a framework for study that employed qualitative research approach. Since the aim of this study was to explore the challenges of Secondary School Teachers regarding SLOBA implementation, qualitative approach was the most suitable choice.

### **2.1 Research Design**

The present qualitative research study was performed using an exploratory research design. According to Saunders, et al. (2012), the exploratory research design simply explores the research questions, allowing space for further studies. This design is very suitable for studies where enough is not known about a phenomenon.

### **2.2 Population of the Study**

The population of current study consisted of all secondary schools' teachers of public and private schools of district Peshawar. According to the report of Bureau of statistics 2022, there are total of 144 public and about 275 private secondary schools in district Peshawar and the total number of secondary school teachers is 1532.

### **2.3 Sample and Sampling Technique**

For current study a total of 32 secondary school's teachers were selected. The researcher selected 16 SSC teachers from public schools and 16 from private schools of district Peshawar. The age and experience of selected teachers was varied.

Sample for current study was selected using purposive sampling technique which involves selection of participants in the light of characteristics needed by the study (Johnson, 2012).

#### **2.4 Data Collection Tools:**

For current study, the semi structured in depth interview was preferred for in- depth exploration of the phenomena (Cresswell, 2012) enabling flexibility in the interview process (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) and providing high quality of data (Cresswell, 2012).

According to Scott and Usher (1999), the most useful tool for qualitative data inquiry is interview. It is the best and most suitable way of obtaining others stories, experiences, descriptions and perceptions in a qualitative study. Further, the researcher arranged two focus group discussions comprising 6-12 SSTs from public and private schools. It helped a lot in exploring collective perspectives on SLOBA implementation.

Blending two methodologies can yield richer insights. By integrating these tools, the researcher combined individual narratives with collective discussions to better understand the nuances of thoughts and experiences.

#### **2.5 Data Analysis**

Data collected from semi structured in-depth interviews and FGDs were analyze using thematic analysis technique by Braun & Clark (2006). Thematic analysis has been widely used in educational researches and has proven to be in effective approach for answering qualitative research questions (Ivankova, 2023).

### **3. FINDINGS / RESULTS OF THE STUDY:**

The participants of the current study, identified certain challenges or constraints that hinder the effective and smooth implementation of SLOBA practices. The findings of the study revealed seven main challenges to the effective implementation of SLOBA. These challenges re explained here;

#### **3.1 Overcrowded Classroom**

Data revealed that one of the primary concerns for public sector teachers is the struggling to effectively manage overcrowded classrooms. For most of the public- sector teachers, managing overcrowded classrooms is one of the most significant challenges teachers have to face when implementing SLOBA, with large size of class, teachers struggle to provide individualize attention and assessment which is critical for SLOBA success. As one teacher noted:

*“Here in our public sector, in a class of fifty to seventy students, it’s impossible to assess each student accurately. The mother of all challenges, in my opinion, is the large and unmanageable classes. Formative assessment becomes difficult that’s why, we have to depend on summative assessments.”*

Another respondent confirmed that teaching and assessing students in an overcrowded classroom is stressful.

*“Large number of students, camped together in one classroom are difficult to be assessed. Assessing so many students is very stressful. We have to spend most of time to get the learners to settle down and it irritates me as I am unable to get their attention.”*

Another important pint raised by one participant was that overcrowded classrooms affect the academic achievement of students. They may ignore their tasks due to large number of students. The respondent replied:

*“Since we are unable to check the home work and assignments of many students, so some learners ignore homework because they knew that teacher did not have time to check all. This results in poor formative assessment.”*

#### **3.2 Time Constraints**

Majority of the teachers brought up the issue of time constraints. For them SLOBA requires both formative as well as summative modes of assessment that demands a considerable time. Teachers have to maintain a balance between teaching time and assessment time. For more than half of the participants maintaining this balance was reported problematic and stressful. The issue of time constraint was cited by both public and private teachers, as they reported that the additional workload and tasks related to SLOBA took away from instructional time. As one of the respondents stated:

*“With the implementation of SLOBA, I am constantly working. I have to make lesson plan, I have to design assessments, I have to give timely feedback leaving very little time for actual teaching.”*

Similarly, another teacher expressed her views about the time and frustration of wanting to innovate and try new strategies but being bound to a packed term or semester schedule. This statement highlights the tension between covering syllabus and implementing SLOBA methods. The teacher noted:

*“I know SLOBA demands a variety of assessment practices.....I want to try new things, but our academic period is so packed that there is simply no room to do new experiments.”*

The frustration of another participant in this regard is summarized in the following comment:

*“To me, every form of assessment is equally important and effective in one way or the other.... but the main problem is time management. Assessment takes lots of our time. There is lot of paperwork that needs to be recorded. My cupboard is full of files and papers. It is very stressful.”*

#### **3.3 Diverse Learning Abilities:**

The implementation of SLOBA at secondary level assumes that students have a solid foundation in basic concepts. However, a significant challenge arises when students lack this foundational knowledge, hindering their ability to understand and apply knowledge.

Students who have not had the opportunity to develop a strong academic base in their earlier years often struggle to keep up with the demands of SLOBA. As a result, teachers have to face a challenge of bridging these

foundational gaps.

This challenge was highlighted by many of teachers from both public and private schools. As one of the participants stated:

*“As you know in 2022, SLOBA was implemented at secondary level. We had students having different backgrounds. I mean academic backgrounds. All of them were not having a strong base not having fundamental skills. It was very challenging for us to take all students with us. Sometimes, even the simplest and basic concepts were to be repeated due to those weak students.”*

Teachers also specified the diverse learning styles and abilities with in the same class as a challenge that impacts assessment process. One participant articulated:

*“As we know well that all students learn at a different speed and in a different way. We have generally three types of students. The weak, the average and the brilliant. Assessing all of them with the same tool, same speed and same time is not justice with them. But we have to do this. Because assessing them according to their individual needs is impossible in classify students according to their common learning styles.”*

The same point was highlighted by another teacher in this way:

*“One of the biggest challenges I face in assessing students is assessing students with a variety of learning abilities. It’s like trying to fit different shaped puzzle pieces in to one standard mold. It just doesn’t work. There are two solutions, either to rethink our assessment method or to divide the students in different sections according to their academic excellence.”*

### **3.4 Resistance to Change**

Resistance to change was challenge highlighted by a few teachers. Every new change has to face certain resistance. Same is the case with SLOBA. Teachers pointed out three types of resistance towards the newly implemented SLOBA.

First type of resistance is that offered by teachers. Two teachers felt the difficulty in moving away from traditional assessment methods. Mostly the senior teachers resist to change that might be due to the pre-established bonds with traditional methods. As one senior teacher from public sector stated his negative perception and his resistance in this way:

*“As I told you, I have been teaching in public sector for more than twenty five years. I have seen many reforms come and go. SLOBA is also a flavor like those. I don’t think it’s going to make a real difference in student learning until and unless I am not convinced by it fruitfulness, I am still using traditional methods of teaching as well as assessing my students. And I am quite satisfied with it.*

The second type of resistance is that offered by students. Students also resist new methodologies. They may be accustomed to traditional methods and may resist the change. This type of resistance was seen during the early time of implementation as one of the respondents stated:

*“When SLOBA was first implemented by the BISEP in 2022, most of the students were showing resistance, they were not receptive to the new method. They actually didn’t understand what was expected of them. They wanted clear cut answers and straight forward questions. It’s been a challenge to get them to adapt.”*

A third type of resistance is that offered by educational institutions. Only two teachers from public sector, notably reported facing resistance from their institutions. One teacher cited:

*“Honestly, as a teacher, I have to follow the school policies regarding assessment and completion of syllabus. While, I personally believe in the potential of SLOBA, the reality is that our school has it’s own set of exams procedures that I have to follow I am ultimately bound to the school’s requirements. Sometimes I feel frustrated as I am unable to assess my students in the way that I think would be more effective.”*

### **3.5 Lack of Training**

An overwhelming majority of participants cited a lack of training as a major challenge and obstacle to implement SLOBA effectively. As one teacher expressed in a very straightforward way that:

*“To be very straight forward, we really never had a training about SLOBA.”*

Teachers knew that training is essential for the proper implementation of any approach. One of the participants claimed that she has not received any training regarding SLOBA, however she is known to SLOBA due to her B.Ed and M.Ed she noted:

*“I have been teaching for many years, and my B.Ed and M.Ed have given me a solid foundation in education. I never received specific training on SLOBA. I am figuring it out an I go, relying on my own knowledge and experience. I think training is necessary and training is lacking.”*

During their interview, each participant was asked —if he/she wants to undergo further training regarding SLOBA? An overwhelming majority teachers verbalized a strong interest for further training, to enhance their skills and knowledge. By seeking additional training, teachers aimed to improve their ability to design appropriate assessment, as one teacher expressed:

*“You know there is always a room for improvement. I believe that further training in SLOBA will equip me with skills. So, I support need for training regarding SLOBA.*

### **3.6 Lack of Resources**

Data collected for current study also revealed that the implementation of SLOBA is effected by a significant lack of resources. Since the assessment of skills and application of knowledge requires practical examination, without adequate resources, teachers face difficulty in providing students with the opportunity to demonstrate their learning. Teachers also highlighted the need for availability of appropriate learning and assessment support material.

Of all the respondents, almost half reported that they have to struggle with a lack of resources. As one teacher reported:

*“Since I teach biology at secondary level, use of AV aids is very effective. Students learn better when they practically do something or observe it live. So, I need lots and lots of resources. But most of the time we have to face the shortage or lack of resources.”*

Another respondent mentioned the same challenge and complained about the shortage of learning resources in this way:

*“No doubt, lack of resources is a pull down factor for SLOBA. as it can not be implemented fully unless we have trained educators and adequate materials for example computers models, instruments for experimentations and equipped libraries.”*

### 3.7 Work Load

Another most significant challenge that emerged from the current study is the issue of workload. Data revealed that majority of teachers both from public and private sectors perceived workload as a major obstacle in the proper implementation of SLOBA. The findings of the study support that the shift towards SLOBA requires teachers to invest significant time and efforts in conducting both formal and informal assessments, which, no doubt, is time consuming and labor intensive. As a result, many teachers feel overwhelmed by the increased workload, which can hinder their ability to effective implementation of SLOBA.

Similarly, another respondent from public school replied:

*“I am not opposing the idea of SLOBA, but you know it’s great just in theory. In practice, it’s a different story. There are many challenges workload is crushing, leaving no time for practical activities and more.”*

The respondents of the study expressed that the increased assessment practices with the implementation of SLOBA not only led to a greater workload, but it’s also stressful to maintain a balance between different activities.

As one respondent commented:

*“There is a lot of work to do, a lot of paper work to be recorded. I have never been so buried in paper work as I am now with SLOBA. Sometimes I think that I have dedicated my life to teaching, not to paper work. It’s just reducing my time in connecting with my students.”*

## 4. DISCUSSION

The implementation of SLOBA in secondary schools, though promising in theory, has encountered multiple challenges with in the education system, as revealed by the qualitative data. The approach demands not only a shift in instructional design and assessment philosophy but also changes in teachers ‘competencies and work conditions. However, such a transformation becomes difficult in environments characterized by limited resources, traditional teaching cultures, lack of trainings and high student teacher ratio. Similar challenges have been reported in other developing countries through educational researches (Norah, 2007; Jacob, 2001; Yen, et al., 2024; Chana et al., 2023). In the context of Pakistan, these challenges seem to be more pronounced, where structural and contextual constraints affect the overall quality of education. So is the case with SLOBA, it’s successful implementation is hindered by challenges related to overcrowded classrooms, workload, limited resources lack of training, diverse learning styles of students and resistance to change, as revealed by conversations with teachers. The finding aligns with several studies in the literature that have highlighted large class size, time limitation, resistance, lack of training and resources as major barriers to the successful, smooth and effective implementation of SLOBA. For instance, Norah (2007), Yasmin & Yasmeen (2021), Chana, et al. (2023), Yen, et al. (2024) noted that these barriers often lead to superficial coverage of content rather than deep learning. These researchers also found that when the teacher student ratio is high, it becomes nearly impossible to provide individualized attention or maintain authentic assessment records for each learner, both of which are principles of SLOBA. Black & William, (2009) also stated that overcrowded classrooms discourage the use of innovative assessment tools, as these require time, detailed observation and frequent feedback. As a result, teachers tend to revert to traditional summative form of testing that are easier to measure specific SLOs effectively. Norah (2007) also concluded time constraints as a major challenge affecting the smooth implementation of SLOBA, in Pakistani context, Chana, et al. (2023) documented lack of time, resources and training as major challenges associated with SLOBA implementation. Killen (2000) asserts that SLOBA demands that teachers provide multiple opportunities and varied methods to students. However, when diversity in learning abilities is not properly addressed, weaker or slower learners tend to lag behind, while advanced learners remain under challenged.

Studies conducted in Pakistan, such as those by Ahmad & Malik (2019) and Erfan (2000) also support this argument indicating that public schools with limited resources and high student enrolment struggle to implement student centered reforms like SLOBA. Hence, overcrowded classrooms not only increase teachers workload but also compromise the validity and reliability of SLOBA. without managing class sizes and adequate training and resources the goals of SLOBA remain largely unfulfilled.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Teachers encountered a range of inter-connected challenges while implementing SLOBA, many of which stemmed from structural, pedagogical and contextual limitations within the schools and indicated a gap between policy and practices. These challenges were time constraints, overcrowded classrooms, resistance to change, diverse learning abilities, workload, lack of resources and lack of training. These barriers often reduce the smooth

and effective implementation of SLOBA and make it a mechanical compliance exercise rather than a meaningful pedagogical shift. The perceptions and practices are also affected by these challenges and complexities. No doubt the insufficient resources and overcrowded classrooms along with limited time together hinder the ability to experiment with assessment methods. Teachers, though theoretically aware of the benefits of SLOBA feel burdened by additional workload and lack of time. One of the most significant barriers was the lack of adequate training and professional development. These complexities create uncertainty and inconsistencies in assessment design and a reliance on traditional summative methods. These challenges collectively shape the teachers' perceptions and contributed to the mixed attitude observed in the study, highlighting the need for systematic reforms, sustained training and supportive institutional environment to ensure successful and meaningful implementation of SLOBA.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the current qualitative study certain recommendations are proposed to strengthen the effective implementation of SLOBA across secondary schools of district Peshawar.

1. Schools are recommended to develop a school based SLOBA\_ policy in order to guide students and teachers about all aspects of SLOBA
2. Encourage and support teachers to attend SLOBA training programs
3. Promote a supportive assessment culture where SLOBA is understood as an effective process rather than merely a compliances requirement
4. Ensure availability of teaching and assessment resources to support SLOBA
5. Improve classroom conditions and reduce overcrowding by taking steps such as reorganizing sections, adjusting timetables or advocating for additional teaching staff.
6. Department of education is recommended to provide comprehensive and continuous training on SLOBA, ensuring subject specific capacity building.
7. Formulate clear policy guidelines including assessment blueprints, benchmarks and rubrics to ensure uniform practices across schools.
8. Allocate adequate resources to schools and address structural challenges to make SLOBA more feasible and effective.

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