

**Gap Analysis between School-Based Assessment Implementation and Policy Framework:
Alignment Challenges and Future Directions**

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ABSTRACT

In education systems, formative and competency-based assessment models are progressively prioritized due to the emergence of novel strategies in the field. School-based assessment has become a significant strategy for assessing learners' intellectual, emotional, and psychomotor development. However, a persistent gap exists between policy and classroom realities. This study explores the organization of and inconsistencies between the Assessment Policy Framework (APF) and School-Based Assessment (SBA) in educational institutes. Data were collected using a qualitative case study approach with semi-structured interviews. Furthermore, document analysis involved ten participants (teachers and administrators) from the designated schools. Five core themes were discovered after the thematic analysis: 1) policy precision, 2) application paradoxes, 3) educator assignments, 4) capability preparation gaps, and 5) recommendations for enhanced alignment. Research has shown that the APF has an extensive policy structure. Operational challenges include unclear guidelines, resource shortages, inconsistent staff training, and excessive paperwork. The research demonstrates that teachers tend to follow policy guidelines only in appearance, but adjustments must occur from the school level upwards. This study concludes by providing practical recommendations for improving policy implementation coherence through local professional development programs, digital platforms, community-based policy creation, and combined monitoring protocols. The complete potential of SBA as a meaningful learner-centered assessment tool depends on solving these problems.

Keywords: Assessment Policy Framework, School-Based Assessment, Policy-Practice Gap, Formative Assessment, Education Reform, Thematic Analysis, Implementation Challenges

INTRODUCTION

The emerging shift toward skill-based education has amplified the emphasis on reliable assessment strategies in school education. The most commonly used mechanism in this revolution is the School-Based Assessment (SBA). It aims to capture students' all-round development across the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of Bloom's taxonomy. The Assessment Policy Framework (APF) familiarized with committing to SBA through principles. This combination ensures that assessment is a meaningful process, and learner-centered approaches are helpful in students' overall evaluations. Nevertheless, a significant reason persists for explaining the APF policy in classroom practice. However, their implementation is often hindered by numerous

limitations. This may be due to inconsistent training and a gap between policy goals and national testing regimes (Ireen & Daka, 2024).

Educational institutions worldwide have prioritized authentic assessment methods owing to the recent global adoption of competency-based education. School-based assessment (SBA) has established itself as a central evaluation method for assessing students' complete educational growth in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. The Assessment Policy Framework (APF) offers fundamental principles that will smooth the execution of school-based assessments in educational institutions. Several implementation gaps persist after the policy intentions embedded in the Assessment Policy Framework (APF) are translated into classroom- and School-Based Assessment (SBA) practices.

Studies indicate that teachers understand SBA and are willing to use it; however, their workload challenges prevent them from deploying it effectively (Samsudin et al., 2014). Educators experience multiple obstacles because they receive insufficient training and lack monitoring networks, and their assessment methods remain disconnected from national tests (Rahman et al., 2021). A proper SBA system requires strong evaluation tools; however, numerous schools have insufficient monitoring systems and feedback mechanisms to conduct these evaluations (Ghazali et al., 2016).

Implementing SBA practices makes teachers in different regions follow procedures symbolically because systemic factors such as classroom overpopulation, resource shortages, and limited time exist (Ireen & Daka, 2024). Multiple challenges in real-world education stem from the gap between APF goals and actual classroom practices.

This study investigates the extent of disparity and overlap and recommends changes to the implementation of APF and SBA standards through an extensive gap analysis. This study utilizes empirical research and teacher accounts to present strategic proposals for bridging policy-practice gaps in school assessment quality improvement.

The discrepancy between educational guidelines and classroom execution diminishes the advantages of SBA, including learner empowerment, thoughtful assessment, and student-led teaching methods. School-based assessment is now an administrative obligation rather than a purposeful teaching method in various educational settings (Ireen & Daka, 2024).

A thorough investigation of the differences between the APF's intentions for the SBA and current SBA implementation practices is necessary because of the pressing need for analysis. Discovering these gaps helps policymakers, educators, and stakeholders create specific improvement strategies that minimize educational gaps and realize the full potential of assessment within schools.

The assumptions behind the SBA policy and its classroom application are critical. SBA is a vital plan for establishing the quality of assessments and educational equity. This study investigated the extent of the disproportion between APF and SBA practices. The root causes of this gap are a lack of research and teachers' lack of experience. Addressing implementation plans, such as resource

scarcity, teacher workload, and systemic disconnects, is crucial. The study at hand aims to offer planned and context-sensitive recommendations that are required (Rahman et al., 2021)

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the alignment between the Assessment Policy Framework and the implementation of school-based assessments in schools.
2. To discover teachers' challenges in implementing SBA effectively at the school level in Punjab.

Research Questions

1. What are the key alignments and gaps between the Assessment Policy Framework (APF) and the implementation of School-Based Assessment (SBA) in schools?
2. What challenges do educators face in implementing SBA effectively, and how can these challenges be addressed to improve alignment with APF directives?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The global implementation of School-Based Assessment (SBA) in educational institutions resulted from adopting competency-based and formative assessment models that embed assessment within classroom practices for teaching and learning improvement. The Assessment Policy Framework (APF) is a directive for maintaining equal, effective, and unified SBA execution in educational institutions. Research shows that policies continue to mismatch classroom practices; therefore, a detailed gap analysis is necessary.

To achieve educational objectives, the SBA evaluates three learning domains: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor (Ghazali et al., 2016). In the Pakistani context, the focus is mostly on the cognitive domain, emphasizing critical thinking or higher-order thinking skills (Azmat et al., 2021; Jamil, Mehmood, & Aziz, 2024; Jamil, Mehmood, & Noorani, 2024; Jamil & Muhammad, 2019; Naseer et al., 2022). The APF, along with other policies, establishes these principles through departure and accountability frameworks. Implementing formative assessment principles through national policies in Ireland and Zambia often results in inward government institutions and, therefore, neglects the intended practices (Ireen & Daka, 2024).

Teachers demonstrated strong readiness and understanding of the SBA, although these positive findings compensated for their inconvenient workload and time allocation. A study in Malaysia revealed that teachers had adequate SBA knowledge, but an excessive workload limited their capability in meaningful evaluation practices (Samsudin et al., 2014). The lack of proper training and insufficient administrative support are significant obstacles to the implementation of SBA for English language educators in Malaysia and Bangladesh (Joachim & Hashim, 2021).

Insufficient infrastructure, inadequate training, and limited resource deployment create significant roadblocks to productive SBA implementation. Ghazali (2016) created a validated model demonstrating how the implementation of successful SBA rests on “attitude, understanding, monitoring, and infrastructure” (Ghazali et al., 2016). Teachers faced implementation challenges

with the SBA because classes exceeded capacity, yet teachers were short-staffed, and facility laboratories were insufficient at educational institutions in Zambia (Ireen & Daka, 2024).

Research demonstrates that APF frameworks have an existing problem with practice-policy mismatches because they do not properly understand real school situations. Educational policies support formative assessment methods and learner feedback; however, high-stakes testing cultures remain dominant, preventing genuine SBA adoption (Murchan, 2018). Research indicates that policymakers tend to terminate local requirements in decisions because this practice leads to unsatisfactory adaptation and symbolic implementation (Thulare, 2018).

The quality assessment of SBA practices depends on reliable measurement tools, which are absent in numerous assessment systems. According to Ghazali (2016), a successful instrument development process showcased how the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) evaluation model generates effective assessment methods (Ghazali, 2016).

The combination of blockchain technology and digital platforms has emerged as a proposed solution for updating SBA systems while managing teachers' workloads to improve data protection, scalability, and efficiency (Shuhaimi et al., 2025).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research combines data from semi-structured interviews with document analysis and adopts thematic analysis to interpret the qualitative data findings, according to accepted standards. This study opted for thematic analysis because it provides flexibility and rigor in identifying meaningful patterns in text data that match the research goal of analyzing policy-practice differences. The interpretation of qualitative data for this study was based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis process: (1) data familiarization, (2) initial code creation, (3) theme identification, (4) theme review, (5) theme definition and naming, and (6) report production. These steps guide researchers through qualitative data interpretation with a structured system, allowing them to adapt their approach according to participant-generated findings.

In the initial stage, the researchers dedicated time to studying both the interview transcripts and policy documents to gain a deep understanding of the content through repeated readings. The researchers documented preliminary observations and notes to help identify patterns and recurring ideas during this stage. Qualitative analysis software (NVivo) and manual or spreadsheet-based (MS Word or Excel) coding methods were used in the research process during phase two. To begin coding, the researchers must identify specific text segments through phrases, sentences, or paragraphs and assign brief labels to those sections. Researchers who review the material assign "insufficient training" to portions addressing training constraints while designating "inflexible syllabus" to parts that outline strict education requirements.

In the third phase, the researchers grouped similar codes into significant themes that captured repeatable ideas in various participant accounts. Relevant themes from Research Objective 1 about identifying APF-SBA implementation alignments and discrepancies will focus on "policy clarity," "curriculum alignment," alongside "assessment guidelines usage" and "inconsistent

implementation.” The analysis of Research Objective 2 (to explore challenges and suggest improvements) will produce the following themes: “teacher workload,” “lack of training,” “resource constraints,” “monitoring and feedback,” and “recommendations for support.” During this step, the researchers examined and enhanced the identified themes to guarantee that they matched within their boundaries and showed apparent differences. Overlapping or vague themes were consolidated or split to better capture their unique relevance. The coherence of the themes was checked against both the coded extracts and the entire dataset to ensure that they accurately represented the participants’ views.

The fifth phase involved defining and naming the themes to clarify their scope and meaning. For example, a theme such as “symbolic compliance” may describe situations where teachers formally follow SBA procedures without meaningfully integrating them into teaching and learning. Clear theme definitions supported a logical narrative structure when presenting the results. The themes were synthesized in the final phase into a coherent and interpretive narrative report that addressed the research questions. Quotes from the participants will be embedded to illustrate the key points and voice the data. Document analysis (such as policy texts, school SBA reports, and guidelines) will be triangulated with the interview data to support or challenge the emerging interpretations and validate the findings.

Data triangulation through interviews and documents enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of this study. Additionally, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with selected participants to ensure that their interpretations accurately reflected their perspectives. An audit trail of coding decisions, theme development, and memo writing was maintained to strengthen the study’s transparency and dependability. By grounding the analysis in a rigorous and systematic framework, this study aimed to produce valid, trustworthy, and context-rich insights into the implementation of SBA under the APF, identifying both areas of effective alignment and critical gaps that must be addressed in the future.

Theme 1: Policy Clarity and Interpretation

Staff members’ comprehension of the APF exceeded the substantial variations between individuals. Most educational professionals understood that the framework existed; however, many teachers were confused about its specific requirements. Teaching staff interpreted the SBA guidelines differently because the guidelines used ambiguous terms, and there was insufficient policy documentation. Teachers manifest varying interpretations of APF, resulting in inconsistent implementation practices between different schools.

“The policy is there, yes, but I do not understand exactly what I am supposed to do with it. The terms are too technical, and nobody explained them properly.”
(Participant 4, Primary School Teacher)

The results indicate that teachers have divergent interpretations of the APF because the original language is either vague or too complex for comprehension, which requires better informational campaigns for policy dissemination.

Theme 2: Implementation Inconsistencies

Standardization attempts in assessment did not stop SBA assessments from showing significant implementation differences between schools and teachers within the same educational institutions. Different leadership approaches, resource availability, and teacher self-confidence in continuous assessment practices generated this variance in the SBA implementation.

“We are told to follow the SBA policy, but every teacher does it differently. Some complete the files to show compliance; real assessment is not happening.”
(Participant 11, High School Teacher)

Multiple teachers implemented the SBA system through formal procedures only, although this approach was referred to by others as "symbolic compliance" because the main focus was on documentation completion instead of learning enhancement. This theme demonstrates a mismatch between official policies associated with the SBA and actual teacher practices in classrooms, thereby threatening the original vision of the APF.

Theme 3: Teacher Workload and Role Strain

Participants reported that increased work intensity was a major obstacle hindering SBA implementing excellence in SBAs. Teachers dedicated significant extra time to producing individual assessment records and benchmark curriculum assessments while performing administrative work without additional support or time compensation.

“I spend more time filling forms than teaching now. SBA feels like an extra burden with no actual benefit to students.”
(Participant 6, Science Teacher)

“There is no support, no extra time given. We are expected to do SBA as if it is just another checkbox.”
(Participant 9, Rural School Headteacher)

Teachers perceived SBA as excessive work that caused stress and led to a loss of academic motivation because they viewed it as a burden rather than an instructional asset. According to this theme, effective and sustainable assessment practices require workload redistribution, time allowances and administrative support.

Theme 4: Capacity and Training Gaps

Most participants identified inadequate training as the main problem in the interviews. Educators reported that their lack of training resulted in their inability to create valuable formative assessments aligned with the APF guidelines. Follow-up support, practical tools, and refresher courses were not provided after the initial workshops.

“We had a workshop once, years ago. Since then, nothing. We do not have any practical training on how to assess skills or attitudes.”
(Participant 2, Middle School Teacher)

“Even the training we received was all theory. We need examples, tools, and real classroom support.”
(Participant 13, Teacher Trainer)

The teaching staff requested practical on-site professional development, which should be accompanied by ongoing mentoring programs. This theme indicates that teacher skill development efforts should be extensive and appropriate for effective program execution.

Theme 5: Recommendations for Improved Alignment

The participants offered various solutions to minimize the gap between APF standards and SBA execution. These include calls for the following reasons:

1. Simplified assessment templates
2. Increased collaboration between schools and district offices
3. Stronger monitoring and feedback loops
4. Technology integration to ease documentation
5. And policy adjustments that consider ground-level realities

“If they want us to take SBA seriously, they need to simplify it and give us proper tools, not just policies.”
(Participant 8, Urban School Teacher)

“Let teachers help shape policy. We know what is happening in classrooms—they do not.”
(Participant 15, District Education Officer)

This theme demonstrates educators’ proactive willingness to contribute to system reform if appropriately engaged, emphasizing the importance of bottom-up policy refinement and inclusive dialogue.

Table 1: Summary of Themes and Alignment with Objectives

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Aligned Research Objective</i>
Policy Clarity and Interpretation	RO1: Identify alignments and discrepancies between APF and SBA implementation
Implementation Inconsistencies	RO1: Identify gaps between stated policy and practical execution
Teacher Workload and Role Strain	RO2: Explore challenges faced by educators in implementing SBA
Capacity and Training Gaps	RO2: Explore implementation barriers and professional development needs
Recommendations for Improved Alignment	RO2: Propose strategies to bridge policy-practice gaps

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to identify differences between the Assessment Policy Framework and practical School-Based Assessment (SBA) practices at the school level in Punjab. The research demonstrates that teachers acknowledge the Assessment Policy Framework but do not fully understand the requirements for its implementation. The findings of the studies in Malaysia and Ghana and this study confirm that teachers simplify or incorrectly understand policies. This is why policies have unclear wording or incomplete documentation (Kudjordji and Narh-Kert, 2024). Educators either refuse to follow the SBA guidelines or provide minimal compliance because they

lack a clear understanding of these requirements. This finding aligns with Zambia's concept of symbolic compliance (Ireen & Daka, 2024).

Different schools showed inconsistent SBA implementation because their approaches depended on leadership backing, resource availability, and professional practice attitudes. Experts in Malaysia and Bangladesh have confirmed through various studies that inconsistent teaching practices occur due to teachers' discretion with SBA support mechanisms and interpretations (Joachim & Hashim, 2021). South Africa, along with Ghana and Malaysia, has experienced the symbolic implementation of the SBA, which has resulted in the abandonment of meaningful pedagogical changes through paperwork compliance (Mdunana, 2012).

The research findings indicated that most teachers throughout this study acknowledged excessive workload as their main challenge in delivering effective SBA practice. Evidence shows that SBA implementation across various nations increases teachers' workloads because administrators fail to provide the necessary administrative support and time (Sidhu et al., 2018). Zambian educators revealed that their implementation of SBA amounted to simple task compliance because the system did not include any reductions in their teaching responsibilities or classroom capacities (Ireen & Daka, 2024).

Teacher training was the most prominent recurring issue because it did not continue beyond the initial introductory workshops. The workshops delivered during approach initiation tend to be standalone events not linked to the modifications teachers encounter in their classroom practice. American teachers in Ghana, Malaysia, and Bangladesh have underlined their requirements for ongoing professional support and mentoring as they develop their assessment skills (Veloo & Md-Ali, 2016).

The participants nominated four practical proposals, which included creating basic assessment instruments while implementing digital system development and ground-based modifications for APF implementation. The submitted guidelines match worldwide requests to build assessment frameworks that are adaptive and inclusive while maintaining flexibility. Emerging technologies, such as blockchain, are supported by research, which shows their capability to handle SBA data and securely decrease administrative workloads (Shuhaimi et al., 2025).

The research findings match a global collection of studies demonstrating that assessment policy guidelines are ineffective in the classroom. Although the SBA has substantial conceptual value, logistical, pedagogical, and cultural implementation problems persist. Policy flexibility, combined with empowered teaching staff, ongoing monitoring, and sustainable training, will help close the assessment policy to the classroom practice gap, which must be implemented according to the local context. The educational future requires the development of assessment approaches that combine communal collaboration and context adaptation, while respecting both teaching practitioners' autonomy and students' unique learning requirements having 21st century having skill based education with life skills which have been emphasized in the current literature (Jamil, Arif, & Shahzadi, 2024; Jamil, Chohan, & Tabassum, 2024; Jamil, Zahra, & Fida, 2024).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

A complete systemic method needs to be implemented to achieve Assessment Policy Framework (APF) goals using School-Based Assessment (SBA) to ensure the goals. The following strategic directions arise from the thematic evidence of this study, while incorporating global research findings:

1. These programs should include mentorship and coaching systems led by master's teachers, practical modules on rubric design, feedback techniques, moderation, and school-based communities of practice for collaborative learning.
2. To reduce teacher resistance and enable meaningful engagement with the SBA, ministries may integrate the SBA into existing teaching and reporting schedules, digitize assessment processes through simple, centralized platforms, and, last but not least, provide time allowances or reduce non-teaching duties to accommodate assessment work.
3. Robust monitoring systems must implement processes that move beyond essential compliance checklists to ensure successful implementation.
4. Involve teachers in co-constructing assessment policy frameworks.
5. Integrate curriculum, instruction, and assessment to effectively utilize SBA as a formative tool that enhances summative achievements.

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