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Effective Summative Assessment Strategies to Enhance Student Learning: A Mixed Method Study

Mashaim Kashif
mashaimkashifsarfraz@gmail.com
MPhil Scholars, Fatima Jinnah Women University

Sunehra Ali
MPhil Scholars, Fatima Jinnah Women University

Pakeeza Sehar
MPhil Scholars, Fatima Jinnah Women University

Dr. Farzana Naheed Salim
Head of Department, Abasyn University, Peshawar
Corresponding Author: * Mashaim Kashif mashaimkashifsarfraz@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This mixed-method study investigated the effectiveness of summative assessment strategies in enhancing student learning outcomes among 8th-grade science students. Utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods, the study measured changes in academic performance through pre- and post-tests and explored teacher and student perceptions via focus group discussions. Quantitative analysis revealed a significant improvement in post-test scores (mean = 12.85) compared to pre-test scores (mean = 6.00), alongside decreased standard deviation, indicating more consistent student performance. However, correlation analysis (r = 0.135, p = 0.569) suggested that the improvement was largely influenced by the summative assessment interventions rather than prior knowledge. Qualitative findings highlighted that project-based assessments and portfolios were preferred over traditional exams, fostering better engagement, critical thinking, and real-world application of knowledge. Both students and teachers identified key challenges, including limited feedback, time constraints, and issues of fairness in standardized testing. The study concluded at innovative, inclusive, and well-aligned summative assessment strategies can significantly contribute to improved student outcomes, provided they were supported by timely feedback were adapted to diverse learning needs.

Keywords: *Summative Assessment, Project-Based Learning ,Critical Thinking ,Inclusive Education ,Student Engagement*

INTRODUCTION

An essential part of education, assessment acted as a link between teaching and learning (Black) Summative assessments were essential for assessing student performance at the end of a unit or course under this framework. Summative assessments provide a whole picture of student performance by measuring the degree to which learning objectives have been reached, in contrast to formative assessments, which are continuous and mostly diagnostic (Timperley, 2007).

At the end of a course, unit, or academic term, summative assessments offer a thorough assessment of students' learning, making them an essential component of the educational process (Wiliam, 2009). It is not the same as formative assessment, which emphasizes continuous feedback and learning

enhancements. Summative assessments provide important information about students' knowledge, abilities, and general academic performance by gauging how well they have met predetermined learning objectives (Brookhart, 2013). Effective summative assessment encouraged reflection, synthesis, and application of knowledge, which improves student learning and engagement in addition to serving as a grading mechanism (McMillan, 2017)

A variety of strategies that go beyond conventional approaches like final examinations or standardized tests were used in effective summative evaluations. Project-based evaluations, performance assignments, and portfolios are examples of innovative teaching strategies that give students the chance to show their understanding in real-world settings (Stiggins, 2005). These tactics place a strong emphasis on cultivating critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities—skills that are crucial in the twenty-first century (Guskey, 2010). Project-based examinations, for instance, demanded that students apply their knowledge to real-world issues, which deepens their comprehension of the material and encourages active participation in the learning process (Wiliam, 2009)

Furthermore, summative assessments are essential for assisting a varied student body. Culturally responsive procedures guaranteed inclusive and equitable evaluations, enabling students from diverse backgrounds to properly showcase their skills (McMillan, 2017). By addressing each student's specific requirements, strategies like differentiated evaluations and multilingual support created an atmosphere in which all students can thrive (Brookhart, 2013). These methods are under education's overarching objective of offering equal chances for learning and success (Stiggins, 2005).

The effectiveness of summative evaluations is largely dependent on how they are created and administered. To guaranteed that tests measure what they are supposed to measure and yield reliable findings, validity and reliability are crucial requirements (Brookhart, 2013). Since it guaranteed that assessments are significant and representative of the desired results, alignment between learning objectives, teaching strategies, and assessment tasks is equally crucial (Stiggins, 2005). Incorporating opportunities for peer and self-evaluation can also help students develop a deeper grasp of their learning progress and improve their metacognitive abilities (Wiliam, 2009).

To sum up, summative assessments are an effective way to gauge and encourage student learning. Teachers may turn summative examinations into a driving force for academic achievement and lifelong learning by using inclusive and varied practices, utilizing technology, and making sure that they are in line with learning objectives (Brookhart, 2013). This essay examined several useful summative assessment techniques that support students' overall growth in addition to measuring learning outcomes.

Problem Statement

The basis of the present research was the necessity to understand the urgency of the integration of summative assessment practices and the current demands of the educational process in the 21st century, especially the development of creativity, critical thinking, and the ability to solve various problems. Common types of high-stakes evaluation that predominantly relied on standardized tests and rote learning did not assess such competencies and restricted the chances to develop student-centered learning (Brookhart, 2013; McMillan, 2017). Furthermore, these techniques failed to consider individual cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic traditions of students, thus resulting in unfair treatment of students and, additionally, contributing to the impoverishment of underrepresented groups among students (Gay, 2000; Wiliam, 2009). With modern classrooms having grown both in levels of diversity and cultural responsiveness, it undoubtedly became necessary to come up with inclusive, culturally responsive, and innovative ways of summative assessment strategies that would not only be able to check the results of

learning but could also be capable of increasing student engagement, motivating them, and also allowing them to improve their skills (Timperley, 2007). The proposed study explored these alternative methods in order to come up with evidence-based suggestions to guide change in practices of assessment with the aim of promoting fair and successful education.

Research Objectives

At the end of the research, the researcher will be able to,

- Assess the effectiveness of a variety of summative assessment strategies (e.g., performance tasks, project-based assessments, and traditional exams) in improving the critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities of students.
- Identify effective summative assessment strategies that enhance critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills among students.
- Analyze the effectiveness of focus group discussions in understanding the alignment of summative assessments with learning

Research Questions

- How do innovative summative assessment strategies, such as project-based assessments and portfolios, enhance student learning and skill development?
- In what ways do culturally responsive assessment practices address the needs of diverse student populations?
- What role does feedback play in improving student performance and learning outcomes during summative assessments?
- How does alignment of assessment tasks and learning objectives affect?
- Is it possible to measure reliability and validity of summative assessments?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of evolutional practice is not new as summative assessment has always played a significant role in the process of education. Giving an evaluation means to evaluate the learning of the students after a teaching period. These assessments are often in form of final exams, standardized tests and end of unit projects. Nevertheless, expanding database of literature levels its criticism at the traditional summative assessment saying that they focus on rote memorization and on a adequate small number of learning outcomes. As Sullivan et al. (2017) assert, regular tests do not reflect on diversities. The involved deeper mental pursuits need to be performed during the learning process, like critical thinking and problem solving. This is especially in science. Such a limitation has pushed the majority of teachers to explore other types of assessment, including project-based learning, where students are involved in more challenging, realistic task; promoting collaboration and thinking at a higher level (Beers, 2019). The summative assessment has been around a long time to assess the learning of students and it is often in form of final examination, standardized examination, or final-unit projects. On the one hand, traditional summative examinations give way to On the one hand, traditional summative examinations are replaced by on the one hand, have themselves been faulted as too focused on rote learning rather than on deep learning, ability in critical thinking. Sullivan et al. (2017) state that conventional assessments do not often indicate the actual situation. The true factual understanding of complex concepts by the students. In reaction, teachers have considered different summative evaluation, especially project-based assessment that encourages real life solving problems, innovativeness, and cooperation. These assessment steps have been proved to enhance student engagement and long-term memorisation (Beers 2019). To illustrate, Frey

and Schmitt (2019) found out that project-based assessments supported students enhance critical thinking skills and enhanced understanding of material especially in Science is an area of STEM.

Pre and post testing is always employed in order to test the effectiveness of various summative examinations. O'Connor et al. (2020) believe that pre-tests indicate students prior knowledge. and post-tests evaluate educational development and educational outcomes. Comparison of the pre and post-test data can be highly valuable in the process of defining the effectiveness of summative assessment process in enhancing student performance. Also, the evaluation part of the assessment is significant in terms of feedback. According to Hattie and Clarke (2020), prompt delivery of detailed feedback to the students is important. improve their study skills and do well in written examinations. With regard to project-based exams, there will be constant feedback in the course of doing the exams and this will make the students grasp what they are taught easily. real-life dynamic situations.

The role of summative assessments is yet another concern that is determined by the students and the teachers. perceive them. Lizzio and Wilson (2017) confirmed that the perception of students about the clarity and fairness of the information presented. Tests measured seriously affected their interaction and performance. Similarly, teachers' approaches to assessment affect the way an assessment is constructed and evaluated in the classroom. The study by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2021) dwells upon the interaction of formative feedback and summative feedback in terms of the identified role of the former in the overall assessment process. Student reflection and self-regulation can be encouraged with the help of evaluations, especially scientific education. The practical insights on the benefits can be obtained by conducting focus group interviews with the students and teachers. and disadvantages of summative exam.

Even though the summative assessment has seen a rising number of research on databases, research is still lacking. which directly respond to the question of how various summative methods, including project based assessments, may be used. compared to normal exams, influence learning of science among students in middle schools. The work of Tan and Goh is a study of the truths that exist about a person. The 2021 paper has repeated the point that examinations involved in scientific education are beneficial because they compel the learners to study. apply their knowledge in the real world in a multidisciplinary framework. The intercession of quantitative indicator (e.g. pre and post-test scores) and quality data of focus group interviews paints a more detailed account of the success of summative assessments. Such a comprehensive plan contributes to filling the gap between both measurable assessment outcomes and human views taking part in learning.

The presence of a quantitative and a qualitative data in the evaluation process results in a more wholesome approach to the determination of the usefulness of different summative procedures of assessment. Pre and post-tests will show how the students increase and focus groups of both students and teachers can bring a lot of facts about their experience in using different types of assessments. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2021) argue that qualitative student feedback can help the instructors learn more about the impacts of assessment processes on motivation and learning than the data provided in numbers would ever do.

To conclude, traditional summative exams have important roles to play in assessing student learning but there is growing evidence of the application of alternative methodologies of assessment e.g. project-based assessments. The methods used do not only enhance engagement, they also enhance critical thinking and problem solving skills. Additionally, pre-and post-test evaluation will be centred on the use of focus group interview to give extensive method of measuring the influence of summative assessment strategies on student learning in science education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research employed a pragmatic paradigm, combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies to better comprehend the research problem from many viewpoints. The pragmatic paradigm was based on the premise that research questions drove method selection, and it stressed the use of data to guide practical outcomes. In this study, quantitative data (pre- and post-test scores) provided objective measures of student performance, whereas qualitative data (focus group talks) offered subjective insights into students' and teachers' experiences with summative assessment procedures. This paradigm encouraged the use of both types of data to gain a thorough knowledge of the success of evaluations.

Research Approach

The research used a mixed-methods approach that included both quantitative and qualitative research. The quantitative method collected pre- and post-test data to track changes in student performance across several summative assessment strategies. The qualitative approach included focus group conversations with students and teachers to gained their perspectives and experiences with these evaluations. This technique provided a full understanding of how assessment strategies affected student learning. The combination of two data sets improved the overall validity and depth of the findings.

Research Design

The Research design used was an explanatory sequential design, the study adopted a mixed-methods methodology, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods. The study's goal was to analyze the impact of various summative assessment strategies on student learning outcomes. Initially, students took a pre-test to determine their initial knowledge. Following the implementation of various summative assessment strategies (for example, project-based assessments, traditional exams), students took a post-test to determine changes in their performance. To enhance the quantitative data, focus groups were held with both students and teachers. These focus groups explored students' perceptions of the assessment strategies, their experiences, and how they believed the assessments had influenced learning. The pre-test and post-test data were analyzed statistically to determine performance improvements, whilst the focus group data were examined qualitatively to identify themes and insights about the assessment strategies. This design enabled a thorough study of the effectiveness of summative evaluations from both a numerical and experiential viewpoint.

Research Instrument

The data were collected using three primary instruments. Before beginning summative assessments, a pre-test was administered to students to measure their initial knowledge. Following the intervention, a post-test was conducted to assess any changes in student performance. In addition, focus group interviews were held with students and teachers to gather qualitative insights into their experiences with various assessment strategies. The focus group discussions explored individuals opinions, issues, and preferences about assessment procedures. The pre-test and post-test data were evaluated numerically, and focus group responses were coded for thematic analysis to highlight important trends and insights.

Population

The study's population included elementary school students who experienced various summative assessment strategies. To provide light on the effectiveness of these strategies, teachers who used them

were also highlighted. A representative cross-section of experiences and viewpoints was ensured by selecting a diverse sample from various schools.

Sample

The sample consisted of 20 students from the 8th grade across one schools who participate in various summative assessment procedures in science subject and 7 science teachers from school were selected for focus group interviews. Students in 8th grade were the only focus of the sample in order to gather their opinions and experiences regarding the techniques of evaluation utilized in the science curriculum.

Sampling Technique

The study used stratified random sampling to choose 20 8th grade students from a single school, assuring academic variety and involvement with various summative assessment strategies. Students were selected by random from classes using a variety of methods for assessment (e.g., exams, projects). Purposive sampling was used to select 7 science teachers to participate in these assessments. This strategy ensured that both students and teachers with appropriate expertise participate in the study.

Research Procedure:

The research procedure used an organized approach to gather quantitative and qualitative data. First, approval and consent were obtained from the school administration and other authorities. The study began by choosing a sample of 8th grade students and science teachers by stratified random sampling for students and purposive sampling for teachers.

The selected students were then be given pre-tests to examine their initial understanding of science before summative assessment procedures were used. Students will then participate in the selected summative assessment procedures (e.g., exams, projects, etc.) in their science classes.

Following the assessments, students took a post-test to assess any changes in their knowledge and performance. In parallel, focus group interviews were held with the 3-6 selected science instructors to gain qualitative insights into their experiences with the assessment methodologies.

The focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed for analysis. To evaluate significant learning changes, data were analyzed using statistical methods (e.g., paired t-test) for pre-test and post-test scores. The focus group material was analysed qualitatively using thematic analysis to find common themes and insights.

Finally, the findings were analyzed to establish the effectiveness of various summative assessment procedures in increasing student learning in science, and recommendations were made based on the results.

Data Analysis

Data analysis were used both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The pre-test and post-test scores were examined using statistical techniques such as the paired t-test to discover significant changes in student performance. This helped analyze the effectiveness of various summative evaluation techniques. The focus group material was transcribed and examined through thematic analysis to discover major patterns and themes in teachers and students impressions of the assessments. The combination of the two analyses will provided a thorough insight of the effectiveness of the assessment strategies.

RESULTS

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

Measure	Pre-Test (N = 20)	Post-Test (N = 20)
Mean	6.00	12.85
Median	5.50	13.00
Standard Deviation	1.78	0.88
Variance	3.16	0.77
Sum	120.00	257.00

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for pre-test and post-test scores, demonstrating a significant improvement in student performance following the deployment of summative assessment procedures. The mean pre-test score of 6.00 rose to 12.85 on the post-test, demonstrating improved learning outcomes. Similarly, the median score increased from 5.50 to 13.00, indicating that at least half of the students improved following the intervention. The standard deviation decreased from 1.777 to 0.875, indicating lower variability and more consistent performance among pupils. Furthermore, the variance decreased from 3.158 to 0.766, demonstrating the tests' usefulness in standardizing learning outcomes. The total score grew from 120.00 in the pretest to 257.00 in the posttest, indicating overall group improvement. These results indicate that summative assessment strategies played a crucial role in enhancing student learning and ensuring more uniform performance.

Table 2
Paired Samples Statistics

Test	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-Test	6.0000	20	1.77705	0.39736
Post-Test	12.8500	20	0.87509	0.19568

Table 3 displays the paired sample statistics that compare pre-test and post-test scores. The mean pre-test score was 6.00 (SD = 1.78), and the post-test average was 12.85 (SD = 0.88). The considerable increase in mean scores indicates that summative assessment procedures were helpful in enhancing student learning outcomes. The standard error of the mean for the post-test (0.19568) is lower than that for the pre-test (0.39736), showing that student performance improved more consistently following the intervention.

Table 3
Paired Samples Correlation Between Pre-Test and Post-Test

Pair	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pre-Test & Post-Test	20	0.135	0.569

Table 4 shows the paired samples correlation of the pre-test and post-test scores, which is 0.135 with a p-value of 0.569. This weak positive correlation indicates that, while there is a slight relationship between pre-test and post-test scores, the lack of statistical significance ($p > 0.05$) implies that other factors, most likely the summative assessment strategies themselves, contributed more significantly to the observed improvements in student performance.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

General Perception of Summative Assessments

Teachers' Perspective

"*Summative assessments are essential because they help evaluate the extent of student learning at the end of a unit or term. However, they sometimes feel more like an administrative requirement rather than a tool to enhance learning*."

Students' Perspective

"*They can be stressful, but they give us a clear idea of where we stand academically. I think they are useful when they are fair and reflect what we learned*."

Specific Strategies Used

Teachers' Perspective

"*We use a mix of strategies like final exams, project-based assessments, and presentations. Among these, I find project-based assessments most effective because they allow students to apply knowledge practically*."

Students' Perspective

"*Exams are the most common, but I prefer projects because they let me be creative. Portfolios are good too because they show how much I improved over time***."**

Impact on Learning Outcomes

Teachers ' Perspective

"*Summative assessments definitely help us measure learning outcomes. For example, after introducing case studies in assessments, I noticed that students developed stronger analytical skills.*"

Students' Perspective:

"*They make us work harder and focus more. For example, when we had a group presentation as part of our assessment, I felt I understood the topic better because I had to explain it to others.*"

Consistency and Equity

Teachers' Perspective

"*Summative assessments can promote consistency when grading rubrics are used. However, equity can be an issue, as students with different learning styles might not perform equally well on standardized tests.*"

Students' Perspective

"*It feels unfair sometimes because not everyone is good at written exams. I think there should be more variety to accommodate different strengths.*"

Preparation and Study Habits

Teachers' Perspective:

"*Summative assessments push students to revise thoroughly. However, some students may resort to last-minute cramming instead of engaging with the material over time.*"

Students' Perspective:

"*It depends on the type of assessment. For exams, I usually memorize facts, but for projects, I spend more time understanding the topic.*"

Challenges and Limitations

Teachers' Perspective:

"*One major challenge is time. Designing effective assessments and grading them takes a lot of effort. Also, some students face test anxiety, which affects their performance.*"

Students' Perspective

"*Sometimes the questions don't match what we were taught in class, and that's frustrating. Plus, we don't always get enough time to prepare.*"

Feedback and Improvement

Teachers' Perspective

"*Feedback is crucial, but in summative assessments, we often don't give detailed feedback because of time constraints. That's a missed opportunity for students to learn.*"

Students' Perspective

"*We rarely get proper feedback after exams. If teachers explained where we went wrong, it would help us do better next time.*"

Student Motivation and Engagement

Teachers' Perspective

"*Summative assessments can motivate students, especially those who are driven by grades. However, they may demotivate students who struggle academically.*"

Students' Perspective

"*When the assessment is interesting, like a project or group activity, it's motivating. But regular exams can feel boring and stressful*."

Role of Teachers

Teachers' Perspective

"*Our role is to design assessments that are fair, aligned with learning objectives, and provide meaningful results. We also need to guide students on how to approach assessments.*"

Students' Perspective

"*Teachers should help us understand what's expected in the assessment. When they explain the marking scheme or give sample questions, it really helps.*"

Suggestions for Improvement

Teachers' Perspective

"*Incorporate a mix of assessment types to cater to different learning styles. Use technology to make assessments more interactive, and ensure timely feedback.*"

Students' Perspective

"Make assessments more creative and relevant to real life. Also, give us more practice opportunities and clear feedback to help us improve."

FINDINGS

Pre-Test and Post -Test findings

1. Performance Improvement: The mean post-test score (12.85) was significantly higher than the mean pre-test score (6.00), showing improved learning outcomes.

2. Consistency in Performance: The reduction in standard deviation (from 1.78 to 0.88) and variance (from 3.16 to 0.77) suggests more consistent performance among students after summative assessments.
3. Weak Correlation: The paired samples correlation ($r = 0.135$, $p = 0.569$) indicates that while pre-test and post-test scores are related, the improvements are likely attributable to summative assessment interventions rather than initial performance levels.

Focus Group Discussion Findings

General Perception: Both teachers and students recognize the value of summative assessments in measuring learning outcomes. However, students note stress and fairness issues, while teachers highlight their administrative burden.

1. Strategies Used: Project-based assessments and portfolios were considered effective by both groups, fostering practical application and creativity.
2. Impact on Learning: Teachers observed improved analytical skills through case studies, and students reported better understanding through collaborative assessments like group presentations.
3. Challenges: Time constraints, lack of alignment between assessments and taught material, and limited feedback were recurrent issues.
4. Feedback: The two groups insisted on adequate feedback in order to enhance learning.
5. Recommendations: The respondents recommended implementing the use of multifaceted and imaginative forms of assessment, the relevance and feedback, as well as technology to enhance assessments.

CONCLUSIONS

1.Summative assessment plans were useful in enhancing the learning of students, which is indicated by the fact that the post-test scores increased by a considerable margin.

2.The narrower the differences in performance, the less support the given strategies demonstrate. It is that consistency between learners can be said to be boosted by these strategies.

3.Feedback constraints, stress, and perceived inequities are obstacles that make the effectiveness of summative assessment low.

4.Several methods are especially well-suited to the development of deeper learning and engagement, namely, project-based assessment, portfolios, and cooperative projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1.**Vary the kind of Assessment:** Consider having a variety of assessments; traditional, project like assessment alongside portfolios to cover the various styles and skills (Andrade et al., 2009).

2. **Timely Feedback:** The feedback that is given to the students has to be in detail, should be actionable, it should be given in a timely manner and this will allow the students to learn based on their assessments (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

3.**Embrace Fairness with Rubrics:** Embrace transparent grade rubrics that will make grading honest and equitable.

4.**Teachers:** Provide professional development in designing good and equitable summative assessment with emphasis on strategies of providing feedback.

5. **Use of Technology:** Tap the technology via learning management system to automate grading, deliver immediate feedback, and simplify the interactive quizzes and tests.

6.**Minimize Anxiety of Tests:** Incorporate activities such as practice examinations and stress-coping tools to allow students to train well so that they do not feel anxiety about tests.

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