

“FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE: INVESTIGATING THE CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT OF NCEL-SPECIFIED SLOS WITH ASSESSMENT PRACTICES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AT SECONDARY LEVEL”

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Abstract

This study investigates English language assessment practices in secondary schools of Punjab, Pakistan, align with the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) specified in the National Curriculum for English Language (NCEL). Anchored in Biggs' Constructive Alignment theory, this study aimed to examine how closely assessment practices align with the Intended Learning Outcomes outlined in the NCEL. To achieve this, five focus group discussions—each lasting two hours and comprising seven participants—were conducted with a total of 35 English teachers from grade 10 in government secondary schools across the Rawalpindi division. The collected data was transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis using an interpretative approach. Thematic analysis of qualitative data uncovers an exam-centric pedagogy, a lack of OBE training, and an overemphasis on rote learning. In-depth participant statements illustrate these challenges, while comparisons with international and local studies highlight systemic gaps in assessment alignment. Recommendations include revising assessment strategies, enhancing teacher professional development, and increasing resource support to foster holistic language competency that aligns with NCEL objectives.

Keywords: NCEL, Assessment practices, Constructive Alignment, Outcome-Based Education, English Language Competencies, Secondary Education.

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, global educational reforms have moved toward competency-based paradigms emphasizing demonstrable skills—critical thinking, problem-solving, and communicative competence—over rote memorization (OECD, 2019; Popham, 2011). In Pakistan, the National Curriculum for English Language (NCEL, 2006) embodies this shift by defining Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) across reading, writing, oral communication, and formal and lexical language knowledge. By aligning teaching strategies, learning activities, and assessments with these ILOs, the NCEL operationalizes Constructive Alignment (Biggs & Tang, 2011) and Outcome-Based Education (OBE) principles (Black & Wiliam, 2018). Despite these progressive mandates, empirical evidence reveals persistent misalignment in secondary English classrooms. High-stakes board examinations prioritize discrete-point grammar and vocabulary recall, reinforcing an exam-centric pedagogy that marginalizes higher-order language skills (Mahboob, 2017; Rahman, 2020). This “backwash effect” (Biggs, 2014) narrows instructional focus to what is tested, undermining students’ deeper engagement with language tasks (Entwistle & Ramsden, 2015). Further, effective enactment of Constructive Alignment requires robust teacher training and resource support—elements often absent in under-resourced contexts (Ali & Hameed, 2018; Ahmad & Rao, 2020). Large class sizes, limited formative feedback, and low assessment literacy exacerbate the divide between NCEL’s outcome-based aspirations and classroom realities (Iqbal & Zakar, 2019; Khan & Zahid, 2022).

This study, titled “From Policy to Practice: Investigating the Constructive Alignment of NCEL-specified SLOs with Assessment practices in English Language Teaching at secondary Level” addresses three key questions.

- i. How do teachers perceive the feasibility and efficacy of ILOs-based assessments?
- ii. How do classroom practices and board exams reflect NCEL objectives?

The evolution of assessment theory and practice reflects a broader shift in educational paradigms from teacher-centrism to learner-centered, competency-driven approaches. Recognizing assessment’s dual role—as both a measurement tool and a driver of pedagogical alignment—researchers have advocated for rethinking assessment as an integral component of learning design (Black & Wiliam, 2018; Popham, 2011). Outcome-Based Education (OBE) amplifies this perspective by prioritizing clear articulation of Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs), backward course design, and formative assessment cycles to ensure continuous learner progression (OECD, 2019; McTighe et al., 2020). In language education, Biggs and Tang’s Constructive Alignment (CA) model further asserts that alignment among learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessment tasks is essential to foster deep, transferable learning (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Carless, 2006).

CA and OBE frameworks have been shown to enhance higher-order thinking and learner autonomy when implemented holistically. Meta-analyses reveal that programs with well-aligned outcomes and assessments yield improved critical thinking, problem-solving, and communicative competence across disciplines (Brookhart et al., 2016; Entwistle & Ramsden, 2015). The NCEL (2006) exemplifies these principles by delineating competencies in reading comprehension, analytical reasoning, writing for varied purposes, oral communication, and formal linguistic knowledge. Yet, CA and OBE’s successful enactment depends on teacher assessment literacy and institutional support, factors often underestimated in reform efforts (Ali & Hameed, 2018; Ahmad & Rao, 2020). International reform narratives—from sub-Saharan Africa (Chikombah & Mutasa, 2021) to South Asia (Farooqui, 2014; Ghosh, 2018)—highlight recurrent challenges: high-stakes exam cultures, resource disparities, and insufficient professional development. Case studies in India demonstrate that integrating portfolios and performance tasks can mitigate rote learning but require systemic investments in teacher capacity-building and material development (Farooqui, 2014). UNESCO’s Global Education Monitoring Report (2020) underscores the necessity of policy coherence, recommending that formative assessment frameworks be embedded within national exam systems to incentivize balanced instructional strategies.

Despite NCEL’s detailed ILOs, national board examinations predominantly evaluate discrete grammar and reading comprehension, sidelining writing fluency and oral skills (Mahboob, 2017; Rahman, 2020). Teacher reliance on past papers and drill exercises perpetuates an exam-centric pedagogy (Rehman, 2021; Shah, 2017). Recent empirical work by Naseer and Farooq (2023) confirms that speaking components in standardized assessments remain limited to scripted dialogues, thus failing to capture spontaneous communicative competence. Professional development deficits impede OBE enactment: Pakistani teachers often experience isolated workshops without ongoing coaching or peer collaboration (Ali & Hameed, 2018; Ahmad & Rao, 2020). Iqbal and Zakar (2019) report that large class sizes hinder individualized formative feedback, while Khan and Zahid (2022) document absent feedback loops between assessment outcomes and curriculum revision. Resource limitations—such as lack of multimedia labs and digital platforms—further restrict formative assessment implementation (OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2020).

The “backwash effect” describes how high-stakes exams shape teaching toward test-focused

content, resulting in surface learning and diminished critical engagement (Biggs, 2014; Linn, 2005). Conversely, formative assessment—characterized by ongoing, low-stakes feedback—cultivates metacognitive awareness and learner autonomy (Black & Wiliam, 2018; McTighe et al., 2020). Although formative strategies show promise in similar contexts, Pakistani secondary schools rarely implement structured feedback cycles, partly due to summative exam dominance and limited assessment literacy (Mahboob, 2017; Iqbal & Zakar, 2019).

While existing literature highlights misalignments between policy intentions and assessment practices, comprehensive mixed-methods studies that triangulate teacher perceptions with classroom observations remain scarce. This study addresses that gap by integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative FGDs and observations, offering a multi-faceted analysis of alignment under Pakistan's high-stakes exam regime. It extends CA theory into a challenging socio-institutional environment, providing actionable insights for policymakers, teacher, and curriculum developers aiming to bridge policy–practice divides.

Method

This study adopts Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which seeks to understand participants' lived experiences and how they make sense of those experiences (Reid et al., 2005). A basic interpretive research design was utilized, employing focus group discussions and classroom observations as primary tools to investigate teachers' perspectives on the practicality and effectiveness of ILOs-based assessments, as well as the systemic factors—such as professional development, resource distribution, and institutional demands—that influence this alignment. Theoretically, the current study is influenced by Biggs' (2014) theory of 'Constructive Alignment' (CA), which is one of the most influential theories in education, and gives us space to explore the existence of alignment between ILOs stated in NCEL and assessment practices.

Participants were selected through non-probability purposive sampling from secondary schools within the Rawalpindi division of Punjab, encompassing urban (Rawalpindi, Attock) and rural (Jhelum, Chakwal) areas. Teachers with a minimum of five years' experience who are well-versed in NCEL and board examination practices were chosen.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): Six FGDs (6–8 teachers each) were held in neutral venues to encourage open dialogue. A semi-structured guide probed teachers' understanding of OBE, their strategies for designing assessments aligned to NCEL, and perceived obstacles such as resource constraints or curriculum pressures. Sessions lasted 60–90 minutes, were audio-recorded, and later transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were member-checked—participants reviewed summaries for accuracy and completeness.

Classroom Observations: Twenty-four non-participant observation sessions took place across eight schools (four urban, four rural). Using a structured protocol, observers recorded the types of assessment tasks (e.g., quizzes, group projects, oral questioning), feedback methods (verbal, written, peer), and student engagement indicators (voluntary participation, on-task behavior). Detailed field notes captured contextual factors such as class size, physical layout, and instructional materials. Observers conducted daily debriefs to refine focus and ensure consistency.

Data Analysis: Transcripts and observation notes were imported into NVivo 12. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach, we (1) familiarized ourselves with the data, (2)

generated initial codes, (3) searched for themes, (4) reviewed themes for coherence, (5) defined and named themes, and (6) produced the final report. Axial coding linked themes to NCEL-ILOs categories and OBE constructs. A codebook documented code definitions; intercoder reliability was established on a 20% sample of transcripts ($\kappa = 0.82$).

Results and Findings

This study's research questions—(1) to what extent are assessment practices aligned with the NCEL-specified Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs), (2) what are teachers' perceptions of ILOs-based assessment, and (3) how do classroom practices and board exams reflect NCEL objectives—were addressed through an integrated analysis of data from two sources: FGDs, and classroom observations. Below, the findings are presented through four key themes that emerged from the qualitative data.

Theme 1: Exam-Centric Pedagogy and Curriculum-Practice Misalignment

A dominant finding is that assessment practices remain heavily exam-centric, with teachers aligning their instruction primarily with the demands of board examinations rather than the broader competencies outlined in the NCEL. During FGDs, teachers repeatedly emphasized that the pressure to pass board exams forces them to “teach to the test.” For example, one participant stated,

“I follow the past five years' exam papers religiously because that is the only way to ensure more than 90% pass rates.”

Such remarks indicate that teachers' instructional planning is more influenced by exam criteria than by the NCEL's intended outcomes—resulting in a misalignment between what is taught and what is expected in terms of language competencies. Classroom observations further confirmed that assessment tasks primarily consisted of textbook-based exercises and recall questions, with little emphasis on skills such as critical thinking or oral communication. Assessments can measure students' progress and proficiency, through students' learning outcomes, and intended educational goals can be achieved more effectively when the evaluation strategies are aligned with the national curriculum's learning outcomes. Such alignment assists in identifying the key skills and required competencies that students need to develop. In the Directive (NCEL), the focus is paid to develop English language competencies among the students of English language for which certain assessment strategies are also expected to be practiced. Here, by using variety of assessment methods, focusing on the formative assessment, giving performance based assessment, giving on-spot feedback, strengthening the review and reflection process, aligning classroom teaching practices with the assessment practices, and training the teachers through multiple Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs, can make it possible to mold the assessment process in order to achieve the prescribed learning outcomes.

However, the data reveals that there is non-alignment between what is expected to learn and what is being assessed. Teachers across all classrooms tended to focus on summative assessment and the formative assessment was conducted in the perspective of annual exam conducted by BISE Rawalpindi due to backwash effect. Most formative assessment practices revolved around checking the memorization of the students. Teachers focused on written exercise of limited assignment which had been assessed repeatedly in previous exam. This included short questions of selective lessons, 6-7 selective essays and only two

summaries of the poems. It was observed in the classroom that teachers emphasized to write the letter format in the exam which carries 4 to 5 marks if students would fail to write the body of letter. This practice indicated that the purpose of teachers was to get the students passed in final exam irrespective to target the learning objectives of NCEL for developing competencies.

Theme 2: Focus on the Annual-Board Examination

Assessment practices emerge from the data analysis as a contributing factor that restricts English language teachers to conventional methods of instruction. However, it is found after data analysis that major focus is paid on getting success in the annual examination. That is why all the other language competencies are ignored and certain set pattern is followed to get good grades. Teachers shared that their efficiency is gauged, based on the board's results. Teachers are compelled to adhere to board examination formats rather than aligning their instruction with the objectives outlined in the NCEL. They blindly follow the examination pattern, a short-cut to get the students passed. The teachers are not supported for any creative work regarding the development of reading and thinking skills, the teaching practice for oral communication skills and writing skill as well. Hence, teachers are far away from the basic purpose of English language teaching to develop English language skills. One of the teachers shared the same thoughts that,

“Our focus is not to prepare the 21st century English language learners, instead a class who may excel in the final exam with 90 plus percentage.”

Furthermore, teachers pointed out that although the various activities regarding the four English language competencies are defined through SLOs, yet they focused only on the content from the text book. Because they know the set pattern and criteria to clear the annual exams, neither the teachers nor the students showed any interest in developing language competencies at secondary school level. One of the teachers remarked that,

“I typically prepare students with a fixed set of seven letters and nine essays, as these are frequently featured in the annual examinations.”

Furthermore, all participants shared the perspective that their instructional focus remained on content rather than language competencies, as the examination framework did not evaluate those skills. Instruction in English relied heavily on rote learning and repetition strategies. Students were taught using pre-prepared notes, solution guides, and dictated material, leaving little to no room for the development and practice of actual language skills within the classroom. Echoing this concern, another teacher acknowledged that,

“The primary barrier to developing English language competencies lies in the examination system itself, noting that the outdated assessment criteria fail to align with the directives outlined in the NCEL”.

One of the teachers shared his teaching experience during the focus group discussion and said that,

“Sharing the bitter experience of my professional career...I tell you that I tried to develop these English language competencies in the students especially by focusing on the critical thinking and oral communication skills but I failed because most of the students have poor academic backgrounds and do not know even the basics of these competencies. I found that most of the students couldn't read and write even a single English sentence properly.” Another one added that,

"Sir, I have also a bad experience regarding the development of English language competencies in students while teaching English. They were at very basic level. However, they have a sharp memory that is why they got promoted every year by rote memorizing certain content from the textbook, without even having any understanding of what they were saying or writing in the exams."

Moreover, classroom observations revealed that the absence of an outcome-based approach hindered meaningful assessment practices. Traditional classroom assessments, which were observed, often emphasized rote memorization and the ability to recall information rather than the application and transfer of knowledge. Teachers did not design assessments with intended learning outcomes, they missed opportunities to gather valuable data on student understanding and skill development. Without it, teachers have no clear picture of student learning, making it difficult to identify gaps and tailor instruction accordingly.

Majority of the teachers discussed the annual examination paper pattern in their lecture. It gave the students an idea of how to prepare for the annual examination. While sharing or delivering the content, teachers shared its value in the context of how much weightage it contained in the board exams. For instance, while preparing essays, students were advised to prepare the selective 10 essays in a way so they may attempt the essay question in the final paper with little bit modifications. Students memorized the content keeping in view the guidelines given by their teachers.

The formative assessments were also based on the summative assessments. For example, during the classroom teaching students were asked for quiz regarding the questions as mentioned in the end of the text book chapters. Students were told that these question answers have maximum weightage in the final Board exams so if they employ rote memorization, they may have a chance to cover a large part of the paper. Thus, students copy pasted the answers in the quiz. That is how formative assessment was done in the classroom where focus was not on the development of certain language competencies in the students but on clearing the end-term assessment only.

Theme 3: The Backwash Effect and Quality versus Quantity in Assessment

Both the quantitative and qualitative strands of data reveal that the prevalent **"backwash effect"** significantly influences teaching and assessment practices.

Biggs (2014) also highlights an important factor involved in this learning process is the backwash concept, students follow the assessment criteria to pass the exam. The discussion reveals that teachers also follow the assessment criteria to get students passed. All participants expressed the opinion that their teaching is limited to the content evaluated in the annual examinations. As one teacher put it,

"We only teach what appears in the board exams."

Additionally, they noted that formative assessments—those carried out regularly in classrooms on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis—are also modeled after the summative assessment patterns set by the respective Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE). Thus, teachers only follow the assessment criteria to get students passed instead of developing English language competencies in English language learners in order to compete with rest of the world. As one of the teachers said,

"To be honest, I relied on the past five years' exam papers to ensure that over 90% of my students achieved high scores."
Another participant explained,

"It is just wastage of time. As the competencies are not assessed in the exam, so, the students don't show their interest to focus on these competencies."

In the assessment process, putting more emphasis on quality rather than quantity can meet the real goal of teaching, which is to promote meaningful learning and in-depth comprehension. Students and teachers may prioritize task completion, engaging with content when the focus is on the sheer quantity of assessments, which can result in superficial learning. This method leads teachers and students to rote memorization, leaving less time for in-depth subject exploration, thoughtful reflection, and individualized feedback. On the other hand, high-quality assessments are designed to precisely gauge students' comprehension, encourage critical thinking, and offer information that helps teachers improve their lessons and assists students in developing required English language competencies. With the focus being on attaining particular learning outcomes and promoting a more thorough understanding of the subject matter, they assist in establishing a more effective and balanced learning environment.

In the current study, the data revealed that, at secondary school level, teachers; teaching English language, focuses on the quantity more than the quality. This practice shows that focus is to prepare the students in way that they may get highest percentages in the annual examinations rather than making them a competent learner. Resultantly, the assessment process is not aligned with the learning outcomes as mentioned in the curriculum. As for English language learners, the NCEL demands to develop English language competencies among the learners but the students are not assessed in a way that whether the instructional process succeeded in developing such competencies among the students or not. Instead, it measures how much students are able to memorize the content and passed it on annual exams sheet in order to get maximum marks. Hence, the criterion of success focuses on the quantity rather than the quality. During the focus group discussion, one of the teachers highlighted that,

"The situation of English learning in our context is like; the more you get marks, the more competent you are! I have many students in my class who don't have basic understanding or skills required for language learning but still they excel as being a good student because they get good marks in the exams."

Majority of the teachers showed their frustration towards the race of getting highest percentages. They shared that there is a race between the education setups regarding producing hundred percent results. The growth in private schools has given rise to unhealthy competition among the students. As a result, parents are also encouraging to choose private schools over public schools. For them, getting highest marks is far more important as the success criteria for college education also depends on it. In all such situations, the teachers shared that they also try to focus on the pattern set by the BISE which is purely based on measuring the quantity rather than the quality of learning. As one of the teachers mentioned that,

"We need to change our assessment criteria. There is huge discrepancy between what is expected from the students in the curriculum and what is being assessed actually. Unless and until this mismatch or gap is filled, nothing can be improved."

Another teacher added that,

“As both the teachers and the students know that these competencies will not be assessed in the examination and they can get promoted with little efforts in memorizing the text, without working on the development of language competencies, why would they try to take this fatigue?”

During the classroom observations, it was also observed that much emphasis was paid to get maximum marks in the examination. The data revealed that neither the teachers nor the students were concerned with the development of competencies or the learning outcomes as prescribed in the National Curriculum for English Language. In fact, as they knew that they were not assessed on the basis of the language competencies that they possess rather how much they were able to rote memorize the content. Therefore, they showed no interest in the development of language competencies but to get maximum marks in the examination due to Backwash effect.

Mostly the classroom talks revolved around the competition between the students to get highest percentages than the previous batch or as compared to the other education setups in the area. The teachers shared examples of other institutions or other students who have taken highest percentages in the board examination and got their pictures on the banner. Thus, students were motivated that they could be excellent learners if they could get highest marks in the exams and set record for the upcoming students. Students were also guided regarding how to excel in the board exams with maximum marks and get admission in the best colleges of the city. They were told that they could also avail multiple scholarships based on that. Therefore, the students showed more motivation towards getting highest percentages rather than having enough competencies in writing, reading, listening, speaking and having enough communication skills.

Theme 4: Inadequate Emphasis on Higher-Order Skills specified in NCEL

In focus group discussions, teachers pointed out that the current assessment system does not capture these essential competencies. One teacher observed,

“Exams mostly test memory and grammar; skills like critical thinking and speaking are almost never assessed, so students are never motivated to develop them.”

The end-term exam is not based on desired learning outcomes present in NCEL. Only memorization is assessed instead of creative learning. Conventional classroom assessments typically prioritize the memorization of facts and the ability to remember information, rather than focusing on the practical application and transfer of knowledge. the adoption of this exam-centric strategy may lead to a limited curriculum that prioritizes rote learning and test tactics rather than practical language application. Consequently, the absence of opportunities of practices of English language in the classroom results in a diminished motivation to develop language skills among secondary school teachers and students. This qualitative insight aligns with previous research (Mahboob, 2017; Rahman, 2020) and highlights a systemic issue: assessments fail to evaluate the actual thinking level as well as oral communication skills, specified in NCEL, and thus fail to encourage, the comprehensive language development required by the NCEL. English is frequently taught through the use of repetition and memorization techniques, employing pre-prepared notes, reference books, and

dictated text. As a result, students are deprived of the chance to develop and enhance their English language skills within the confines of the classroom.

5. Discussion

Overall, data from FGDs and classroom observations provide the contextual depth to these findings, describing an exam-centric teaching culture that is heavily influenced by board exam criteria. Teachers' statements reflect frustration with a system that prioritizes memorization over competency development, reinforcing the quantitative data showing low mean scores for critical higher-order skills. The convergence of these findings suggests that the misalignment between NCEL-specified ILOs and assessment practices is systemic—rooted in traditional pedagogical practices, the pervasive influence of high-stakes examinations, and insufficient teacher training. Such misalignment not only limits the development of comprehensive language competencies but also undermines the overall goals of Outcome-Based Education as envisioned by the NCEL and theoretical frameworks like Constructive Alignment (Biggs & Tang, 2011). The integrated analysis demonstrates that current assessment practices in Pakistani secondary schools fail to align with the NCEL's intended learning outcomes. The exam-centric pedagogy, reinforced by both summative board exams and formative classroom assessments, encourages a narrow focus on rote memorization, thereby neglecting vital language skills. These findings echo earlier studies (Mahboob, 2017; Rahman, 2020) and call for an urgent reorientation of assessment practices.

Evaluations are of utmost importance in gauging students' advancement and expertise in attaining intended learning objectives (Asghar & Irshad, 2023). The National Curriculum for English Language (NCEL) aims to enhance language skills in English language learners (NCEL, 2006). This is accomplished through a range of assessment methods, including formative assessment, performance-based assessment, immediate feedback, reinforcing the review and reflection process, aligning classroom teaching with assessment practices, and providing Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs for teachers. Classroom teaching is closely associated with the assessment practices because assessment can have a “beneficial backwash effect in terms of focusing the teaching” for the development of English language competencies (NCEL, 2006, p. 153). The concept of “Backwash” plays a vital role in ‘CA’ (Biggs, 2014). It conveys the idea that students learn by looking at assessment criteria, they learn what will be assessed in the test and exam, ultimately resulting in rote learning and poor performance. Biggs (2014) further argues that students will always follow the assessment task as a second guess, they will learn what they think will meet those requirements of the evaluation content. If the assessment reflects those learning outcomes prescribed in the official curriculum, there will be no problem in achieving the students learning outcomes (SLOs). The backwash effect, as posited by Biggs (2014), is a critical factor in this misalignment. When exams focus solely on recall, teachers are incentivized to design instruction that mirrors these expectations, thus diminishing opportunities for engaging and formative assessments. The present study's findings are in line with international research indicating that systemic factors such as inadequate teacher training and resource limitations contribute to these issues (OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2020). This finding is similar to Irie (2003) that the examination system frequently prioritizes rote memorization and written assignments rather than practical language application, so hindering students from participating in activities that foster vital abilities such as speaking, listening and interactive communication. When preparing essays, students were advised to select carefully and prepare 10 essays, based on their importance in the board exams. The formative

assessments were derived from the summative assessments, which involved administering quizzes to students on the questions found at the end of textbook chapters. The primary objective was to prepare students for the final assessment. This approach prioritizes the achievement of passing the end-term assessment over the development of specific language competencies in students. The study demonstrated that conventional teaching methods give greater importance to final assessments (annual exams) compared to other language skills, such as reading, critical thinking, verbal communication, and writing due to backwash effect. The backwash effect can lead to a misalignment between the intended educational outcomes and the actual learning experiences of students (Naveed-ur-Rahman & Sultan, 2022). Biggs (2003) stresses that students “learn what they think they will be tested on” this is Backwash. The concept of **"Backwash"** suggests that students acquire knowledge by focusing on evaluation criteria, which in turn influences their learning and leads to memorization and subpar performance. As students tend to focus their learning on what they believe will be evaluated. This approach impedes students' progress in developing their English language skills by prioritizing textbook content and evaluation methods that do not measure specific outcomes. These findings are mentioned by Khoshhal (2016) that the teachers often use ready-made notes, key books, and dictated text to limit practice, leading to an outmoded and non-NCEL examination system. To enhance alignment, educational policymakers must consider reforms that integrate formative assessment strategies, performance-based evaluations, and comprehensive teacher training on OBE principles. Such systemic changes are essential to shifting the focus from a quantitative, exam-based approach to a quality-oriented framework that fosters comprehensive language competency.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study reveals a pronounced misalignment between the NCEL-specified Intended Learning Outcomes and the assessment practices implemented in secondary English language classrooms in Punjab, Pakistan. During classroom observations, it was found that core competencies such as thinking and speaking are significantly under-assessed, this qualitative insights underscore an entrenched exam-centric culture driven by high-stakes board examinations.

Revise board examination formats to incorporate performance-based tasks that assess higher-order skills. Implement targeted training programs to equip teachers with skills in formative assessment and OBE-based instruction. Allocate more resources—especially in rural schools—to support innovative teaching and assessment practices. Engage curriculum developers and policymakers in aligning assessment practices with NCEL-specified ILOs, moving beyond a focus on rote learning. Establish periodic evaluation systems to monitor the alignment between curriculum, instruction, and assessment for continuous improvement. These measures are fundamental for bridging the gap between intended outcomes and classroom practices, ultimately fostering a more effective and holistic English language education system in Pakistan.

7. References

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