



Examining Elementary School Teachers' Views and Practices Related to Grading and Reporting of Students' Learning

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Abstract: This paper presents the elementary school teachers' views and practices related to grading and reporting of students' learning. This study also examined the different challenges that are faced by teachers during grading practices and also explored the gaps that exist between teachers' views and practices regarding grading and reporting of students' learning. Qualitative research (phenomenological design) was employed to conduct the study. Data were collected in two phases; in phase one, open-ended questionnaires were used with 50 teachers, which comprised four general questions related to grading and reporting of students' learning. On the basis of the initial analysis of teachers' input, those ten teachers were selected for phase two of data collection activities which have maximum variations in their views. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and documents analysis in phase two of data collection. The major findings revealed that the traditional grading system is used in public schools and teachers consider only cognitive factors (achievement marks) and summative assessment scores while assigning grades to students' learning. The findings highlighted the difficulties like large class size, the restriction imposed by authority, consideration of different factors, etc., that teachers faced during their grading practices. It was further revealed that noticeable gaps exist between teachers' views and their practices related to grading and reporting of students' learning. For example, participant teachers insisted on considering both cognitive and non-cognitive factors, but their practices contradict their views since the grades were assigned only on the basis of %age marks and that too obtained during summative exams.

Key Words: Elementary School Teachers, Learning, Education

Introduction

This study focused on teachers' views and practices related to the grading and reporting of students' learning because, nowadays, the grading process is acknowledged as a significant part of any educational system (Kubiszyn & Borich, 2013). In instructive settings, learners expect that they will be reviewed dependent on their exhibition in

schools, while guardians expect that their kid's instructive, professional, and monetary status depends on their evaluations.

Parents also believe that these grades may help their children to access a multitude of opportunities beyond their academic lives. Students learn different types of knowledge, and the teacher assesses their knowledge by using different tools of assessment. At the end

of the academic session, the teacher summarizes all their assessment result by assigning them an alphabetical or a numerical code, often referred to as a grade (Allen, 2005).

This qualitative study focused on those teachers who taught at elementary schools because assessments are conducted, and grades are assigned by the teachers solely. But, at the end of Year 5 and Year 8, an external body, that is, Education Department, conducts examinations to assign grades and promote students to the next year level (Khattak, 2012). Similarly, external boards conduct exams and

assign grades/scores to learners' performance at the end of secondary and higher secondary levels.

This study not only examined elementary school teachers' views but also observed their practices related to grading and reporting of students' learning to build up a comprehensive understanding of how do elementary school teachers assign grades to students' learning, which factors do they include while assigning grades, which challenges they face during this process, and how they report their students' results to major stakeholders.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

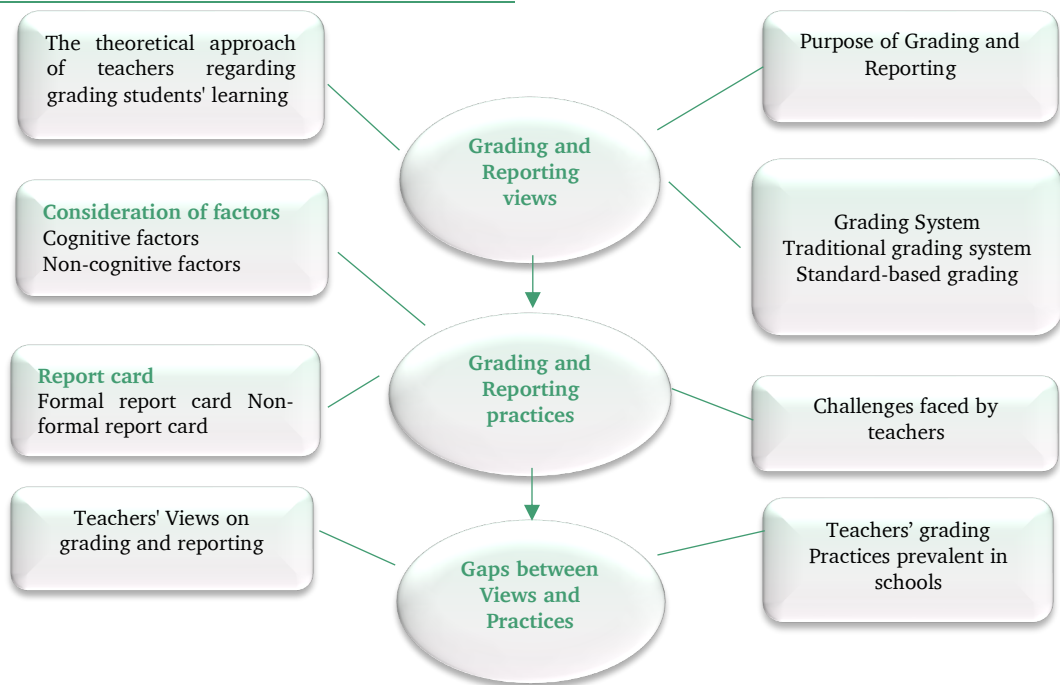


Figure 1

As seen in figure 1, the basic aim of the study was to examine the teachers' views and current practices regarding grading and reporting of students' learning. From teachers' views, we know about the purpose of grading and theoretical approach of the teacher because theoretical approach varied from teacher to teacher about grading and reporting even in the same school.

Teachers' practices demonstrate how they perform grading practices in their school, whether they used a traditional grading system or assigned grades to students according to set standards/criteria, which types of information they mentioned on report cards, and which types of challenges they faced during the process of grading and reporting. This study also explored the gaps that exist between

teachers' views and practices related to grading and reporting of students' learning and how these gaps can be bridged.

Research questions of the study

This study is framed within the following research questions:

1. What are elementary school teachers' views about grading and reporting students' learning?
2. What are elementary school teachers' practices related to grading and reporting students' learning?
3. What are the challenges that are faced by elementary school teachers during grading and reporting of students' learning?
4. Do any gaps exist between elementary school teachers' views and practices regarding grading and reporting of students' learning? If yes, what is the nature of these gaps, and how can they be bridged?

Theoretical Perspective of the Study

A decision model for grading students informed this study. The decision model presented is based on an establishment of critical thinking ([Pugach & Johnson, 1995](#)) and instructor cooperation ([Friend & Cook, 1996](#)). The model starts with an appraisal of arrangements, rules, and guidelines overseeing grading, trailed by a direction to the hypothetical methodologies utilized by instructors to allocate grades.

This model consisted on four essential steps. The first is to determine district, state, and federal policies and guidelines regarding grading. The second step is to identify your own theoretical approaches to grading. [Rojewski et al. \(1990\)](#) recommended three philosophical ways to deal with evaluating impact educator rehearses:

Criterion-referenced. To perspective mirrors a conducted way to deal with evaluating where data is conveyed dependent on the supposition that evaluations reflect achievement or authority of least destinations.

Self-referenced. To perspective partners' grades with exhibited development by the

learners (related with a humanistic way of thinking).

Norm-referenced. To perspective spotlights on surveying qualities and necessities in relationship to other people.

The third step is to identify your colleagues' theoretical approaches to grading. When educators recognize their own ways to deal with grading, they have to decide on the methodology of partners. This study also explores the theoretical approach of teachers regarding grading practices and which approach they used (norm, criterion, or self-approach) while grading students' learning.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach. A phenomenological design was used to describe and analyze teachers' views and practices related to grading, as well as the reasons behind their grading decisions to make sense of individual and collective choices involving grading practices. Furthermore, this study is influenced by a transcendental phenomenological approach which focuses on people's sense of an existing practice of a notion of the phenomenon as compared to the hermeneutic approach in which researchers usually explains participants' experience on the base of their own pre- experience about the phenomenon ([Giorgi, 2012](#)).

Data was gathered by employing in-depth interviews and documents analysis to explore teachers' views and experiences related to grading and reporting students' learning.

Methods of Data Collection

Multiple methods were used, including open-ended questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and document analysis for data collecting during the conduct of the study. Data were collected in two phases. In 1st phase, the open-ended questionnaire was used for obtaining more detailed information from teachers regarding to their grading and reporting practices. Four general questions were included in open-ended questionnaire about their views related to grading and reporting and their availability to

participate further in the study. On the basis of teachers' input, I selected the teachers for the next phase of data collection activity.

In the second phase of the study, interview method used which explore the participants' views related to grading practice. Open-ended questions were asked from the participants, and their personal experiences related to the phenomenon were emphasized in order to allow for more in-depth responses, and more investigative questions. At times, the demand of the questions varied for individual participant, depending on the flow of the conversation with each participant (Creswell, 2007). The guide included questions like: What are your current grading practices in school? How do you assign grades to students' learning and which factors do you consider while assigning grades to students?

All interviews transcripts were kept as separate word document files in Microsoft Word, and the files were saved in four different places – two removable disks, one laptop computer and one hard drive on a personal computer.

For the purpose of the study, document analysis was also used for getting knowledge about current grading and reporting practices that are prevalent in school. Consequently, school grading policy documents, students' report cards, result cards, and anecdotal record of any kind (if available) were examined and analyzed. This analysis helped me to further understand how teachers assigned grades to students' learning and how they prepared students' report cards, which factors they considered while assigning grades to students' learning, and if and how did they follow the school's policy on grading and reporting.

Data Analysis

Transcendental phenomenological data analysis procedure was used, which began with the transcription of whole data and highlighted "significant statements," sentences, or quotes that provided an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon. [Moustakas \(1994\)](#) term this step as horizontalization. For example, in this study,

first transcribed the whole data and highlighted the several significant statements.

Next, clusters of meaning were developed from these significant statements into themes. The subjects are then used to compose a depiction of what the members experienced. At that point, the depiction of the specific situation or setting that impacted how the members encountered the phenomenon, called imaginative variations or structural depiction was created from the bunch of information produced for the theme.

From the structural descriptions, composite descriptions were that presented the "essence" of the phenomenon, called the essential, invariant structure (or essence). For example, after describing the context of teachers' grading practices then I wrote the essence of these practices and concluded that traditional grading practices are prevalent in government schools and teachers consider only cognitive factors (achievement scores) while assigning grades to students' learning.

Presenting the Results

By following the data collection phases, results were also presented in two different sections.

Section 1

In section 1, results presented from the phase one of the data collection activity, in which open-ended questionnaires were used to collect data from 50 elementary school teachers from four different schools. For developing a generic understanding regarding grading and reporting of students' learning, four general questions were included in the open-ended questionnaires for the respondents, which are as follows:

- Q.1 What are your current grading and reporting practices in school?
- Q.2 Which types of factors do you consider when assigning grades to students?
- Q.3 Which types of challenges do you face in assigning grades to students?
- Q.4 Are you available for an interview regarding grading and reporting practices?

Insights were organized from data into different themes, including teachers' general grading and reporting practices, consideration of different factors, challenges faced by

teachers, and availability for interviews. The discussions on themes were discussed in table 1.

Table 1

Themes	Evidence
General grading and reporting practices	<p>“Teachers assigned grades to students’ learning based on %age of marks like Above 80% = A+ (Exceptional) Under 80% = A (Excellent) Above 60% but below 70% = B (Very Good) Above 50% but below 60 % = C (Good) Above 40% but below 50% = D (Fair) Below 40%= F (Failed)” (T1).</p> <p>“Only output of students are considered while grading and reporting of students’ learning” (T17).</p>
Consideration of different types of factors by the participant teachers	<p>“Students’ class performance, behaviour, attendance, cleanliness, and homework completion are considered” (T10).</p> <p>“We consider attendance rate, reading habits, and participation of students during class discussions” (T31).</p>
Challenges Faced by Teachers	<p>“Overcrowded class is also challenge for me in assessing individual student and gaining attention of student because some students are physically present in class but mentally absent” (T6).</p> <p>“Lack of parents’ cooperation in backward areas because parents have no interest in their children studies. They have no information about their child strength and weaknesses” (T1).</p>

Teachers use traditional grading and reporting system in schools. Teachers assign grades to students' learning based on their %age of marks like above 80% = A+, under 80% = A, and above 60% but below 70% = B etc. But some teachers also consider other qualities of students like attendance rate, class participation, and neatness etc., besides cognitive factors. Data from the study show that all teachers prepare report cards at the end of the academic year to inform parents about their child's achievement and performance.

Participants of the study faced different types of challenges during the process of assigning grades and reporting on students' learning like large class size, illiterate family background, lack of parents' cooperation etc. (see table 1).

Section 2

This section presents data from teachers' interviews and document analysis. The section addresses the research questions that guided the study by highlighting the views, practices, and challenges faced by the participant teachers during the process of grading and reporting of students' learning. It further examines the gaps that exist between teachers' views and practices. Consistently, the findings are divided into four sections as follows:

1. Teachers' views about grading and reporting of students' learning
2. Teachers' practices related to grading and reporting of students' learning

- 3. Challenges faced by teachers while grading and reporting of students' learning.
- 4. Gaps between teachers' views and practices regarding grading and reporting of students' learning

Table 2. Presents Excerpt from the Teachers' Interviews.

Themes	Evidence
Teachers' views about grading and reporting of students' learning	<p>"According to my point of view, grading and reporting are two different things; grading is directly related to student evaluation and reporting is related to the involvement of parents in the teaching-learning process and getting feedback" (T17).</p> <p>"Students get motivation and develop competition among them through grading and reporting. Students try to work hard for achieving good grades and develop passion in themselves that, 'I can do this. So, grading and reporting is very necessary for students' learning' (T31).</p> <p>"Pass-fail system is used in government school and grades are assigned to students on the base of their %age of marks at the end of year. Teacher makes report card at the end of final term exam and inform the parents about the students' performance" (T10).</p>
Teachers' Practices Related to Grading and Reporting of Students' Learning	<p>"Teachers just focus on students marks while grading and reporting of students' learning. But according to my point of view, we should consider student honesty, character, behaviour with others, obedience, and neatness while assigning grades to students" (T6).</p> <p>"Parents are illiterate and from backward area, that's why they are not cooperating with teachers. They have lack of interest about their child's learning" (T1).</p>
Challenges Faced by Teachers While Grading for and Reporting on Students' Learning	<p>"Large class size is a big challenge for teachers; it make it difficult for the teacher to maintain every student's report card and assess students individually" (T47).</p> <p>"I face challenge in following the order from authority like if a student is the relative of our headteacher, then we are bound to give him highest grade in class, even if he didn't deserve that marks" (T37).</p>

Grading and reporting are two different yet interlinked processes. In grading, teachers assign grade to students on basis of their scores at the end of session and through reporting, teachers communicate the students'

performance to their parents. Conventional grading system is used in government school. Teachers assign grades to students learning' at the end of the academic year and these grades are based on only %age of marks.

Teachers face different types of challenges during the process of grading and reporting on students' learning. Teachers appear concerned because parents take little interest in their child's education/ studies and the other challenge is the restriction from government's policy that limits the teachers to not to fail any student and consider only final term marks while assigning grades. Moreover, teachers are under pressure from authority, including the headteacher/senior teacher. Teachers feel pressurized to follow their orders and often engage in unfair practices by assigning higher scores/grades to students who are relatives of headteachers or senior teachers (see table 2).

This study also explores the gaps that exist between teachers' views and practices related to grading and reporting of students' learning. According to teachers' views, grading should be done fairly by considering both cognitive and non-cognitive factors, considering formative assessment but the actual grading and reporting practices differ from the teachers' views. Most of the teachers reported considering only cognitive factors like achievement scores when assigning grades to students' learning. Formative assessment is rarely considered.

Discussion

The discussion on findings is presented according to the research questions of the study. Overall, teachers' views about grading and reporting are similar to the description of grading and reporting as found in the literature which states that grading is a process in which a numeral or letter is assigned at the end of a period of time as a instantaneous statement of learner's presentation ([O'Connor, 2018](#)). Overall, teachers' explanations of the grading and reporting of students' learning are in line with the descriptions found in the literature, which implies that the participants of the study have a clear understanding of the purposes of grading of, and reporting on, students' learning.

Teachers' grading and reporting practices are also in line with the explanations that are found in literature about grading and reporting

practices which stated only summative evaluations should be included in the final grades because students frequently don't comprehend the material on the first attempt, and they should not be punished or forced into idealizing an undertaking while they are currently finding out about it and grades must be based on their learning content toward the end of the academic year ([O'Connor, 2007](#)). Consistently, the participants of the study also used conventional grading system in their school and consider only cognitive factors related to the learning content/curriculum. Teachers consider only students' marks obtained in final term exam and grades are assigned in alphabetical form and percentage form which present the students' annual academic performance.

The challenges that teachers face during the process of grading and reporting of students' learning are in line with the literature to some extent. Some of the challenges are also discussed in the literature. However, some of the challenges faced by the participants of the study have not been mentioned in the literature. For example, teachers feel perplexed and wonder whether they should consider cognitive factors and non-cognitive factors or only cognitive factors while assigning grades to students' learning. Teachers do not find any justification for the consideration of non-cognitive factors while assigning grades. Such types of challenges are often highlighted in the literature. It is argued that teachers often get confused in a two-hat dilemma while assigning grades to students' learning ([Pike, 1991](#)). But lack of parents' cooperation, restriction from the government policy, authority pressure not frequently discussed in literature. In this way, these findings contribute to help in filling the gaps of previous researches.

The findings of the study further demonstrate that important gaps exist between teachers' views and practices. According to teachers' point of view, teachers should consider cognitive as well as non-cognitive factors while grading and reporting of students' learning. But teachers' views contradict their practices. Teachers do not consider formative

assessment while assigning the final grades. Likewise, non-cognitive factors are not considered when assigning grades to, and reporting on, students' learning. In fact, only students' marks obtained in final term exam are considered and mentioned on the final report cards.

Conclusion

The results of this study concluded that according to teachers' views, grading and reporting as two different, yet interlinked processes. This means that teachers assign grades to students' learning at the end of the session while grading, and communicate students' results to different stakeholders through reporting.

According to teachers' practices, the traditional grading system is used in government sector schools; teachers consider only cognitive factors like achievement scores when assigning grades, and do not consider formative assessment scores and/or other non-cognitive factors like student's class participation, attendance rate, neatness etc.

Teachers face different types of challenges while grading for, and reporting on, students' learning. These include difficulties imposed by the large class size, lack of parents' cooperation, restriction from the authority, and unfair grading practices to name a few.

There are important gaps that exist between teachers' views and practices related to grading and reporting of students' learning. While the teachers believe that, cognitive as

well as non-cognitive factors should be considered when assigning grades to students' learning; in practice they consider only cognitive factors due to a number of reasons as authority pressure, have not justification for considering non-cognitive factors etc.

Applications

The result of this study highlights the different types of issues as well as reason of unfair grading practices. These include: large class size, restrictions from government policy and maintaining attendance rate to name a few. It is important to note that the teachers have to make students' attendance rate 90% themselves, whether students come to school or not. So, due to pressures from authority or government policy, teachers perform unfair grading practices for maintaining their reputation and duties in schools. It is suggested that class sizes should be reduced. Government authorities and, overseers, and school heads must make sure that the class size decreases. They ought to choose the suitable educator student proportion and ensure that all classes maintain the predefined proportion.

It is suggested that all government schools use common policy which is recommended by SED instead of using school internal policies. However, it is important to note that teachers do feel restrictions that are imposed by the SED policy. It is, thus, equally important to develop a framework for effective, practical and meaningful grading and reporting practices based on the teachers' input.

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