

An Appraisal of Secondary School Certificate's Examination Papers of Pakistan Studies in the Perspective of Higher Order Thinking

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Abstract



Higher-order thinking skills are highly important for the students in learning new knowledge, storing it in their memories, correlating, and organizing to achieve a specific purpose. Students Higher-order thinking skills can be determined and activated through higher-order thinking assessment tasks. Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to analyze five years (2014 to 2018) secondary school level Pakistan Studies papers, utilizing higher-order thinking. Assessment papers of the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Islamabad were qualitatively examined. Findings of the current research showed that major portions of the assessment papers comprising the tasks that can measure the remembering and understanding skills lie in the cognitive domain. However, the portions for the assessment of students' abilities regarding the application, analysis, evaluation, and creation were quite limited at the secondary level. Therefore, it is recommended that the assessment process in the subject of Pakistan studies may be revised and training may be organized for teachers and educators to include questions of higher cognitive capabilities for the improvement in students' learning.

Keywords: Assessment, Cognitive, Higher-order- thinking, Question Paper, Secondary Level.

Introduction

21st-century education aims to teach students to effectively meet the challenges of the world rather than just providing information. It must develop the ability of learners to face the world of work, live a daily life, and walk together with society, as well as provide new experiences, unique and creative ideas. According to Warisdiono, et al (2017), in the 21st century partnership, it was suggested that it was necessary to achieve 4Cs to face today's world; collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and communication. Students can sharpen their skills that are consistent with the 21st-century demands with the use of higher-order thinking skill (HOTS) items in tests (Hamidi, et al 2018).

One of the most critical components for a person to be able to address new challenges in the twenty-first century is HOTS (Brookhart, 2010; Moseley et al., 2005; Thompson, 2008). To efficiently address new challenges, HOTS also play a crucial role in applying, connecting, or altering prior information (Thomas & Thorne, 2009). HOTS is characterized as an incision between the three top levels of ability in the cognitive dimension (analyzing, evaluating, and creating) and the three levels of knowledge dimension (conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive) in the revised Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001, Thompson, 2008). As a result, tasks such as analyzing, evaluating, and producing conceptual and procedural knowledge, or metacognition, are used to assess HOTS. This indicates that familiarizing students with HOTS activities is critical in preparing them to solve new problems, acclimate to a new environment, and make decisions about a specific problem (Retnawati, et al, 2018).

Improving students' HOTS is a cumulative practice; without the help of other teachers' one teacher of a selected subject cannot improve the higher-level thinking ability of students, it's a collective method among all subject specialists and maybe educated for all stages of knowledge (Lawson, 1993; Shellens, & Valcke, 2005). Furthermore, Bloom (2008) contends that students' progress can be enhanced through these skills cumulative by their courses, subjects, and alternative experiences they get from their institutes. As well, critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-

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making activities together with their subjects can facilitate the students to improve HOTS (Misykah & Adiansha, 2018).

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

The revised Bloom's Taxonomy for Educational Objectives was the theoretical framework for the present study. The Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, known as Bloom's Taxonomy is one of the most renowned theories in teaching and learning. Educators regularly use Bloom's Taxonomy to come up with learning objectives that aim not only at the subject matter but also at the level of learning they want students to achieve and then to create tests that accurately report on students' progress about the outcomes (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Bloom's taxonomy is a renowned framework closely related to high-order thinking. Generally, it has been used as a framework for teaching and learning thinking skills. Dr. Benjamin Bloom and his team designed Bloom's taxonomy in the year 1956. The purpose of this framework is to introduce higher-order thinking in the education system (Rosli & Maarof, 2017).

Taxonomy Framework consists of the following domains:

1. Cognitive domain is knowledge-based
2. Affective domain is attitudinal-based
3. Psychomotor domain is skill-based (Forehand, 2010).

Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation was the original sequence of cognitive skills. Lorin Anderson and David Krathwohl revised the framework in 2001, "yielding the revised Bloom's Taxonomy". The most important modification of Bloom's Taxonomy was the elimination of 'Synthesis' and the addition of 'Creation' as the highest level. The cognitive domain is divided into six groups which are "remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating". The first three are known as lower-order whereas the other three analyzing, evaluating, and creating are in the category of higher-order thinking skills.

Remembering means identifying or memorizing facts from long-term memory e.g. retrieve facts, reciting previously learned information, definitions. Understanding means creating meaning from activities and written messages e.g. understanding, demonstrating, categorizing, briefing, concluding, relating. Applying means through implementing carrying out or using a procedure. The conditions where learned material is used through products like demonstrations, interviews models, refer to applying. Analyzing is breaking concepts into parts, defining the relationship among the parts, or relationship with a comprehensive structure or objective. In this function, intellectual activities are involved. The creation of diagrams, worksheets, and reviews can illustrate these intellectual activities. Evaluating means "making judgments based on criteria and standards through checking and critiquing. Critiques, recommendations, and reports are some of the products that can be created to demonstrate the processes of evaluation. In the newer taxonomy, evaluating comes before creating as it is often a necessary part of the precursory behavior before one creates something". Creating means "putting elements together to form a coherent or functional whole; reorganizing elements into a new pattern or structure through generating, planning, or producing. Creating requires users to put parts together in a new way, or synthesize parts into something new and different creating a new form or product. This process is the most difficult mental function in the new taxonomy" (Forehand, 2010).

Assessment

Assessment may be a means of providing feedback to the varied stakeholders involved in the education system. It communicates the expectations of the education system to all stakeholders. The data provides feedback to teachers about the learning of their students. It informs students to what extent they are meeting expectations and provide feedback to the headteacher and educational officers about the efficiency of students and teachers' workings under their supervision. The assessment also provides feedback to policymakers about how well policies are functioning.

In the development of students, assessment plays a dynamic role and determines whether a student can promote to the next class (Borghouts, Slingerland & Haerens, 2017). A public examination system is organized around the world to evaluate the capabilities of pupils to attain a certain level of calibration (Goldstein & Leckie, 2016; Lau & Tam, 2017). Public examinations promote examination-oriented instructions. The excellence and values of the schools are determined by the results of these examinations (Islam, 2016; Kirkpatrick & Zang, 2014) (Rind & Mari, 2019).

In most cases, teaching is teacher-centered in Pakistan, where the primary role of students is to remember content correctly because they are passive learners. Students are evaluated based on the reproduction of knowledge as credit is given based on the correct recall of information in examinations (Safdar, 2013). In Secondary School Certificate and Higher Secondary Certificate examination, rote learning is the only way to assess students (Christie and Afzal, 2005) and this method continues as they move towards tertiary education (Ahmed, and Ahmed, 2017).

The evaluation strategy is questionable at the secondary and higher level in Pakistan as paper setters and instructors need to be developed to analyze test items. Selected test items do not cover the entire curriculum. Selective reading is preferred. Therefore, the reliability and legitimacy of the examination papers cannot be assessed. There is no proper checking and results preparation framework. Well-designed tests in modern education systems are the basic components of the learning process that reinforce the student's defining and critical thinking skills. The assessment framework of Pakistani public schools meets this objective ineffectively, which comes in the ineffectively stated test papers that undermine numerous great students (Khattak, 2012).

Researchers have sent several recommendations for planning evaluation in the best possible way for higher-level thinking assessment. Initially, types of open-ended questions may be more reasonable to assess high-order thinking abilities than traditional multiple-choice designs. KU (2009) emphasizes that current surveys prove and suggest that open questions better capture the construction of high-order thinking because they are more vulnerable to identifying the nature of high-order thinking abilities than different choice things. Therefore, Ku suggests systematic tests, in which both multiple-choices and open questions should be designed.

"Test of Specification Table (TST) is an important tool in the construction of classroom assessment because it ensures the validity of a measurement tool," (Arsaythamby et al. 2016). Teachers need to prepare TST before constructing an assessment tool. The use of TST will be effective in determining the validity of items as well as guiding teachers in the assessment of questions. As a result, integrating HOTS into teaching and preparing a TST is one of the strategies of teachers for effective assessment execution. In addition, as justified by Arsythamby et al. (2016), reference books are being used by teachers to choose test items. As a result, the reference books are a solution, and the development of quality assessment items has been neglected. Arsythamby et al. (2016) also stated that when assigning scores and bands to students' HOTS, teachers may use a variety of assessment methods, such as students' observations, discussion, and group work (Wilson & Narasuman, 2020).

Pakistan Studies at the secondary level

In the Pakistan scenario, optional and compulsory subjects are offered at the secondary level. But the subjects of Pakistan studies and Islamiyat are compulsory from secondary level to onward. The subject of Pakistan studies enables the students to become good citizens, good Pakistani, and a good democratic personality. The students get knowledge about the history, geography, culture, constitutions of Pakistan as well as about the relationships of Pakistan with neighboring countries. The objective of the teaching of Pakistan studies is to enrich students' learning about the history, people, culture, society, and geography of Pakistan (GOP, 2010). Furthermore, the teaching of this subject aims to inculcate knowledge about literature, resources in Pakistan, the political & constitutional developments, the administrative system of the country, and relations with other countries. If we view the history of curriculum development, in 1960 "Social Studies" was announced as a compulsory subject at elementary and secondary levels. Later, Pakistan Studies replaced Social studies, in terms of its name, for high grades i.e. IX-X in 1976 as a compulsory subject (Ghaffar & Afridi, 2015).

Determine the Purpose of the Document Analysis

Focus on specific goals that you want to learn because all aspects of teaching cannot be observed at a glance. Adjusting specific education and evaluation goals will get your attention to whether you fully review the document or just as part of the review. In the National Curriculum 2006, the following objectives of teaching of Pakistan studies (Grade IX-X) were stated:

Objectives of Pakistan studies syllabus

- Having a sovereign and independent state, create a sense of gratitude to Almighty Allah.
- To encourage creativity, higher-order skills, and observation emphasizing learning of various concepts regarding Pakistan Studies.

- To promote efforts for achieving the goals of Islamization, understanding the philosophy of Pakistan, Muslims struggle for the emergence of an independent state.
- To inform about the geography of Pakistan.
- To communicate awareness about several socio-cultural characteristics of the community.
- To Highlight Pakistan's strategic position and its relationship with neighboring and Muslim States.
- Inculcate the responsibilities and rights as a citizen of a sovereign and independent state.
- Highlight the importance of national cohesion, patriotism, and integration.
- To familiarize with several phases of Pakistan's historic, political and constitutional developments (Gull & Saeed 2020).

Studies on Pakistan studies

Though many researchers have observed the level of higher-order thinking amongst students at different phases of education (Mahyuddin, Lope Pihie, Elias & Konting, 2004; MohdSuhadi et al., 2015; Yee, Yunos, Hassan, Othman, & Tee, 2011) it is necessary to measure learners' level of HOTS through assessment. The students must equip with HOTS and be able to use the skills effectively. After going through the national and international reputed journals and periodicals, it was observed that no research work was found related to present research recently. However, Irfan Ahmed Rind and Awais Malk (2019) conducted research on the "examination trends at the secondary and higher secondary level in Pakistan" in Sind province of Pakistan, the study analyzed ten-year (2005 to 2016) examination papers of Mathematics, Sciences, and English of grades X and XII, but not related to assessment of question papers in the context of HOTS. The partial findings of Sufiana khatoon Malik, Syed Iftikhar Hussain Jafri & Amjad Ali Arain, Mehwish Gull & Muhammad Saeed (2011, 2012, 2020) were published under the title of (i) "Teaching of Pakistan studies at secondary level: A review. Elixir Social Studies" (ii) "Assessment of Instructional Objectives in Boards' Examination Papers in Physics: Cognitive Development" (iii) "An analysis of Pakistan Studies BISE Lahore question papers at secondary level". Gull & Saeed (2020) found that the knowledgeability of the students was assessed in short and long questions in Pakistan studies papers (2015-2017) of the Lahore Board. All the questions were based on basic definitions and the rest of the cognitive abilities were ignored to a great extent. Similarly, the partial findings of Sufiana khatoon Malik and Irfa Zaheer, Ghaffar & Arbab Khan Afridi (2012, 2015) were published under the title of (i) "An analysis of Pakistan Studies question papers at secondary level" (2007-2011) of Rawalpindi board (ii) "Teaching of Pakistan Studies". Sufiana khatoon Malik and Irfa Zaheer found that students' cognitive abilities related to higher-order thinking were ignored to a great extent. Ghaffar & Arbab Khan Afridi presented curriculum development Views, teaching methods, and techniques in the teaching of Pakistan studies. In developed countries, public examination has been promoted as a result of the continual analysis of their standards through research. However, there is very little systematic and smart analysis found to work out the standard of public examination at secondary and higher secondary levels in Pakistan especially concerning the revised Bloom taxonomy (cognitive domain). This study tries to fill the gap by conducting an inclusive study on the assessment of annual question papers of the subject of Pakistan studies. With this aim in mind, the researchers intended to assess the annual question paper of Pakistan Studies (2014-2018) of grade x, conducted under the ambit of FBISE, Islamabad, in the context of revised Bloom's Taxonomy (cognitive domain).

Statement of problem

The problem under study is to analyze the annual question papers (2014-2018) of Pakistan studies subject (grade x) in the context of revised Bloom Taxonomy, conducted by the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education, Islamabad.

Research objectives

The objectives of the study

1. To analyze the last five years (2014-2018) annual question papers of Pakistan Studies subject at secondary school level of FBISE, Islamabad, in the context of revised Bloom Taxonomy.

Research Question

The research question of the study

1. Does annual question papers (FBISE) of Pakistan Studies subject assess the students' ability to remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluation and creativity?

Research method

The present research paper employs a qualitative approach to data analysis. Document analysis was done. The last five years Federal board annual question papers (2014-2018) of Pakistan Studies were thoroughly reviewed concerning Revised Bloom Taxonomy. A variety of methods was used in the annual question papers to test students’ knowledge including Constructed Response Questions (CRQs), Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs), and Extended Response Questions (ERQs). The present study was limited to Constructed Response Questions and Extended Response Questions. In this way, 52 CRQs, and 15 ERQs were analyzed. To respond to research questions, available literature in the shape of books, research articles, reports, research theses, annual question papers of Pakistan Studies was referred to shape the outline for the study.

Data collection

In this present study, thesis, textbooks, dissertations, research articles, grade-x question papers of Pakistan Studies (2014-2018) of group-I, and all other available documents of Pakistan Studies were consulted for the collection of data.

Data analysis

To attain the objectives of the research, the document analysis method was used. The study was qualitative. In the present research annual question papers of Pakistan Studies (2014-2018) of FBISE Islamabad were assessed. The researchers have measured every item of the question paper of Pakistan Studies against the revised Bloom taxonomy of the cognitive domain. Grade 10th paper usually includes 10 multiple-choice questions (MCQs) 11 Constructed Response Questions (CRQs) and 3 Extended Response Questions (ERQs). In this study students’ abilities were measured through Constructed Response Questions (CRQs) and Extended Response Questions (ERQs). Therefore 52 CRQs and 15 ERQs given in the annual question papers of Pakistan Studies (2014-2018) were analyzed. The collected data were tabulated and analyzed through percentages and frequencies Findings are presented in the form of a table for further interpretation.

Unit of analysis

"The entity that is being investigated in a scientific investigation" is a simple definition of the word "unit of analysis." In social research, almost anything can be used as a unit of analysis. Students, parents, instructors, classes, schools, and school districts are the most typical units of analysis in educational research. Although some units are more popular in a particular area, any form of social entity can be used as the unit of analysis in a study as long as it is something the researcher is interested in learning more about. Buildings, novels, music, jokes, tales, scientific breakthroughs, strikes, laws, constitutions, and meetings are all examples of studies utilizing these types of units of analysis (Dolma, 2010). Keeping in reference the cognitive domain of revised Bloom’s taxonomy, the annual question papers (2014-2018) of Pakistan studies subject (grade x) were assessed as the unit of analysis for the present study.

Delimitation of the study

Due to inadequate means, the current research was restricted to the assessment of annual question papers of Pakistan studies;

1. 2014 to 2018 of Group-1 at the Secondary school level.
2. FBISE, Islamabad.
3. In the perspective of the cognitive domain of revised Bloom’s Taxonomy.
4. Only short (constructed-response) and long (extended response) questions were analyzed.

Results and discussion

Cumulative results of all question papers from (2014 to 2018) are described in the following table:

Table No 1: Cumulative Results of Annual Question paper (short & long) of Pakistan Studies question papers of F.B.I.S.E, Islamabad 2014-2018

Year	2014		2015		2016		2017		2018	
	No of short questions (%age)	No of long questions (%age)	No of short questions (%age)	No of long questions (%age)	No of short questions (%age)	No of long questions (%age)	No of short questions (%age)	No of long questions (%age)	No of short questions (%age)	No of long questions (%age)
Remembering	10 (91%)	01 (33%)	09 (81%)	01 (33%)	08 (72%)	0 (0%)	11(100%)	0 (0%)	11(100%)	0 (0%)
Understanding	0 (0%)	02 (67%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	02 (18%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	01(33%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Applying	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0(0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Analyzing	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	01 (33%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	01 (33%)
Evaluating	01 (9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	01 (33%)	01 (9%)	01 (33%)	0 (0%)	01 (33%)	0 (0%)	02 (67%)
Creating	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	01(33%)	0 (0%)	01 (33%)	0 (0%)	01 (33%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

The analysis of the annual question paper of Pakistan studies (2014) showed that there was a total of 11 short questions in the paper of Pakistan Studies. Among these short questions, 91% (10) items were related to the first category of the cognitive domain of revised Bloom's Taxonomy that is remembering whereas, 9% (1) item was linked with the evaluation category of the cognitive domain. There was a total of three long questions in the paper of Pakistan Studies (2014) among these 33% (1) long questions related to remembering level whereas 67% (2) long questions were related to the understanding level of the cognitive domain. These results reflect the tendency of assessment methods that students are asked routine questions just to recall information. Students' higher-order thinking skills will not improve in this way. Rind & Mari (2019) stated that students' memorization and comprehension are assessed in most of the items. Items are repeated frequently every year.

The analysis of the annual paper of Pakistan studies (2015) showed that there was a total of 11 short questions among these 81% (09) short question items were related with remembering category and only 0% item linked with understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating the category of the cognitive domain. There was a total of 03 long questions in the annual question paper of Pakistan Studies (2015) among them 33% (1) items related to remembering level and 33% (1) items related to evaluating the level and 33% (1) item was related with creating a level of the cognitive domain. This was following the opinion of the researcher Gull & Saeed (2020) who found that only students' knowledgeability is assessed in Pakistan Studies papers. In National Curriculum 2006 the abilities comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and creation have been described were ignored. The ability to generate new ideas and analyze things is not assessed in Pakistan Studies question papers (2015-2017) of BISE, Lahore.

The analysis of the annual question paper of Pakistan studies (2016) showed that there was a total of 11 short questions among them 72% (8) items related to remembering category, 18% (2) items linked with understanding, and 9% (1) item was linked with evaluating category of the cognitive domain. There was a total of 03 long questions in the paper of Pakistan Studies (2016) among them 33% (1) items related to analyzing level and 33% (1) items related to evaluating the level and 33% (1) items were related with creating a level of the cognitive domain. These findings supported the views of researchers Jafri, & Arain, (2012), where researchers found an imbalance proportion of knowledge, understanding, and application. Gull, M. & Saeed. M. (2020), stated that in Pakistan Studies question papers (2015-2017) short and long questions only assessed the knowledge and comprehension ability of the students.

The analysis of the annual question paper of Pakistan studies (2017) showed that there was a total of 11 short questions among them 100% (11) items related to the remembering category of the cognitive domain. There was a total of 03 long questions among them 33% (1) items related to the understanding level and 33% (1) items related to evaluating the level and 33% (1) items were related to creating a level of the cognitive domain. This situation is also supported by Malik, S., & Zaheer, I. (2012) where finding resulted that the main objective of the teaching of Pakistan studies was the memorization of taught concepts. The results of the study indicate that the Federal Board of intermediate and secondary education evaluates the abilities of students regarding knowledge. Questions items regarding analysis, application, evaluation, and creation were ignored.

The analysis of the annual question paper of Pakistan studies (2018) showed that there was a total of 11 short questions among them 100% (11) items related to the remembering category of the cognitive domain. There was a total of 03 long questions in the annual question paper among them 33% (1) items related to analyzing level and 67% (2) items related to evaluating the level of the cognitive domain. These research findings support the results of Gull, M. & Saeed. M. (2020) where researchers found that knowledge, comprehension, and analysis ability was assessed in Pakistan Studies at the secondary level, the knowledgeability of the students was assessed in short and long questions in annual question papers of Pakistan Studies (2015-2017). All the questions were based on basic definitions and the rest of the cognitive abilities were ignored to a great extent.

Conclusions

The results of this paper show that the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (FBISE) Islamabad exams mostly examine the remembrance and understanding abilities of the

students. Even application-level queries scrutinize students' procedural knowledge rather than their application skills. The 05 years of examination papers covered by our study hardly had any analytical questions and no diagnostic level questions.

- The finding shows remembering ability of students is measured and evaluation abilities are ignored (short questions) in the annual question paper of Pakistan studies 2014. Moreover, the maximum focus of long questions is on the understanding level of the cognitive domain whereas applying, analyzing, and creating abilities are ignored.
- It is concluded that the maximum focus of the question paper of Pakistan Studies 2015 was on the remembering category of the cognitive domain in short and long questions. In this paper higher-level abilities of students are not measured. It means that students learning achievement in Pakistan Studies is only assessed by memorization of facts or information.
- Finding concluded that in the question paper of Pakistan Studies, 2016, remembering ability of students is measured mostly in short questions whereas only one short question is related to evaluating.
- It is concluded that the remembering ability of students is measured in short questions of question paper of 2017. Students' understanding, analyzing, evaluating, creating abilities are ignored. The results of the assessment of long questions conclude that applying and analyzing categories of the cognitive domain are ignored.
- Finding of assessment of annual question paper of Pakistan studies 2018 shows that mostly remembering category of the cognitive domain is measured through short questions. The long questions only measure analyzing and evaluating categories of the cognitive domain.

Recommendation

Findings of the present research revealed that in annual question papers of Pakistan Studies (2014-2018) only students' understanding and remembering abilities were assessed. The abilities relating to higher-order thinking were ignored to a great extent.

The quality of Pakistan Studies question papers needs to improve. In the light of the finding and conclusion of the present research, the researchers suggest the following recommendations;

- The proficient instructors may be assigned the duty of paper setter by FBISE.
- Training programs regarding the writing of question paper items may be scheduled annually for paper setters.
- Transformation of the pattern of Pakistan studies paper may be held according to the assessment of cognitive abilities as analysis, evaluation, and creation.
- Revised Bloom's taxonomy may be made parallel with the selection of content and content demonstration methods and the same may be assessed accordingly.
- Pakistan Studies teachers may be trained according to the assessment procedure of FBISE.
- Items regarding decision making, analyzing, and generating new knowledge may be incorporated in the Pakistan studies question papers.

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