



DOI:10.22144/ctujoisd.2025.067

Exploring themes and patterns in periodic examination in English language classes

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Article info.

Received 12 Nov 2024

Revised 12 Feb 2025

Accepted 17 May 2025

Keywords

Content analysis, educational assessment, English assessment, multiple-choice test, periodic examination

ABSTRACT

Assessment practices need to be transformed to fulfill their guiding role effectively in the teaching and learning process. This study explores the structure, content, and educational value of district-wide, standardized English assessments for grades 7–10 through the Bloom's Taxonomy framework. Using inductive qualitative content analysis, themes, building techniques, content distribution, curriculum alignment, and learning implications were highlighted in this study. The results show a progression in the skills evaluated, prioritizing communication and critical thinking over basic grammar. To ensure fair and equitable assessment, areas for test construction improvement are also noted, focusing on minimizing bias, maintaining consistency, and ensuring clarity. The distribution of content and the significance of a well-rounded strategy are also examined in the analysis. Although the emphasis is on analytical skills, the lack of attention to evaluation asks raises questions about inclusivity. Closing this gap will guarantee that tests fully evaluate a variety of cognitive skills. Likewise, teachers can create a dynamic, inclusive learning environment that fosters critical thinking, communication, and analytical skills through the improvement of assessment practices.

1. INTRODUCTION

Assessment is imperative in the teaching-learning experiences of the people in the educational setting to determine how well the teachers' methods of instruction are working with their objectives set for the day. Assessment practices play a crucial role in the teaching and learning process. A common assessment type primarily used by teachers is the multiple-choice test. Multiple-choice tests are a well-liked assessment strategy because of their adaptability to different age groups, efficiency in providing objective feedback, and increased use of technology (Tuma, 2021). While multiple-choice tests are a quick and easy way to evaluate people, Tongol-David (2019) points out that they are not very good at measuring skills that go beyond the

subject matter, which raises questions about how well they can evaluate more comprehensive aspects of human potential.

A district-wide periodic examination covering all subjects and levels was introduced by the District of Balamban I in the Division of Cebu for the 2023–2024 school year, emphasizing the quality assurance of multiple-choice exams. Contextualized approaches are necessary for diverse teaching environments, and the evolution of classroom assessment literacy (CAL) standards highlights the significance of teachers' competency in assessment (Asamoah et al., 2023). Comprehensive performance comparisons between schools are made easier by including mean percentage scores (MPS) from these exams. The significance of test

question creation is underscored by a mean percentage score analysis (Tongol-David, 2019). However, there is a dearth of studies looking at test questionnaire content, which points to a deficiency in research on content analysis. A methodological gap happens when the current research methods cannot be sufficiently explored (Oke, 2024). Thus, a methodological gap in content analysis of the multiple-choice test questionnaires. Conducting content analyzes on junior high school students' English multiple-choice test questionnaires shows promise in improving assessment practices to close this gap (Asamoah et al., 2023).

Further, Ryan (2018) has conducted additional research emphasizing the importance of pre-service teachers' assessment literacy and how it affects student outcomes. A key element of teacher preparation programs is the development of competency in assessment practices and an understanding of the complexities of assessment processes. Comprehensive training programs that address the constantly changing landscape of assessment methodologies and technologies are necessary to close the assessment literacy gap among educators. In addition, Clifton (2023) emphasizes the need for teachers to possess specialized knowledge and skills in language assessment when addressing the importance of language assessment literacy (LAL) in EFL education. Understanding language testing models, fairness principles, and formative assessment practices are just a few of the dimensions that make up LAL. Adding LAL training into teacher preparation courses can greatly improve teachers' capacity to create and administer efficient language assessments. Meijer et al. (2023) clarified educators' ideas about assessment literacy by highlighting how dynamic and socially constructed it is. Their research emphasizes the need to manage tensions in educational settings, as well as the continuous development of assessment competence, by pinpointing seven interconnected aspects of assessment literacy. To effectively support student learning and optimize assessment practices, educators must comprehend and navigate these aspects.

There is a substantial research vacuum in the field of English assessment when it comes to the thorough assessment of emergent literacy abilities using multiple-choice testing approaches. Although emergent literacy assessments play a critical role in identifying students who may struggle with literacy and informing effective teaching practices, there is

still much to learn about how to incorporate these assessments into multiple-choice test formats (Borges et al., 2023). The majority of research conducted to date has concentrated on emergent literacy assessments in particular language contexts; however, little thought has been given to how these abilities can be successfully measured in multiple-choice exams (Borges et al., 2023). Studies examining the viability and validity of integrating emergent literacy assessments into multiple-choice test formats are therefore desperately needed to provide insight into how these assessments can accurately measure students' emergent literacy skills while adhering to standardized testing procedures. Closing this research gap will help improve the efficacy and inclusiveness of English language assessments, which will lead to more comprehensive assessments of students' literacy development and language proficiency.

This research thus commits to creating a comprehensive content analysis of the test questionnaire in English for junior high school (JHS) used in the first semester of the school year. This study aims to provide insights into the design, content priorities, and educational implications of standardized district-wide periodic examinations in English for JHS students, with potential implications for curriculum development, assessment practices, and educational policy. In this study, "standardized" refers to a uniform test questionnaire administered during periodic examinations across the entire district where the research is conducted. In addition to analyzing the distribution of content areas, and determining recurrent themes, concepts, and skills in test questionnaires, this research study also seeks to determine whether test items are cognitively leveled, examine consistency across exams, and assess the implications of the findings for student learning, instructional strategies, and educational equity.

2. MATERIALS AND METHOD

2.1. Research design

The method used in this study is inductive qualitative content analysis. Content analysis enables a methodical investigation of the meanings and messages expressed in a particular kind of communication. In the context of this study, this 'communication' referred to is the first and second quarter standardized tests of the English subject (Renaud & Ruut, 2022).

2.2. Sources of data

Purposive sampling was utilized to choose the test questionnaires for analysis. This sampling method facilitates the selection of 8 sets of test questionnaires with their corresponding tables of specification and keys to correction. These 8 sets of questionnaires were composed of one questionnaire used in the first and second quarter examinations of English for 7th to 10th graders. It would be practical to focus on the English subject for this research since there are available standardized district-wide test questionnaires for various subjects in the first semester; with this, the study concentrated on a content analysis of English language exams for junior high school students with a sample size of two questionnaires per grade level and grading quarter was chosen for this analysis. The Most Essential Learning Competencies (Curriculum Guide) became the basis for the content standards. The Tables of Specifications (TOSs) are used for triangulation purposes. The test developers assigned difficulty levels ("easy", "average", and "difficult") to the sampled TOSs based on their judgment of student capabilities. These periodic test questionnaires are necessary to provide insights into the design, content priorities, and educational implications of standardized district-wide periodic examinations in English for junior high school students, with potential implications for curriculum development, assessment practices, and educational policy.

The district-wide periodic English examinations given to junior high school students in the first and second quarters served as the main source of data. These sets of test questionnaires are used in all public secondary schools in a district of the Cebu Province Division. To guarantee thoroughness, the most recent exams that are accessible were acquired, covering both quarters.

2.3. Data analysis

This study employed inductive content analysis, a qualitative data analysis technique, to identify recurring themes, concepts, and skills assessed across the examinations. To create a systematic conduct of the content analysis, codes were used. The rule for this tagged code is to create a string of characters and numbers. The first set of characters would be the name of the subject, represented by "ENG" for English. It would be followed by the year level: "07" for the 7th grade, "08" for the 8th grade, "09" for the 9th grade, and "10" for the 10th grade. The quarters will follow: "Q1" for the first quarter

and "Q2" for the second quarter. Finally, the corresponding respective item number would follow after, i.e., "01" for the first item, "02" for the second item, and so on, respectively. For example, the first item for English 7 for the first quarter would be: "ENG07Q101". During the data analysis phase, the inductive content analysis was based on the order of the research objectives:

For objective 1, recurring topics, concepts, and skills that have been assessed in the test questionnaire were identified. These were re-identified with their common set of objectives. In this objective, the results were presented in tabular form and created a comprehensive comparison of the TOS with the 1st and 2nd quarters and with the other grade levels. The common skill sets were identified and labeled as sub-themes and themes, respectively.

For objective 2, the distribution and weighting of different content areas across the examination using Bloom's taxonomy was analyzed. The results were presented in graphical form, showing a comprehensive comparison with the TOS, with the first and second quarters, and with the other grade levels.

For objective 3, the alignment between test content and content standards or curriculum objectives was analyzed, with two content experts helping in the validation. The researchers and content validators independently checked whether the item is indeed relevant and essential compared with the MELCs. Each item was rated on a four-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (not relevant) to 4 (very relevant) to calculate the content validity index (CVI). Items with a CVI value above 0.79 were considered acceptable. Furthermore, each accepted item was further rated by the checkers. Using the Lawshe formula, determine the content validity ratio (CVR) on a three-point Likert scale (necessary, useful but not important, and not necessary). Items that had a CVR greater than 0.75 were kept. $CVR = (N_e - N/2) / (N/2)$ is the formula for calculating the content validity ratio, where N_e is the number of panelists who indicate something is "essential" and N is the total number of panelists (Ahmady et al., 2023). The results were presented in tabular form, showing a comprehensive comparison with the first and second quarters and with other grade levels.

For objective 4, the potential implications of test content and the emphasis on student learning, instructional practices, and educational equity were looked into. To do this, the researchers utilized all

the available findings in this research and came up with a comprehensive analysis of the findings, leading to the synthesis of conclusions and recommendations.

2.4. Ethical considerations and trustworthiness

Ethical research guidelines were followed, guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality throughout the duration of the study. There was no collection or reporting of personally identifiable information. The required authorization from the appropriate authorities was sought to get entry to the exams. The trustworthiness of this research is based on credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Recurring topics, concepts, and skills

The study generated three themes: language skills, critical thinking and research skills, and communication strategies, respectively. These themes are generated through thorough inspection of the skills and categorization.

Language Skills: The students' reading comprehension skills are tested based on their ability to understand and analyze the given text. The micro-competencies include: figuring out the main ideas, providing an overview, and applying various reading techniques. For students in grades 7, 8, and 9, these skills are mainly addressed in the first quarter, with some continuing into the second. At the beginning, roughly in grades 7, 8, and 9, the emphasis is on building a solid foundation. The questionnaires for reading comprehension tests portray an entire narrative of how teachers can develop these vital abilities at different grade levels.

Critical Thinking and Research Skills: The Critical Thinking and Research Skills curriculum for Grade 8 encourages a more in-depth comprehension and application of critical thinking when navigating the realm of academic research. The emphasis is on giving students the tools they need to navigate and synthesize knowledge efficiently from any source. Students gain the critical ability to evaluate sources by learning how to distinguish between various

materials (books, articles, websites), as well as how to use library catalogs. This gives them the ability to differentiate between reliable and possibly unreliable sources, strengthening the basis of their knowledge. The curriculum covers more ground than just knowledge retrieval. Information synthesis is a major area of focus where students learn to recognize pertinent conclusions and condense important ideas. This gives them the tools to understand the key ideas and make connections between disparate pieces of information.

Communication Strategies: The English curriculum acknowledges the importance of communication skills with emphasis on refining fundamental "Communication Skills" and, second, on investigating different communication modalities such as "Active Listening" and "Multimodal Communication." Under the "Communication Strategies" curriculum, grade 9 students set out on a quest to become master communicators. Likewise, the foundation for effective listening is laid in grade 7. Students start by classifying the various forms of listening, such as information gathering and emotional comprehension. This enables them to go into every conversation with a clear goal in mind.

3.2. Distribution and weighting of different content areas

A key factor influencing the validity and reliability of test results is the way content areas are distributed and weighted within assessments. This examines the reasoning behind the emphasis placed on various subject areas to determine how assessment design and educational priorities align. This study encountered a challenge in aligning item difficulty with Bloom's taxonomy. While the test developers initially categorized items based on their perception of difficulty ("easy," "average," and "difficult"), the research aimed to utilize Bloom's Taxonomy for a more objective classification. To bridge this gap, the researcher presented the items categorized by both methods (perceptions and Bloom's Taxonomy) in a graph for comparison. Figure 2 shows a comparative column graph of the distribution and weighting of the content areas for English 7-10 tests for quarters 1 and 2.

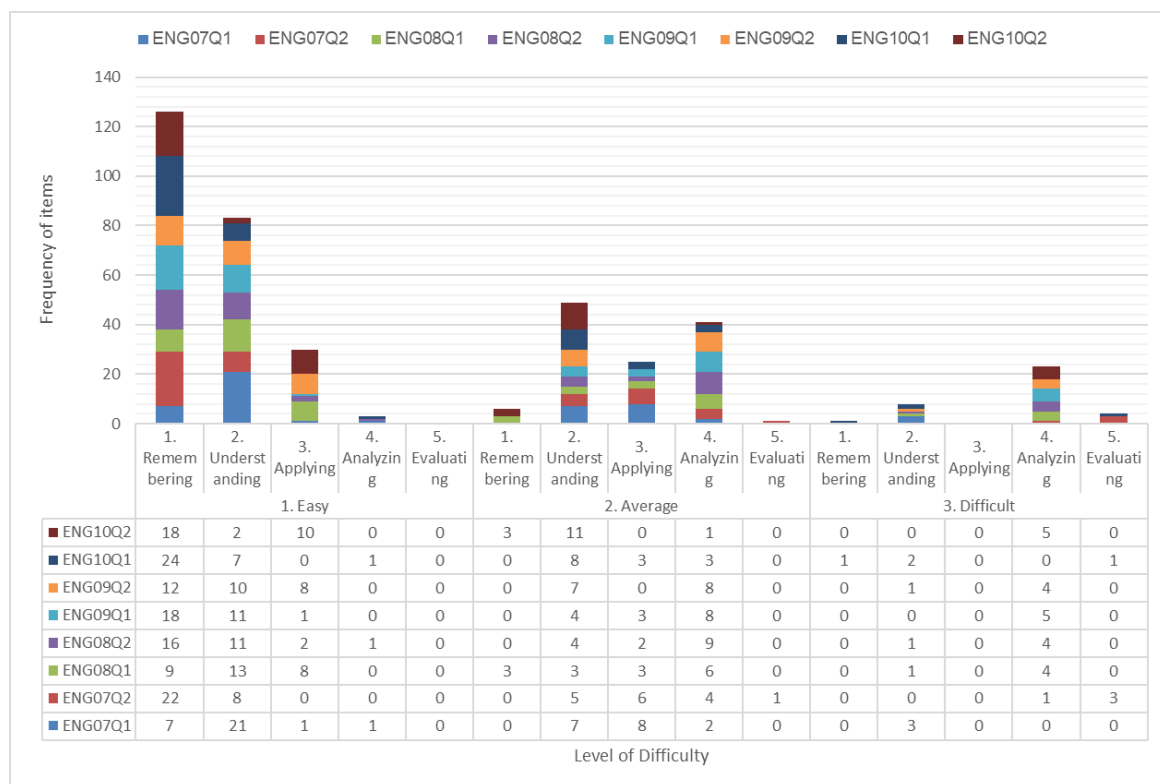


Figure 1. Comparative column graph

Following the Bloom's Taxonomy of objectives, Figure 1 carefully describes how test questions are distributed among different assessments, divided into categories based on both cognitive domains and difficulty levels. It provides an in-depth analysis of the cognitive complexity and skill demands associated with each assessment, with a total of 400 questions distributed across eight assessments. The graph presents a noteworthy observation regarding the uniform distribution of questions across the easy, average, and difficult difficulty levels throughout all evaluations. Teachers can assess students' understanding across a range of difficult tiers thanks to this uniform distribution, which guarantees a fair and balanced assessment of students' proficiency levels.

When one looks more closely, one can see that each assessment shows a clear progression in cognitive complexity from easy to difficult levels. The main goals of easy-level and average-and difficult-level questions are fact recall and comprehension of fundamental ideas, whereas applying, analysing, and evaluating information are more difficult tasks. This progression emphasizes the conscious effort to provide students with challenging assignments that foster critical analysis and higher-order thinking

abilities, setting them up for more difficult cognitive tasks. Additionally, a discernible focus is placed on analytical abilities, especially at the average and challenging levels. This emphasis is in line with the educational goal of developing students' critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills, all of which are essential to their success in both their academic and professional endeavors.

However, the lack of "Evaluating" questions in any assessment raises questions about how inclusive the tasks are that help students develop the capacity to make well-informed decisions based on standards and criteria. This gap shows how important it is to include evaluative tasks so that students' higher-order thinking skills can be thoroughly assessed. It also offers a chance to improve assessments and refine instruction. The careful dissection of test question distribution, combined with insights from multiple sources, reveals a complex understanding of assessment procedures and learning goals.

Firstly, each assessment's wide range of test questions—which are divided into difficulty categories and cognitive domains following Bloom's Revised Taxonomy—provides a detailed look at the cognitive demands and skill

requirements that are specific to each one. This breakdown makes it easier for teachers to align assessment procedures with curriculum objectives while also giving them a framework for assessing students' proficiency levels (Kuloğlu & Tutuş, 2024). In this endeavour, Bloom's Taxonomy acts as a beacon of guidance, outlining the hierarchical progression from basic memory to complex creativity (ElJishi et al., 2024).

Second, a dedication to impartial and balanced evaluation procedures is demonstrated by the consistent distribution of questions among easy, average, and difficult difficulty levels across all assessments. By ensuring that students are evaluated across a range of difficulty levels, this uniform distribution enables teachers to get a comprehensive picture of their cognitive capacities. However, the lack of questions labeled as "Evaluating" in assessments begs questions concerning the inclusiveness of activities meant to develop higher-order thinking abilities. This realization demands a critical analysis of assessment procedures to guarantee a thorough assessment of students' cognitive capacities (ElJishi et al., 2024).

A more thorough examination reveals a clear increase in cognitive complexity as each assessment moves from an easy to a difficult level. The emphasis on fostering creative thinking through student-cantered learning experiences in this progression highlights the goal of education, which is to provide students with challenging assignments that encourage the use of higher-order thinking skills (Widiana et al., 2023). Students' ability to think critically, solve problems, and make decisions is demonstrated by the conscious effort to develop analytical skills, especially at the average and difficult levels (Kuloğlu & Tutuş, 2024). It is important to promote creative thinking through thought-provoking and innovative learning opportunities in the teaching of reading skills (Alda, et al., 2024). This is consistent with the emphasis that assessments have been shown to place on analytical abilities, highlighting the part that assessments play in promoting student success and engagement across a range of subjects.

To conclude, the comprehensive analysis of test question distribution, enhanced by perspectives from various sources, provides a strong basis for enhancing instruction and refining assessment. Teachers can create more effective learning experiences and assessments that encourage higher-order thinking skills and foster cognitive growth in

students by utilizing Bloom's Taxonomy as a guiding framework and addressing the issues that have been identified. This will ultimately improve the quality of education.

3.3. Test content alignment

Ensuring the validity and efficacy of assessments depends critically on the alignment of test content with content standards. Exam content alignment with defined content standards is explored to evaluate the validity of assessment tools in terms of accurately gauging student competency and mastery of learning goals. The Junior High School tests' content validity ratios (CVRs), which provide a numerical indicator of how closely the test's content complies with accepted educational standards, are displayed in Table 1 for the first and second quarters.

Table 1. The content validity ratios of the junior high school tests for quarters 1 and 2

Test	CVR
English 7 – Q1	1
English 8 – Q1	1
English 9 – Q1	1
English 10 – Q1	1
English 7 – Q2	1
English 8 – Q2	1
English 9 – Q2	1
English 10 – Q2	1

In the field of educational assessment, the Content Validity Ratio (CVR) is a crucial metric that provides information about how well test items represent the content domain they are intended to measure. The table that follows, which shows the CVRs for Junior High School English tests in Quarters 1 and 2, indicates that experts generally agree that the test items are relevant and of fundamental importance for evaluating students' English proficiency in different grades and during different quarters of the academic year (Alda & Bacus, 2022; Renaud & Ruut, 2022).

The highest level of content validity, represented by a CVR value of 1, is indicative of expert agreement that the test items are essential for accurately assessing English language proficiency. The consensus among experts suggests a strong consensus regarding the fundamental nature of the test items, which increases trust in the validity and precision of the assessment results. In addition to highlighting the stability and dependability of the assessment framework, the consistency of CVR

values across grades and quarters also reflects the uniformity of the content coverage and evaluation standards maintained throughout the junior high school curriculum. Regardless of the student's grade level or the length of the assessment, maintaining this consistency is essential to guaranteeing fair assessment procedures and creating a cohesive learning environment for them. When a CVR value of 1 indicates the highest level of content validity, it means that experts generally agree the test items are necessary to accurately assess English language proficiency. This expert agreement raises confidence in the validity and accuracy of the assessment results by indicating a strong consensus regarding the fundamental nature of the test items.

The uniformity of the content coverage and evaluation standards upheld throughout the junior high school curriculum is reflected in the consistency of CVR values across grades and quarters, which also highlights the stability and dependability of the assessment framework. Ensuring fair assessment procedures and fostering a cohesive learning environment requires maintaining consistency, regardless of the length of the assessment or the grade level of the students. All things considered, the examination of the CVRs for the Junior High School English examinations highlights the strong content validity of these assessments as well as their critical function in precisely assessing students' English language competency in different grade levels and quarters (Renaud & Ruut, 2022).

3.4. Potential implications of test content

A thorough analysis of the English assessments given to students in Grades 7 through 10 reveals several important insights about student learning, teaching strategies, and educational equity. First, the analysis reveals a step-by-step progression in language skill development, starting with basic grammar and ending with sophisticated comprehension and critical thinking skills. It is noteworthy that Grade 10 emphasizes advanced communication skills heavily, especially in argumentation and multimodal expression, suggesting a sophisticated approach to language learning. This development demonstrates a conscious attempt to provide students with the skills they need to successfully negotiate the challenges of contemporary communication (Vachova et al., 2023; Alda, 2018). This development demonstrates a conscious attempt to equip students with the skills they need to negotiate successfully the challenges of

contemporary communication (Vachova et al., 2023; Alda, 2018).

Students are provided with opportunities to experience a wide range of linguistic proficiency, which improves their ability to participate effectively in authentic communication situations. But this evolution also calls for a matching modification in teaching methods. Teachers need to be prepared to teach and evaluate higher-order language skills in a way that fosters independent and analytical learners while adhering to curriculum objectives. Furthermore, the focus on critical thinking highlights a larger dedication to developing well-rounded people who can handle challenging situations and make significant contributions to society (Li et al., 2024). Additionally, educators can foster inclusivity and relevance in education by addressing varied topics and methodologies (Foreman, 2024). This will help ensure that every student has an equitable learning experience.

A thorough examination of the English assessments given to students in Grades 7 through 10 provides insight into the complex relationships between test content, instructional strategies, and educational equity. Through an integrated approach to assessment and instruction, coupled with an awareness of the dynamic nature of language learning, teachers can better equip students for success in a world that is becoming more interconnected and complex. Utilizing continuous introspection, adjustment, and cooperation, interested parties can endeavor to establish an educational environment that enables every student to prosper and realize their complete potential (Alonzo et al., 2023). Examining the test construction strategies used in English assessments for students in Grades 7 through 10 reveals areas that need to be improved and can have a big impact on educational equity, fairness, and the quality of evaluations. Important areas that need improvement are the choices' alignment and order, the use of blanks consistently, compliance with question formats, and the clarity of the best answers. The maintenance of assessment integrity is determined to be contingent upon the provision of clear stems, avoidance of telegraphed answers, and assurance of grammatical consistency.

The implications of these findings for educational practice are significant. Teachers can obtain more accurate assessments of students' understanding by improving the construction techniques used in assessments, thereby increasing their validity and

quality. This guarantees that assessment results are accurate measures of student learning in addition to giving educators a better understanding of students' proficiency. Additionally, the testing design pays close attention to detail to reduce bias and accidental clues, which in turn supports equitable assessment procedures and educational equity. Teachers can make sure that every student has an equal chance to demonstrate their knowledge and skills by designing assessments that are free from outside influences. Furthermore, cautious test construction methods help create evaluations that precisely reflect student competency and offer insightful feedback for better learning. With the help of well-designed and unambiguous assessments, teachers can pinpoint students' areas of strength and weakness and implement focused instructional interventions that promote their development.

Consequently, Bloom's Taxonomy analysis of the content area distribution and weighting in English assessments for Grades 7 through 10 sheds light on the cognitive demands of these tests. The intentional increase in cognitive complexity, with an emphasis on analytical abilities, shows a dedication to helping students develop higher-order thinking skills. Concerns concerning inclusivity in evaluating higher-order thinking skills are raised by the noticeable lack of emphasis on evaluative tasks, which may cause significant facets of students' cognitive development to be missed.

To support thorough student learning, educators must make sure that assessments sufficiently measure a variety of cognitive skills. Teachers can create more equitable evaluation experiences for all students by filling in the gaps in assessment practices and implementing evaluative tasks. This will ensure that assessments fairly represent students' learning achievements and accurately capture the full range of students' cognitive abilities. Furthermore, continuously improving assessment practices is crucial for raising educational standards and guaranteeing fair opportunities for all students. To ensure that assessment procedures are in line with changing standards and goals for education, educators must constantly reflect on and modify their methods. Teachers can design evaluation

experiences that are rigorous, equitable, and conducive to the learning and development of their students by regularly reviewing and improving their assessment protocols. Lastly, factors like careful test design, equitable content distribution, and a dedication to continuous improvement highlight the ongoing efforts to improve assessment quality and meet changing educational needs.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This in-depth analysis of English assessments for Grades 7 through 10 illuminates the complex relationships that exist between instructional strategies, test content, and educational equity. The analysis shows a distinct progression in the skills evaluated, starting with communication and critical thinking and ending with basic grammar. It highlights how important it is for teachers to modify their lesson plans to evaluate these higher-order skills accurately and get students ready for the challenges of the contemporary world. However, the analysis also points out places where test construction methods could be strengthened. Although the emphasis on analytical abilities is praiseworthy, inclusion issues are raised by the lack of attention given to evaluation tasks. By closing this gap, tests accurately capture a variety of cognitive skills and offer equal educational opportunities to every student.

Based on the findings of this study, it is suggested that English teachers revisit, review, and assess their current assessment practices to ensure that all students are fairly evaluated vis-à-vis the curriculum competencies. Moreover, this study emphasizes the complexity of language assessment. Teachers can create a dynamic, inclusive learning environment that accommodates a variety of learning styles and supports the development of critical thinking, communication, and analytical skills by continuously improving their assessment practices.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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