BRIDGING THE GAP: EFFECTIVE MULTIPLE CHOICE ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

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Introduction

This action research investigates the alignment between internal assessment results and external standardized test scores, focusing on the effectiveness of multiple-choice questions. A current issue identified, is the discrepancy between students' strong performance in internal assessments and their lower scores on standardized tests. This difference in alignment makes me wonder how well internal measures can predict how well students will really do in school. Addressing this problem is crucial, as it affects instructional decisions and student support. If internal assessments do not reflect external expectations, students may be underprepared, and teachers may miss critical learning gaps. Evidence from recent assessment cycles shows this pattern, prompting a closer look at assessment design. The study's goal is to make internal exams more accurate at predicting the future by improving the way multiple-choice questions are used. A better connection will help make sure that internal data better guides teaching and shows how ready students are for external tests.

Background of the Problem

The study was carried out a Universal American School in Grade 1 classes, where internal assessments are used regularly to track progress. However, many students who perform well on these assessments often struggle with standardized tests, revealing a gap between internal and external results. This issue has been ongoing and is becoming more urgent as standardized data increasingly guides teaching and school evaluation. If nothing changes, students may be underprepared, and teachers could make decisions based on inaccurate data. By improving multiple-choice question design, we can better align assessments, leading to more accurate predictions of student performance and more effective instruction.

Literature Review

Research highlights that effective multiple-choice questions (MCQs) can improve assessment accuracy when paired with strong cognitive strategies. Flavell's Metacognition Theory (1979) emphasizes the value of students thinking about their thinking. Teaching strategies such as reading all answer choices, identifying distractors, and reflecting before selecting an answer can improve student performance. Kahneman's Dual Process Theory (2011) also offers insight, noting that students often rely on quick, intuitive thinking (System 1). Encouraging slower, more analytical thinking (System 2) by having students justify their answers can enhance accuracy and deepen understanding. While these strategies show promise, there is still limited research on how best to apply them in early primary classrooms. More investigation is needed to adapt these approaches for younger learners.

Methods

Action research is the most suitable approach for this study because it allows me to investigate and improve my own classroom practice in real time. It is a practical, classroom-based method that supports ongoing reflection, testing, and adjustment. This approach helps address the gap between internal and external assessments by allowing me to trial strategies, gather evidence, and make informed changes based on student responses.

Research Question
How can effective multiple-choice questioning help align internal and external assessment data?

Objectives
- Improve internal assessment design.
- Support students in answering MCQs more effectively.
- Strengthen the link between internal and standardized results.

Methodology
To address the gap between internal and external assessment results, I will focus on refining the design of multiple-choice questions (MCQs) in internal assessments. The goal is to make these questions more aligned with the structure and cognitive demands of standardized tests, encouraging deeper student engagement and more accurate measurement of learning.

Participants
The participants in this study were approximately 23 students from a Grade 1 class, consisting of a mix of boys and girls with varying abilities. Feedback was collected from the students in small groups to ensure more focused and manageable discussions. These students provided insights on the revised multiple-choice questions and their performance on both internal assessments and standardized tests.

Data Collection
Data for this study was collected through a combination of student feedback, observations, and performance analysis. After each assessment cycle, I gathered feedback from students in small focus groups, asking them about their experiences with the revised multiple-choice questions. I also observed their strategies and thought processes as they worked through the questions. I finally analyzed student performance on both internal assessments and standardized tests to measure the effectiveness of the changes made to the MCQs. This provided a clear comparison of how the revised assessments impacted their scores and overall readiness for external tests.

Data Analysis
To analyze the data, I used both qualitative and quantitative methods. Student feedback was analyzed with Braun & Clarke's Thematic Analysis (2006), coding focus group responses to identify themes around engagement, question clarity, and strategies for answering MCQs. I also compared performance data from internal assessments and standardized tests, tracking correlations between internal assessment improvements and standardized test results. Graphs were used to display trends over time.

Results

The outcomes of the action research clearly addressed the research questions outlined in the Methods section, which explored how revised MCQs influenced student understanding and performance. **Figure 1** illustrates the effect of these improvements on the alignment between internal assessment scores and standardized test results. Before the revision, internal assessment scores were consistently higher than standardized test scores. After the revision, standardized test scores increased, narrowing the gap and enhancing consistency across assessment types. These findings indicate that well-designed MCQs contributed to greater predictive accuracy between internal and external assessments.

Figure 1
Impact of Improved Multiple-Choice Questioning on Math & Reading
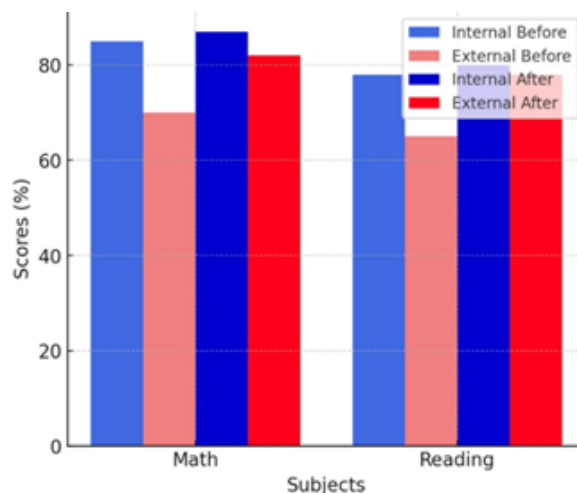
Discussion and Reflections

The results showed that clearer, better designed MCQs improved student understanding and helped align internal assessments with standardized test scores, supporting the original hypothesis and existing research on assessment design. This research led me to adjust my practice in many keyways: increasing practice frequency, simplifying question language, integrating visual supports, reviewing assessment alignment regularly, allowing extended response times, and focusing more on grade appropriate vocabulary. These changes have improved student confidence and performance and offer practical strategies that can benefit colleagues and other action researchers aiming to enhance assessment quality.

Conclusion

This action research found that clearer, better-aligned multiple-choice questions improved student understanding and narrowed the gap between internal and standardized assessments. Student feedback supported these changes, noting improved clarity and confidence. Key outcomes include simplifying language, using visual supports, increasing practice, aligning assessments regularly, and focusing on vocabulary. These strategies can be applied more widely to enhance assessment quality. Further research could explore their impact across subjects, year levels, or with diverse learners.

References

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