



## A Comparative Study of Educational Achievement Assessment System of Syria's Primary Schools with Iran

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: 12 July 2020 Revised: 08 October 2020 Accepted: 13 June 2021 Online: 17 June 2021</p>	<p>The aim of present study was a comparative study of educational achievement assessment system of primary schools in Syria and Iran. For data collection, curriculum document analysis and semi-structured interviews with primary school teachers were used. Participants included 15 primary school teachers in both countries. The data obtained from the interview were analyzed using MAXQDA software. The results showed that assessment system of academic achievement in primary schools of Iran is qualitative-descriptive; whereas In Syria, it is quantitative, and pupils must obtain required scores to be promoted to a higher grade. Iranian students are interested in participating in qualitative assessment and this method has reduced their stress and anxiety. Conversely, Syrian students experience anxiety, fear, stress, and lack of self-confidence, and most feel disgusted with quantitative assessment system of academic achievement. The recommendation of study is reconsideration of assessment system – based on the goals of educational system and philosophical and psychological foundations – in Syria. It is also recommended to deepen and develop descriptive evaluation in Iran.</p>
<p><b>KEYWORDS</b></p> <p>Assessment Educational Achievement Primary schools Iran Syria</p>	

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## **1. Introduction**

Assessment of academic achievement is a regulatory factor for student learning through teacher's teaching, students' activities, teaching materials, and learning contexts (Andrade & Brookhart, 2020). While in developed countries, lifelong learning, flourishing of life talents and skills, and development of critical and creative thinking are most important outputs of the public education system and all executive measures are organized in this direction, the process of educational achievement assessment in many developing countries is based on competition, memory-sparing, fear and anxiety of pupils about examinations (Ahmadpour & Sheikhzadeh Takabi, 2017; Fathi Azar, Hatami & Rozi, 2012; Jadid, 2010). Nowadays, assessment of academic achievement is a topic that is of interest to all countries in the world. Achievement is a tool that aims to determine level of skills or general or specific acquired knowledge in different subjects to determine educational status of each learner (Suet Fin & Ishak, 2012). According to Pierce (2002 as cited in Kırmızı, & Kömeç, 2016) academic achievement assessment is an essential part of any learning-teaching activity. It not only includes educational decisions that are made on a daily basis, but also provides help in identifying students' strengths and weaknesses and provides appropriate feedback to support learners' learning process. Assessment also provides instant feedback for teachers to shape their teaching methods according to students' learning styles. In this regard, the evaluation of academic achievement can be divided into two general groups of summative and formative. Both groups have their own goals and are important for different reasons (Faragher, 2014). The main purpose of formative assessment is to aid learning, while summative assessment aims to provide information about what has been achieved at a particular time (Dolin, Black, Harlen, & Tiberghien, 2018). In the traditional evaluation model, only objective and observable results are considered, so that all the efforts of teachers, students, parents and entire educational system are focused on the final test and score. Getting a score or rank - as the ultimate goal- has a negative effect on learning. Students forget educational goals in order to get a higher score or rank (Qaltash, Nejad & Mangabadi, 2015). Traditional assessment - which mostly measures students' learning based on educational objectives - has consequences such as anxiety, fear, emotional crisis, unhealthy competition, and lack of self-confidence and security (Fathi Azar, Hatami & Rozi, 2012; Ahmadpour & Sheikhzadeh Takabi, 2017; Ostad-Ali, Behzadi, & Shahvarani, 2015; Jadid, 2010). Dikli (2003) argues that traditional assessment often focuses on learners' ability to recall, which includes low levels of cognitive skills. In descriptive assessment, the teacher expects to perform activities and actions beyond traditional tests so that the results of measurement are used for

students' growth, progress and promotion. Most importantly, every student expects to grow and thrive as much as he or she can. In this approach, the evaluation process is interconnected and continuous with the process of education and has been increasingly underlined as a tool to promote and improve learning processes (Stiggins, 2005; Berry, 2005; Taras, 2002). Descriptive assessment has also been implemented in many developing countries as a way of learning outcomes to improvement (Berry, Kannan, Mukerji, & Shotland, 2020). In this regard, primary education system has a high mission and position in the world due to its irreplaceable role in shaping educational foundations of societies (Cranston, Mulford, Keating, & Reid, 2010). In this educational level, the child is confronted with organized education for the first time; experienced a period of growth; and lays the foundation for his own future educational life. Therefore, primary education is most important educational level because the knowledge and skills acquired in this period is a basis for knowledge and skills needed in later grades (Ak & Gvendi, 2010).

Thus, assessment is a genuine and fundamental element among the elements of curriculum. Many experts have introduced curriculum elements in a variety of ways. Tyler (1997) considers the curriculum to have four elements, Klein (1985) indicates nine and Aker (2003) ten elements; but assessment is common in all definitions. Therefore, reforming the measurement system is necessary before the reform of curricula and should be given priority in policy-making for the reform of educational system (Mehr Mohammadi, 2013). Lubis, Ariffin, Muhamad, Ibrahim, & Weke (2010) introduce assessment as a vital element in teaching-learning process of primary education. Academic achievement assessment of primary pupils today in countries that are at the forefront of education process focuses on components of descriptive evaluation, measuring learning outcomes based on multiple intelligences, reducing anxiety, using multiple measurement tools, and creating learning vitality. According to the Finnish National Board of Education (2004), the role of academic achievement assessment is to guide and persuade teachers to study and explain how pupils achieve the goals set for growth and learning. The purpose of continuous assessment is to guide students in learning process, to develop their abilities for self-assessment and to support development of self-awareness and acquisition of reading skills (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018). In India's education system and over the past few decades, a process entitled "CEE" is followed by three terms: "continuous", "comprehensive" and "assessment". This process is not done to grade, judge, and label children, but is an integral part of the teaching-learning process as opposed to the traditional method. This assessment focuses on students' progress in learning based on established criteria and multiple evidences to provide

valid interpretations of student's learning performance. Assessment should also be childlike and free of any irritating elements such as causing fear, anxiety or harm in children (NCERT, 2019).

In Iran, assessment of academic achievement until the end of 1990s was done in three trimesters, i.e. three assessments during the academic year, once every three months. This assessment was then changed to two semesters (similar to the university system). The fundamental reform was the change of assessment from quantitative to qualitative-descriptive method, which has been implemented (as a pilot study) since the early 2000s, and after being officially revised, started from the academic year of 2009-2010 in the first grade of primary schools. With the following years, finally in the academic year of 2013-2014, this method was completely performed in all six grades of primary schools. In Syria, to assess academic achievement in primary education, the school year is divided into two semesters. Assessment of the grades of different subjects is done quantitatively and then the students are given a transcript which is basis of their promotion to a high grade. Indeed, Syria due to war conditions and disruption of cultural and educational affairs has not had a serious opportunity to review formal education programs - including academic achievement assessment system. Opposite to Syria, Iran as a country has been developed upstream documents such as "Document of Fundamental Reform in Education" to provide necessary changes and improve quality of public education. Therefore, Iran's experiences can be useful to empower policy-makers of Syrian education system. This research provides an opportunity for Syria to benefit from Iran's experiences and for Iran, an opportunity to assess and be aware of its developments - compared to a country that, according to its upstream documents, is in its infancy. In fact, the development of assessment process - in accordance with the curriculum - is the goal pursued by Syrian Ministry of Education (Bobo & Zohreh, 2018).

Given the current situation in Syria, the education system is trying to achieve a fundamental reform based on philosophical and religious paradigms and social and psychological foundations to improve students' intellectual, social, psychological, and physical well-being through acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. Also it prepares students to develop their learning in lifetime and next level of education (Syrian Ministry of Education, 2015). Changes in curriculum elements and education system cannot be made in isolation from social realities, and it is imperative that any change be rooted in philosophical, sociological, psychological, and historical foundations of society. Accordingly, it is necessary to examine each element of the

educational system through in-depth and comprehensive studies. Comparative studies can help the Syrian education system gain successful global experiences. These studies provide a basis for criticism and solutions to the problems of the present education system of Syria to analyze main issues. In other words, awareness of the changes and reforms that have occurred in the educational systems of other countries and the problems they have had and familiarity with the methods they have used to solve problems and challenges can help us to take appropriate measures and resolve them satisfactorily.

Numerous comparative studies have been conducted about educational achievement assessment system. For example, Yeke Zare et al. (2015) in a comparative study of assessment system in Iran, Singapore, Australia, Sweden and Poland found that method of assessment academic achievement in all countries studied is qualitative. Research by Bahramian et al. (2010); Bozaslan & Kaya (2015); Iqbal, Samiullah & Anjum (2017); Mohammadifar et al. (2011); Vala & Dadfar, (2015); Navidi et al. (2013), and Ugodulunwa & Okolo (2015) also showed that educational achievement assessment system with a qualitative method has effects such as reducing anxiety and fear in students, increasing interest in school and exams, and increasing academic achievement. The subject of this research is one of the interesting topics for Syria because the Ministry of Education is trying to improve curriculum process by gaining the experiences of successful countries in realm of formal and public education. Also, this study can include recommendations for the Iran's educational system to continue direction that has begun since 2002 to change process of academic achievement system. The present study seeks to answer the following questions with a descriptive-analytical and comparative approach:

- What is assessment method of academic achievement in the education systems of Iran and Syria?
- What are differences and similarities between method of academic achievement assessment of primary school students in education systems of Iran and Syria?

## **2. Research Method**

Research method in the present study is qualitative comparative using phenomenological approach, which was a combination of descriptive phenomenology and document analysis. In phenomenological approach, the lived experience of participants in educational systems of two countries was used. The reason for choosing the phenomenological method was to focus on the

perception and lived experience of those involved in primary education system in Syria and Iran in relation to structure, expectations and process of students' academic achievement assessment. According to Gall, Borg, and Gall (2012) for phenomenological studies, researchers used in-depth interviews to obtain a comprehensive description of interviewees' experience on the subject. People participating in the research were 5 primary school teachers in Iran and 10 in Syria. The selection of these teachers was through purposeful sampling method and based on two criteria: having at least 3 years of teaching service and professional reputation. The selection of this number was based on theoretical saturation. Thus, despite the fact that after the interview with the third person in Iran and the seventh person in Syria, the proposed material seemed repetitive, but the interviews continued with the fifth person in Iran and the tenth person in Syria. To review existing documents in the field of academic achievement assessment of primary school students in both countries, document analysis method was used. Then, the five steps of qualitative texts analysis of Wash and Ward (2013) were used in order to analyze texts and these steps were followed: 1. Determination of criteria for selection of texts and documents based on approval of the document by authorities in the Ministry of Education in two countries; 2. Collection of sources and texts; 3. Initial review of resources; 4. Identifying the desired features by taking notes, and 5. elimination of similar data, aggregation and classification of information according to the research problem. In the next step and based on Bereday's four steps for comparative studies i.e. description, interpretation, juxtaposition and comparison (Abbaspour & Dehghani, 2012), the results were presented. To determine validity of interview coding stage, re-checking method by participants and to extract the items and identify components within upstream documents, second coder was used.

### **3. Findings**

Given that the assessment of educational achievement as an element of the intertwined set of the curriculum, its study and analysis is possible only by attention to objectives and materials. Therefore, first, a comparison is made between the goals, age of school entrance and school subjects in the two countries. Then, in particular, a comparison will be made regarding the components of academic achievement assessment system at primary education of both countries.

#### *Primary education in Iran and Syria*

The results of reviewing curriculum documents of Iran and Syria indicate that there is a difference between two education systems (Table 1). Examination of the National Curriculum Document of Islamic Republic of Iran and Internal System of Syrian Basic Education showed that in

Iran, primary education consists of two separate 3-year courses (first and second primary) for children in the age group of 7 to 12 years; while in Syria, primary education includes a course (first to sixth grade) for children aged 6 to 11 years.

### *Goals of primary education in Iran and Syria*

Examining educational documents of both countries reveals difference in objectives of primary education (Table 1). The main goals of primary education in Iran are on issues such as establishment of appropriate educational environment for moral and mental development of students, fostering children's talents and creativity, improving physical strength of children, teaching reading, writing, arithmetic, socializing with community members, and teaching individual and group health issues, whereas in the Syrian education system, the goals include such factors as training the learner in a balanced way from emotional, scientific, intellectual, social, psychological and physical aspects; use of technologies appropriate to the age of the student; interacting with social, national, and global issues for developing oneself in life situations, and gaining knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values.

Table 1: Evaluation of objectives of primary education in Iran and Syria

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Component</b>	<b>Iran</b>	<b>Syria</b>
Goals of primary education	Establishing an appropriate educational environment for students' moral and doctrinal development.	*	-
	Fostering children's talents and creativity	*	-
	Improve children's physical strength	*	-
	Learn to read, write, calculate and socialize with other members of the community	*	-
	Teaching individual and group health issues	*	-
	Creating a balanced learner personality from emotional, scientific, intellectual, social, psychological and physical aspects	-	*
	Use of technologies appropriate to the age of the student	-	*
	Interact with social, national and global issues positively for your development in life situations	-	*
	Acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values	-	*

Source: Ministry of Education, Syrian Arab Republic (2015); Secretary of National Curriculum Plan of Iran (2012)

### Primary school curricula in Iran and Syria

The result of content analysis of upstream documents showed that subjects like Quran, physical education, national language (Persian for Iran and Arabic for Syria), mathematics, experimental sciences, art, and social sciences are taught to children in Iran and Syria, but there are differences between two countries regarding subjects of Heavenly Gifts, Thinking and Research, Work and Technology, General Competence, English, and Project (Table 2).

Table 2: Comparison of primary subjects in Iran and Syria

Factor	Components	Iran		Syria	
		Similarities	Differences	Similarities	Differences
School Subjects	Quran	*	-	*	-
	Physical education,	*	-	*	-
	National language	*	-	*	-
	Mathematics,	*	-	*	-
	Experimental sciences,	*	-	*	-
	Art	*	-	*	-
	Social studies	*	-	*	-
	Gifts of Heaven	-	*	-	-
	Thinking and Research,	-	*	-	-
	Work and Technology,	-	*	-	-
	General Competence,	-	*	-	-
	English	-	-	-	*
	Project	-	-	-	*

Source: Ministry of Education of the Syrian Arab Republic, Center for Educational Assessment and Evaluation (2018) & Organization for Educational Research and Planning (2015)

### Academic Achievement Assessment Principles in Iran and Syria

The results of content analysis of National Curriculum Document of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the National Assessment Guidance Document for Learning in Syria showed that these principles are similar in some cases (Table 3). The similar principles are the use of a variety of methods and tools, attention to process of achieving goals with regards to differences in learning in students, and considering assessment as an integral part of teaching-learning process.

Table 3: Principles of academic achievement assessment in Iran and Syria

Principles	Similarities		Differences	
	Iran	Syria	Iran	Syria
Using a variety of methods to demonstrate students' ability in different situations and in a meaningful way	*	*	-	-
Provide sufficient evidence to judge students' level of achievement	-	-	*	-
Determining process of achieving goals and how to take effective action in a flexible and continuous manner	*	*	-	-
Emphasis on students' self-awareness	-	-	*	-
Avoid using anxious and frustrating assessment methods	-	-	*	-
Enabling participation of students, educators and parents in assessment process	*	*	-	-
Maintaining pivotal role of teacher in assessment process	-	-	*	-
Design and implementation of result-oriented assessment system in primary education and integrated approach (process-oriented and result-oriented) in other educational levels	-	-	*	-
Emphasis on teamwork and collective activities and problem-solving methods	-	-	*	-
Determining evaluation as an integral part of the teaching-learning process, using its results for planning and professional development of teachers and improving the curriculum	*	*	-	-
Emphasis on using functional assignments in measuring students' achievement of competencies, preparing and compiling a report on their academic and educational performance with cooperation of students and parents	-	-	*	-
Linking assessment process with performance indicators related to standards of each curriculum.	-	-	-	*
Develop critical thinking, creativity and innovation skills by considering different aspects of learner learning.	-	-	-	*
Encourage peer self-assessment by providing opportunities for students	-	-	-	*
Supporting outstanding students and developing their abilities and talents through activities focused on intelligence and creativity	-	-	-	*
Provide immediate and continuous feedback to learner to help improve his / her learning.	-	-	-	*
Attention to the balanced use of formative and final evaluation methods.	-	-	-	*
Documenting assessment processes	-	-	-	*

Source: Ministry of Education of the Syrian Arab Republic, Center for Educational Assessment and Evaluation (2018) & Secretary of the National Curriculum Plan, Iran (2012)

*Assessment method of primary school in educational system of Iran and Syria*

The results of content analysis of two documents of Regulations for Educational Assessment of Primary School in Iran and the Reforms of Internal System of Primary Schools: General Framework of National Curriculum for Syrian Arab Republic indicates some differences between the two countries (Table 4). The results showed that in Iran, academic achievement system in primary schools is qualitative-descriptive during the academic year and based on objectives of curriculum of each grade, while in Syria it is quantitative. Also in Iran, teachers use various tools including functional tests, portfolio work, observation, project, provide information on in-class and out-of-class activities. Whereas in Syria, teachers use a set of questions with short answers (questions with specific answers, multiple choice or questions that require multiple word answers) or descriptive questions and other differences. The results also showed that the method of assessment of students in Iran and Syria in cases such as ability to report results of evaluation of academic achievement of each student during the school year, possibility of promotion to higher levels based on success in all school subjects is similar.

Table 4: Comparison of assessment method in Iran and Syria

Components	Similarity		Differences	
	Iran	Syria	Iran	Syria
Qualitative-descriptive assessment of educational progress during academic year based on objectives of curriculum of each grade	-	-	*	-
Quantitative assessment of educational progress during academic year based on objectives of curriculum of each grade	-	-	-	*
Report results of assessment of students' educational progress twice during academic year	*	*	-	-
A student is eligible for promotion to a higher grade at the end of academic year if she / he has obtained the minimum acceptable score in all subjects	*	*	-	-
The student file that has not reached an acceptable level in one of the two subjects (mother language and mathematics) or other subjects will be submitted to school council for a final decision	-	-	*	-
The student file that has not reached an acceptable level in one of the two subjects (mother language and mathematics) or other subjects will be rejected and not be allowed to go to a next grade	-	-	-	*
Fifth and sixth grade students succeed if they get at least 50% of the total marks from the two semesters	-	-	-	*

Teacher assessment is done using various tools such as performance tests, portfolio work, observations, study and project, activities inside and outside the classroom and school	-	-	*	-
Exams include a set of short-answer questions (questions with specific answers, multiple-choice and short-answer), descriptive questions, and other teaching and learning activities	-	-	-	*
Students who do not qualify for promotion to a higher level in June have until September 6 to take part in compensating classes or doing the activities suggested by the teacher in the form of a project to compensate for their shortcomings in the relevant courses.	-	-	*	-

Ministry of Education of Syrian Arab Republic, 2016, 2018; Department of Assessment and Evaluation of Learning Processes and Teaching, Office of Primary Education, Iran (2015)

### *Scoring method in Iran and Syria*

Examining how primary school students are graded is shown in two documents of Iran and Syria and indicates some differences between two educational systems (Table 5). Teachers in Iran assess pupils according to students' activities during school days and rating them at four levels of very good, good, acceptable and need for further training and effort. In Syria, the method of grading teachers to students from the first to fourth grade according to second paragraph of Article 22 of the Internal Reform of Basic Education System Document is as follows: 60% for students' educational activities including 10% for oral activities (Class presentation - interview), 10% for assignments and short tests, 20% for innovative activities (research, observation, practical performance, travel, exhibition, field visit, school library's activities, and study of non-curricular resources), and 20% for midterm written exam. Also, 40% of the score is allocated to final exam. Criteria for student acceptance are presented in Table 5. In addition, the method of grading teachers to fifth and sixth grade students in Syria according to the third paragraph of Article 23 of Internal Reform of Basic Education System Document is quantitative and each subject is estimated at 100 (60% for students' semester activities and 40% for final exam of each semester).

Table 5: Comparison of assessment and grading system for primary school students according to curriculum of Iran and Syria

Factor	Component	Differences	
		Iran	Syria
Assessment and grading methods	Very good	*	-
	Good	*	-
	Acceptable	*	-
	Need more training and effort	*	-
	0- 40% (weak)	-	*
	41- 70% (average)	-	*
	71- 80% (good)	-	*
	81-90% (very good)	-	*
	91-100% (excellent)	-	*
	Fifth- and sixth-graders are given a grade point average of 100 per subject	-	*

Ministry of Education of Syrian Arab Republic, 2018; Department of Assessment and Evaluation of Learning Processes and Teaching, Office of Primary Education, Iran (2015)

#### *Comparison of student assessment methods from the perspective of teachers in Iran and Syria*

A comparative study of student assessment method in Iran and Syria was done through phenomenological interviews with primary school teachers. The results presented in Table (6) show that except for one teacher, the rest of Iranian teachers use qualitative assessment method. The majority of interviewees stated that they use methods such as student projects, question design, essays, group assignments, class activities, answering questions in class, group activities, portfolios and checklists, skill-based assignments, and observation to evaluate students. The results of interviews with primary school teachers in Syria also showed that, except two teachers who stated that they use both quantitative and qualitative methods in assessing students, the rest of the teachers mostly benefit from a few methods. Interviewees also mentioned issues such as taking written and oral exams, assignments and worksheets, spelling and reading as assessment methods. It is noteworthy that some Syrian teachers have used only qualitative methods of discussion, class activities and participation, continuous review and communication with parents.

Table 6: Comparison of student evaluation methods in primary schools in Iran and Syria based on interviews with teachers

Country	Component	Frequency	Cases
Iran	Qualitative and quantitative (combined)	1	Pencil tests, homework, oral questions, observation of performance, portfolio and checklists.
	Qualitative	4	Student projects such as question design, essay, group workshops, classroom activities (board activities, brainstorming and group activities, portfolio and checklists, classroom questions, core skills assignments and observation of performance
Syria	quantitative	8	Written and oral exams, tests, questions, assignments and worksheets, spelling and reading
	Quantitative and qualitative (combined)	2	Written and oral exams, quizzes, questioning, homework and worksheets, spelling and reading, discussion and class participation, ongoing review and communication with parents

The results of interviews with primary school teachers in Iran regarding student assessment criteria showed that most teachers pay a lot of attention to learners' ability. For example, one interviewee stated:

"I consider starting point of students and I always try to compare the student with himself/herself in evaluation and choose a method of assessment that is in line with his/her ability. For example, if a student cannot put his thoughts and answers on paper, but explained very well orally, we will give him an oral exam"

Also, the results of interviews with primary school teachers in Syria reveal that most teachers pay much attention to components such as deep understanding and application of information learned. For example, one interviewee stated:

"The learner must understand school subject and be able to use it as a solution. The student must also be able to relate information to reality, as this demonstrates students' understanding and mastery of information."

Some teachers in Syria pay attention to student's smooth and clear expression. In this regard, three teachers stated that they pay attention to student's ability to answer questions quickly, in answering accurately and how to answer.

Table 7: Comparison of assessment components of primary students from perspective of teachers in Iran and Syria

Country	Component	Frequency	Cases
Iran	Student Ability	4	Student's level of effort, his/her progress compared to past, amount of correct answer, attention to learners' individual differences with other pupils
	Applied skills	1	Apply skills learned in real life
	Active attendance at class	1	Active attendance at class discussions and activities
	Participate in a team work	1	Active participation in group work
Syria	Student self-confidence	2	High self-confidence of student, confidence of pupil in his / her information, providing correct answers with speed and accuracy
	Memory power	1	Ability to store large amounts of content in short and long memory
	Smooth answer and clear expression	3	Speed in answering questions and accuracy in answering
	Well-written	1	Beautiful writing, no spelling and grammar mistakes; attention to students' individual differences and attention to motivational aspect of exam
	Deep understanding and use of learned information	5	Student understanding and awareness of lesson and its benefits, understanding school subjects, linking information with reality

The results of interviews with primary school teachers in Iran regarding how to provide feedback to students showed that most teachers express their strengths and weaknesses. For example, most teachers said that they first tell him the strengths of the whole in two or three short sentences and then identify the weaknesses for them. One of the teachers says:

"In fact, by telling each student's strengths and weaknesses, I explain to each one individually why they had such a score; I listen to their protests and I respect their personalities."

The results of interviews with Syrian teachers also showed that most of them use methods of advising students separately, discussing answers and encouraging learners to study. One of the Syrian interviewees said:

"I give feedback to each student individually, both for the correct and wrong answers. Also, after the exam, I show the mistake to each student to learn from their mistake and I will teach them how to fix their errors."

Table 8: Comparison of how teachers in primary school in Iran and Syria provide feedback to primary students

Country	Component	Frequency	Cases
Iran	Express strengths and weaknesses	3	Expressing strengths and weaknesses of each student individually, explaining each student's score, attention to pupils objections, attention to student's personality
	Record the status in the student workbook	1	Put assessment of each lesson in workbook for students, pupils refer to workbook, gain knowledge of evaluation process
	Weekly classroom assessment	1	Agree with students to announce weekly class evaluation
	Install worksheets in the classroom and school hallway	1	Install worksheets in the classroom and school hallway to report to other learners
	Submit a report to cyberspace (class channel, blog)	1	Provide learners' performance in cyberspace; Class channels and blogs are also very attractive, refusing to send reports of poor students to cyberspace to maintain their self-esteem
Syria	Talking about student answers to questions	4	Discussing test questions and their answers on blackboard. Explain each learner's mistakes in front of their classmates and discuss them in groups to avoid repeating mistakes. Writing their common mistakes on blackboard and group discussion and student participation to correct mistakes. Repetition of correct answers by learners and ensuring learning of whole class
	Separate advice to students	5	Provide advice and suggestions to each student separately Checking learners' feedback for correct and incorrect answers Talk to each student and show her/his mistakes Learn how to fix mistakes and provide the right answers Correction of exam papers in front of the student
	Encourage students to study more	4	Encourage both successful and poor students to work harder Encourage successful students in the classroom and give them small gifts

The results of interviews with primary school teachers in Iran about students' reaction of exams showed that most students are interested in qualitative assessment methods, but they get stressed with the paper and pencil test (quantitative method). For example, one Iranian teacher stated:

"As there are very few written exams and children know that the results of exams are not crucial for them and is only part of their assessment; they are interested in the exam, but they get a little stressed out during the exam because they find it difficult to write down what they think".

Another interviewee also stated:

"Students were stressed and anxious when confronted with the pencil tests, but easily coped with the oral question. Students are usually stressed before the exam, but if assessment is during class activities, it will also reduce their stress".

Results of interviews with primary school teachers in Syria regarding students' exposure to exam indicate that most students experience anxiety, panic, and low self-esteem through quantitative assessment. For example, a Syrian teacher stated:

"Some students are anxious and scared during the exam and this can be seen on their faces. They suffer from anxiety and confusion."

"Students do not have confidence when taking exams. For example, most pupils do not have confidence in their information and memory during written exams and are hesitant. Some of them cry if they cannot solve it".

#### **4. Conclusion**

To answer the first question of the research, upstream documents of primary education in Iran and Syria and interviews with primary school teachers have been used. Findings related to Iran showed that the method of students' assessment is qualitative-descriptive and based on objectives of curriculum goals in each grade. The findings also showed that teachers collect necessary information and evaluates pupils' performance using various tools such as tests, portfolio, observation, and project. The findings of study are consistent with research findings of Yekeh Zare et al. (2015) who found prevalence of qualitative evaluation in Iranian primary schools .The

research findings also reveal that in Syria, assessment of students takes place during school year and in a quantitative manner. Therefore, students must obtain the necessary scores to be promoted to a next grade. The findings also showed that teachers use a variety of quantitative tests to assess students' academic achievement. The research findings are consistent with finding of Bobo & Zohreh (2018).

Findings of research on how students face exams in Iran showed that the use of qualitative assessment method has reduced stress and anxiety and increased interest in exams among Iranian pupils. This finding is similar with research findings of Agudolonova et al. (2015), Weights et al. (2015), Iqbal et al. (2017), Bahramian et al. (2010), Vala & Dadfar (2015), Mohammadifar et al. (2011) and Navidi et al. (2013) who found positive effect of qualitative assessment on reducing students' stress and anxiety. Research findings related to Syrian students indicate that most of them experience anxiety, panic, stress and lack of self-confidence when faced with written exams and avoid taking the exam. Similar results to this finding have been approved by Fathia Azar, Hatami, & Rozi (2012); Ahmadpour, Sheikhzadeh Takabi (2017) and Jadid (2010). The researchers showed that anxiety, fear, stress and lack of self-confidence in students is one of the consequences of participating in traditional paper and pencil tests.

Findings also indicate that traditional assessment methods are still practiced in Syria and teachers evaluate students' academic achievement in quantitative ways. This method of assessment leads to negative effects such as feelings of weakness in performance, decreased motivation and significant increase in school dropouts (Asghari, Abdul Kadir, Elias & Baba, 2012). Thus, when students are concerned about examinations and find them irrelevant or even an obstacle to meeting their natural needs, they feel dissatisfied with learning and school. Students, especially in the primary school - which is the first stage of separation from the family and entering to society-, should be satisfied with school's environment. The learning environment should be based on their needs and emotions, and should encourage children to compete with themselves instead of competing with others. The research finding is consistent with Keramati (2001) that feeling jealousy, humiliation, and low self-esteem is result of quantitative evaluation.

Although In Iran several years have passed since the promulgation of qualitative-descriptive assessment, experimental evidences show that some teachers are still fascinated by traditional quantitative assessment method and see it as reflecting the actual level of learning of students.

Parents also put pressure on teachers to demand a mark for their child's performance; a wish that, if fulfilled; the result will be nothing but competition, increased anxiety, a desire to cheat and a hatred of learning environment. The main reason for these demands is in ignoring cultural context for using qualitative assessment methods in Iran. This is a useful experience for Syrian education policy-makers. They may learn from it and make the move to change assessment system depending on real participation of community and stakeholders. They must first try to create a cultural context. Iranian managers and planners should not neglect cultural development in parallel with the continuation and development of the qualitative assessment. Radio and TV channels, parent-teacher associations, school social networks, the press and news sites, and even Friday prayer podiums can be considered as important media for culture building. In addition, the Ministry of Education is expected to be responsible to provide necessary plans for coordination of all organizations and media. This role can be strengthened with the help of educational sciences departments and teacher education universities. Based on the findings of study, the following suggestions are offered:

- Creating a culture for administrators and agents of the educational system and stakeholders, including parents and students, to accept change of academic achievement assessment system from a quantitative and traditional approach to a qualitative and descriptive approach;
- Develop strategic plans to change approach and process of students' academic achievement assessment, especially in primary school;
- In order to reduce anxiety, fear and panic among pupils and increase their self-confidence and interest in school and exams in Syria, it is necessary to review and change upstream documents in this country to change assessment methods. In this regard, it is necessary for Syrian education system to propagate and create this culture, and inform it through national media. A culture that can persuade the general public, especially stakeholders, including students, parents, and teachers, not to resist this change.
- Conducting courses on qualitative system of assessment by the Syrian education system for teachers to familiarize them with its philosophy, methods and techniques. In this way, the assessment of students' academic achievement is aligned with the upstream documents of Syrian education, and students can provide their own identity for lifelong learning.

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