

UNPACKING TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON ALIGNING HIGH STAKES EXAMINATIONS AT THE SCHOOL LEAVING QUALIFICATION IN ESWATINI

41st AEAA CONFERENCE, 25 – 29 AUGUST 2025

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EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL OF ESWATINI

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INTRODUCTION

- ❖ The Examinations Council of Eswatini (ECESWA) offers high-stakes examinations at the school leaving qualification:
 - ❑ The Eswatini General Certificate of Secondary Education (EGCSE) & Eswatini Prevocational Certificate of Secondary Education (EPCSE)
- ❖ One of the major tasks for ECESWA is consistently offering assessments that are effectively aligned with the curriculum & classroom practice
- ❖ Assessments should reveal how well students have learned what was expected of them to learn while instruction ensures that they learn it (Hamstra & Bell, 2019)
- ❖ History of aligning assessments to curriculum & classroom experience - 1994 Elementary & Secondary Education Act & the 2001 No Child Left Behind legislation



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LITERATURE REVIEW

- ❖ Curriculum alignment researchers assert that in a coherent education system, the intended, enacted, & assessed curriculum must be well-aligned (Porter, 2002; Webb, 1997)
- ❖ Bhola, Impara & Buckendahl (2003) emphasised the importance of curriculum alignment, describing it as the necessity for cognitive demand & classroom content to be compatible with assessments
- ❖ Students have a clear idea of the direction of their learning when learning goals, instructions & assessment items are aligned (Blumberg, 2009)
- ❖ High alignment between the prescribed, assessed & enacted curriculum provides students with appropriate & sufficient opportunities to achieve learning objectives (Anderson, 2005; Ziebell & Clarke, 2018)
- ❖ Poor alignment may lead to reduced teacher effectiveness (Anderson, 2005) & failure to identify poor alignment could lead to low student performance (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001)
- ❖ After policy & syllabus changes, there may be large gaps between the new prescribed, assessed & the enacted curriculum (Akar, 2014; Fenwick, 2018)

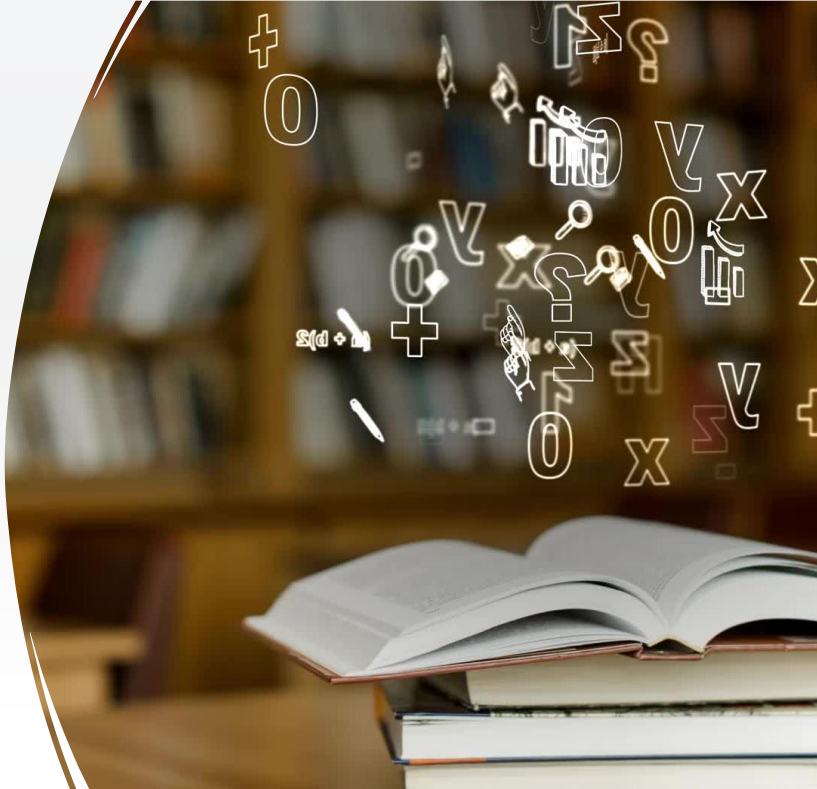


STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

- ❖ Hamstra & Bell (2019) argue that assessments should reveal how well students have learned what was expected of them to learn while instruction ensures that they learn it. To achieve this, assessments, learning objectives, & instructional strategies need to be closely aligned so that they reinforce one another.
- ❖ Edwards (2010) argues that examining alignment is particularly important during the transition to a new curriculum to evaluate the success of reform efforts. After policy & syllabus changes, there may be gaps between the new prescribed, assessed & the enacted curriculum (Akar, 2014; Fenwick, 2018).
- ❖ However, the reality is that curricular alignment is a dynamic & complex process & can affect student outcomes.
- ❖ The effective alignment of high-stakes examinations to the curriculum & classroom practice is, therefore, worthy of exploration for both practicing teachers and the ECESWA.



PURPOSE & OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY



1. examine how high-stakes examinations were aligned to the curriculum & classroom experiences at the school leaving qualification in Eswatini
2. ascertain how teachers perceived the alignment of high-stakes examinations to the curriculum & classroom experiences at the school leaving qualification in Eswatini



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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. To what extent are high-stakes examinations aligned to the curriculum and classroom experiences at the school leaving qualification in Eswatini?
2. What are the teachers perceptions on aligning high-stakes examinations to the curriculum and classroom experiences at the Eswatini General Certificate of Secondary Education (EGCSE) level?



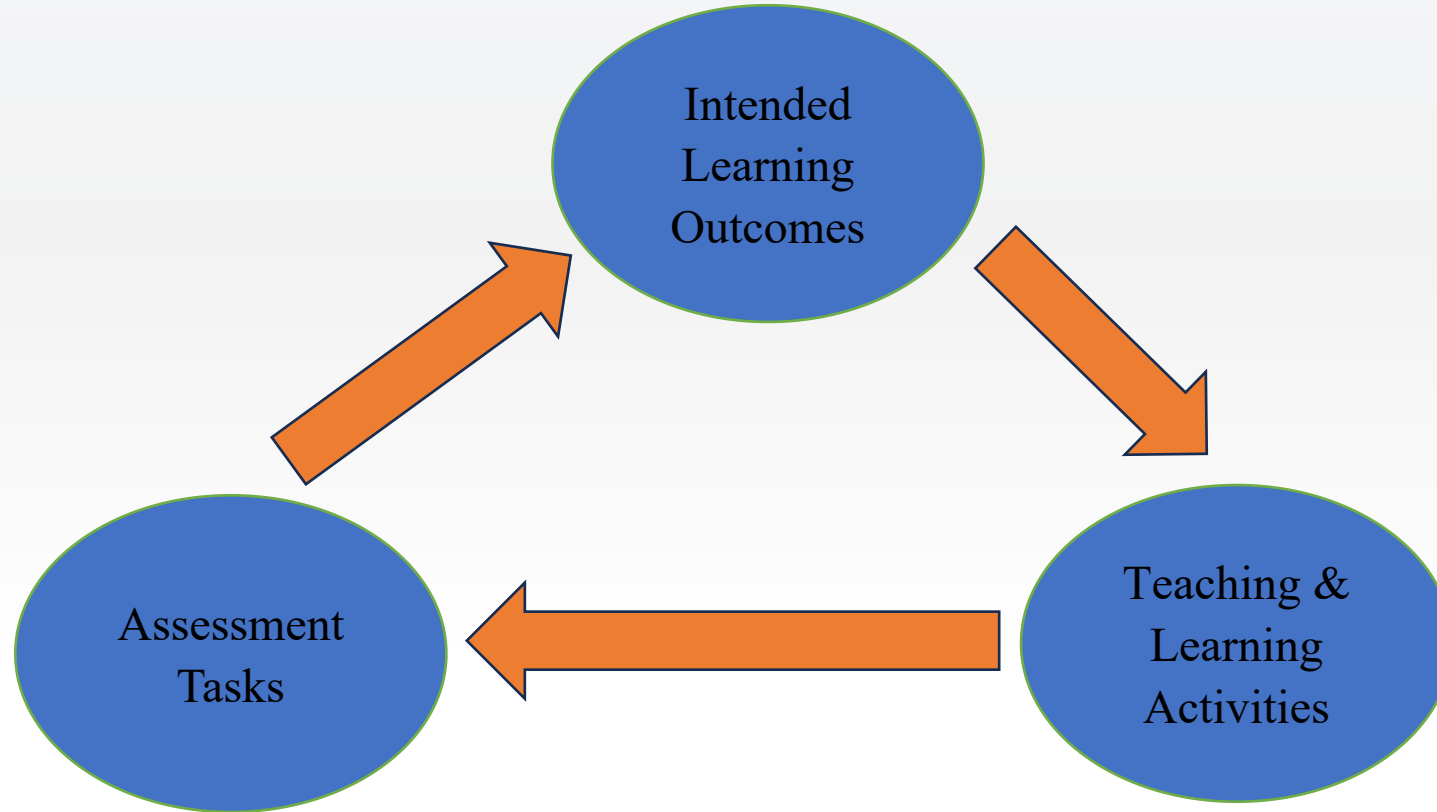
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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- ❖ The study was guided by Biggs' (1996) Constructive Alignment (CA) theory
- ❖ The CA theory was coined by Biggs to describe an approach to curriculum design focused on closely aligning teaching & assessment to intended learning outcomes.
- ❖ Biggs (2003a) highlights the importance of the systemic & integrated nature of curriculum design as a facilitator of Learning Objectives (LOs) attainment. He argues that in an integrated system, all aspects of teaching & assessment are tuned to support high level learning.
- ❖ Constructive alignment is an approach to curriculum design that seeks to improve the conditions for quality learning. The design process should be inclusive & participatory to promote buy-in & minimise resistance from the stakeholders (Goe, Holdheide & Miller, 2014; Heneman, Milanowski, Kimball & Odden, 2006; Mayne, 2007; Santiago & Benavides, 2009; White, Cowhy, Stevens & Sporte, 2012).



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

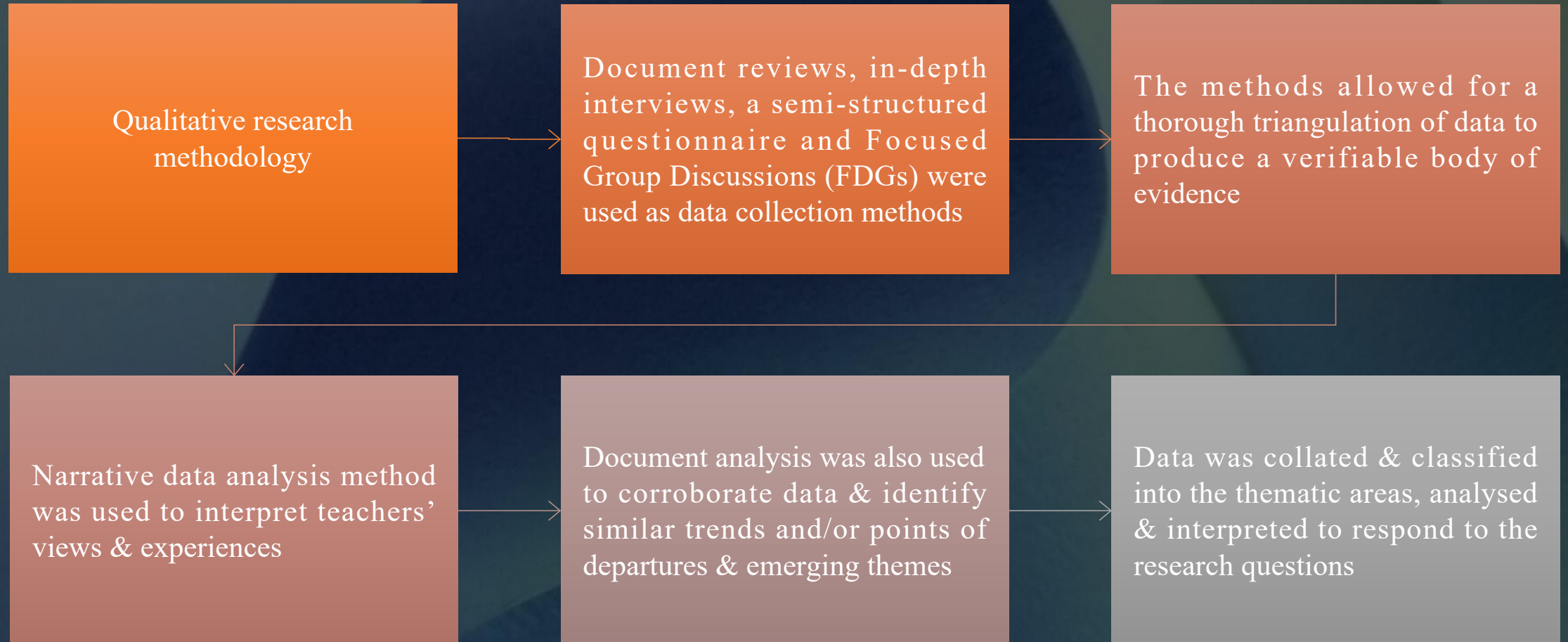


CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT IN ACTION Fig. 1 Adapted from Biggs, J. (2014)



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METHODOLOGY & APPROACH



POPULATION & SAMPLING



The target population for this study comprised teachers involved in the teaching & learning at the school leaving qualification in Eswatini



The target population had adequate qualifications & had more than 5 years' experience in teaching



The study purposively & conveniently sampled teachers who were within the database of ECESWA



A total of 720 participants (out of which 66% were subject teachers, 30% were Heads of Departments, 4% were administrators comprising Deputy Headteachers & Headteachers) representing all subjects of the high school curricula in Eswatini were engaged



Key informants came from all geographical locations of the country; urban schools (20%), semi-urban schools (34%) and rural schools (46%) across all four regions

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION



Positive alignment of high-stakes examinations to the curriculum & classroom experiences at the school leaving qualification in Eswatini



However, there were concerns raised by teachers on the content tested and the alignment was not perceived to be always perfect



Most teachers (96%) understood the meaning of aligning assessments to the curriculum and classroom experiences. The few that did not understand were qualified teachers with teaching experience ranging from 6 – 20 years but either taught in the rural or semi-urban schools



A majority of teachers believed it was important to align examinations to the curriculum & classroom experiences as it helped to make curriculum more relevant to learners

IMPORTANCE OF ALIGNING EXAMINATIONS TO THE CURRICULUM AND CLASSROOM EXPERIENCES



Relevance of curriculum to learners



To check the students understanding & retention of the syllabus content



To enable effective assessment that is congruent & relevant to what learners are used to



Makes the students to be comfortable when sitting for their final examination



Bring about validity and reliability in high-stakes examinations



Authenticity in high-stakes examinations

TEACHERS' CONCERNS

- ❖ Syllabus coverage
- ❖ Clarity of questions
- ❖ Complexity of the language used in examinations
- ❖ Pressure of high-stakes exams settings and limited time
- ❖ Some students struggled with language or exam strategies
- ❖ Duration of papers and the time allocated for some of the subjects
- ❖ Questions were mostly higher order questions requiring critical thinking
- ❖ Questions seemed to favour learners from urban schools



QUALITY ASSURANCE IN ASSESSMENT MATERIALS

- ❖ developing quality assessment materials, quality control & assurance at all levels and areas of operations is a priority
- ❖ examining personnel are carefully selected
- ❖ regular training to capacitate & equip them with the necessary & relevant skills
- ❖ close monitoring of the work of the examining personnel
- ❖ numerous check points such as moderation, revising, vetting, proof reading & editing for quality control are employed
- ❖ Feedback about the performance of the examining personnel



CONCLUSION

- ❖ Positive alignment of high-stakes examinations to the curriculum & classroom experiences
- ❖ Most teachers felt that high-stakes examinations were aligned with the curriculum & classroom experiences
- ❖ The examinations assessed what they intended to assess consistently, thus bringing about validity & reliability
- ❖ The examinations also gave learners a fair chance of demonstrating what they have learned
- ❖ Some teachers felt that adjustments could be made to bring about improvements
- ❖ Some concerns were not valid
- ❖ Quality assurance



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RECOMMENDATIONS

High alignment between high-stakes examinations & curriculum & classroom practice

Vigorous attempts by the ECESWA to interpret the syllabus for teachers

Teachers to cover the whole syllabus

Heads of Departments, Heads of Centre and Quality Assurance officers to monitor the teaching & learning especially with regards to syllabus coverage

Curriculum designers to use feedback from high-stakes examinations to inform curriculum review and development

ECESWA to continue to engage stakeholders in the development of assessment materials to align with the curriculum and classroom experiences





Thank you!



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