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## Lived Experiences of Elementary Teachers from Qualitative and Descriptive Evaluation

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the quality of life assessment of teachers in descriptive evaluation. The research method is qualitative. The statistical population is the primary teachers who work in education office (Ardebil district1). The method of selecting participants is targeted. Ten teachers qualified in qualitative-descriptive teaching were studied in the present study. Deep semi-structured interviews were used to collect information. The results show that by implementing a descriptive evaluation project, students became more active and interested in the lesson. The need to re-interpret items is a problem that teachers are involved with, and this is related to the parents' lack of awareness and familiarity with such a method. Also, the time-consuming of the process of descriptive evaluation is a problem that all teachers acknowledge. The problem of reinforcing student motivation is another challenge faced by teachers. Particularly the elimination of the score and the making difference between more hard-working and less hard-working students is difficult in terms of qualified items. However, improving students' mental and psychological well-being in the form of reducing stress and anxiety and strengthening their social skills in the lives of teachers has been represented.

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**Keywords:** *qualitative descriptive evaluation, evaluation tools, life experience, phenomenology*

### Introduction

The basic aim of assessment and evaluation is to enhance student learning. The content and how to evaluate the teaching process specifies the way of studying and the quality of students' learning. If the teacher emphasizes the maintenance of inappropriate content, students will turn to superficial and rote learning. That's why they said: If you want to improve the educational system, modify the methods of assessment and evaluation (PashaSharifi, 2002). Students' achievement evaluation techniques has been changed accompanied with the advancement of psychology and stating new theories of learning and with the advent of new approaches, such as cognitivism and humanistic innovations, constructivism, the context of changing the nature of evaluation from a quantitative approach to the

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qualitative approach was provided. In fact, the shortcomings and failures of the traditional system of educational evaluation in Iran and the growing concern of scholars in the field of education on the one hand, and the inability of a quantitative approach to meeting the expectations of society, eventually predisposed the replacement of the qualitative-descriptive evaluation system, of course with the approval of the Supreme Council of Education in the year 2002; an approach seeking to restore the role of assessment and evaluation to students' learning scene attempts to attract the goals, principles, features, methods, tools for collecting and organizing information, all of which serve to provide better and lasting learning (Karamalian, 2013).

In the definition of descriptive evaluation it can be said that it is a qualitative model that attempts, contrary to commonly used evaluation models, to pay attention to the depth and quality of students' learning rather than quantitative, by paying attention to the curriculum and educational criteria, and also to describe their status and appreciate evaluation in the service of learning and teaching (Hesarabani, 2006). The main objectives of this plan are as follows: improving the quality of the learning process; providing an appropriate context for the elimination of inclination to get twenty; emphasizing the goals of education rather than emphasizing the content of books; providing an appropriate context for the elimination of absolute authority of exams in determining the educational achievement of students; increasing the mental health of teaching-learning environment or reducing mental stress due to existing evaluation system. In order to achieve these goals, it has been claimed that descriptive evaluation has been developed in five aspects that has transformed the evaluation system. This change eliminates many of the problems and shortcomings of evaluation. It has also been claimed that these changes are synchronous with global developments in this area (Hosni, 2006). In evaluation systems, and especially in descriptive evaluation, teachers have a central role. The study by Stronge and Tucker (2003) showed that without the presence of competent and high quality teachers in the classroom, the success of any educational reform program could not be achieved. The role of teachers is so important and vital that one can imagine the teacher as the main driver of the educational system. This important role in basic education is twofold because of reasons such as the basicity and sensitivity of the students.

An examination of the current research background on the effects of a descriptive evaluation plan confirms the advantages and disadvantages. Based on the studies conducted, the main advantages mentioned and possible include the promotion of collaboration and teamwork between students, reducing competition, increasing student participation in the discussion, eliminating the test anxiety and more consistent with the evaluation standards (Vakili&Amini, 2010; Namvar, Rastgoo, Abolghasemi and Derakhshandeh, 2010; Hosni & Ahmadi, 2007; Mousavi & Pashashrifi; 2008; Khoshkhal and Pasha Sharifi; 2006; Goodbye and Islamiyeh, 2006). On the other hand, an overview of the findings reveals the disadvantages and the adverse effects for students, teachers and, in general, the educational system; some of which are due to the nature of the descriptive evaluation program, some of which relate to the implementation of rigorous and selective and some are also related to the former evaluation system. Some of the most important factors are reducing the level of motivation for students due to lack of competition (Hosseini, 2011); failing to motivate students; failing to improve students' attitudes to learning and continuous improvement of education quality (Mousavi & Pasha Sharifi, 2008); failing to focus on higher levels of cognitive goals; deepening learning; durability and sustainability of learning; creating coherence and coordination in the application of various types of descriptive assessment tools; using process feedback in the path of learning improvement; reducing parental sensitivity to the score, improving the learning opportunities through parent participation in teaching and learning (KhoshKholg and Sharifi, 2006); failing to reduce stress and promote emotional characteristics of students compared to students of the traditional system (Rezaei, 2006); failing to improve the quality of students' performance (KhoshKhalq and Sharifi, 2005; Islamiyah, 2006); low willingness and negative attitude of elementary school teachers to carry out continuous evaluation activities (Parvisian and Kazemi, 2005) and others.

Considering the advantages and disadvantages that various researchers have included for this type of assessment, teachers may have different experiences with this type of assessment. However, the study of evidence and observations shows that a significant proportion of primary school teachers object to the destructive effects of the pattern on the motivation of academic achievement in students, and consequently the decrease in the depth and quality of learning in them. Regarding the above situation, the present research seeks to answer the question of what

the life experience teachers have about descriptive evaluation and what challenges they faced in the learning process-learning process.

### **Instruments and methodology**

The research method is qualitative and it is a phenomenological type. The statistical population is the primary school teachers of Ardebil district 1(education office). The method of selecting participants is targeted. The researcher tries to select participants according to the type of particular information sought after the initial findings. Accordingly, 10 qualified teachers in descriptive teaching and provincial instructors were investigated. In the sample selection, the principle of saturation was considered. Theoretical saturation occurs when the researcher concludes that at the stage of the work s /he has achieved similar concepts and answers and no new concepts emerged(Mohammadpour and Bahmani, 2010). Semi-structured interviews are used to collect information. A seven-step strategy is used to analyze the data. These steps include: reading out all the important descriptions and comments of the participants; extracting the relevant phrases related to the qualitative-descriptive evaluation; conceptualizing the part of the extracted important sentences; sorting out the participants' descriptions and common concepts in particular clustering; converting the inferred comments into comprehensive and complete descriptions; turning the full description of the phenomenon into a real and concise description; and referring participants to the explanation of the ideas obtained and the final accreditation of the findings.

### **Findings**

#### **A. Specifications of the subjects examined**

The following table summarizes some of the characteristics of the subjects studied. As you can see, ten teachers with a history and familiarity with descriptive evaluation were purposefully selected and examined. In selecting the subjects, the first attempt was made to select all the bases and in the second place there are people who have enough information and experience in this field and have worked in both evaluation systems.

**Table 1: Specifications of the subjects**

Teaching Grade	Teaching Experience	Education	Gender/ sex	Participant
Four	15	B. A.	Female	1
Six	21	M. A.	Male	2
One	24	B. A.	Female	3
Five	29	B. A.	Female	4
Two	25	M. A.	Female	5
Five	20	B. A.	Male	6
Three	26	M. A.	Male	7
Four	18	B. A.	Male	8
Three	22	M. A.	Female	9
Five	25	B. A.	Female	10

#### **B. Findings related to life experiences from qualitative descriptive evaluation**

The First Question of the Study:

1. What is the experience of teachers about qualitative-descriptive evaluation? There are different perspectives on qualitative and descriptive evaluation of teachers' experience. From the perspective of teachers, traditional evaluation systems and the new method lead to different motivations for learning. Most of the teachers surveyed suggest that qualitative-descriptive evaluation leads to deepening of learning. Learning is considered educational and this category is among the positive points and benefits of this type of evaluation.

Because qualitative assessment uses a variety of ways to learn, and scoring is not the only criterion, it is effective in deepening learning so that students interact more with the interest in learning. Since this type of assessment is process-centered, it is more involved in educating students and has a more lasting impact on deepening the learning. This is especially clear when teachers use different learning methods. Six of the teachers' surveyed point out that learning is more in depth than descriptive evaluation, and students without stress and anxiety can participate in the

learning process. As an example, one of the teachers states (teacher number 1): "As a teacher and regarding the experience that I have in descriptive evaluation, I deeply believe that every student has the ability to grow and learn, provided that we abandon the traditional instruments that seek to identify the disadvantages of individual differences, and provide tools to identify students' abilities. In this type of qualitative-descriptive evaluation, self-esteem, student respect, positive feedback, and growth-oriented assignments are provided, and the student with high motivation has the ability to grow continuously. In summary, in this type of assessment, Students gain more ability in this type of assessment, and participation and interaction with classmates and teachers rises."

Another teacher says (teacher # 8):

"The fact is that qualitative descriptive assessment has been fully addressed to all students' needs, including emotional, social, skill, knowledge, and .... It draws a horizon that all students at different levels study and actually live together, in other words, each of them has their own special feed. In this type of assessment, the student is not left out because of the weakness of the previous method, but they are used at his own level, and they are more motivated and self-reliant." The elimination of the score is the category most teachers point out, however, some teachers consider eliminating the score in order to increase learning, and others consider the student motivation to mitigate and reduce learning. One of the teachers' states:

"A score for a student is just as a sign that leads to some pleasant or unpleasant behaviors for friends, teachers, parents, and others. But it has no effect on the identification of strengths, weaknesses, abilities and limitations. But quality feedback gives the students greater motivation and effort in a quiet environment and the teacher, paying close attention to the learning outcomes of the students, and the parents to be aware of the students' educational status and the duty and responsibility they face. It should not be equated removing the score from the feedback given to the student with eliminating the evaluation. A more accurate, more complete evaluation is done with more appropriate tools aimed at helping the student and their parents during the school year, but the result is announced in words, phrases, sentences, etc."

However, three of the teachers point to the role of the scoring in the traditional evaluation as a positive boost. For example, these two can be noted: "One can point to the student's enjoyment of the grades previously given and not given now." "Not having a score has caused the student to be irresponsible."

Second question:

2. What are the positive aspects of descriptive qualitative assessment from the point of the view of the teachers?

In relation to positive points, psychological characteristics are mentioned. Features such as strengthening social skills, developing student creativity, and strengthening self-esteem can be mentioned in this case. In the descriptive evaluation model, in addition to the growth of the rational dimension of the student, other aspects of growth, including the growth of social, emotional and physical dimensions, have also been considered. During the course of the year, the teacher presents a description of his situation in the areas described in descriptive form by observing the student's behavior and performance. One of the objectives of performing qualitative descriptive evaluation is to consider the different domains of students' personality in emotional, social, physical and high cognitive dimensions. (Assembly of the Supreme Council of Education, 2003). One of the components of the social dimension is working group. In descriptive evaluation, students do not feel competitive with each other, and this can enhance the teamwork spirit in the classroom.

Confidence is a mental health feature. Students who have high self-esteem can usually easily take their own words and defend themselves. In traditional assessment, students are always exposed to stress and this stresses them, which in turn leads to a decrease in self-esteem. One of the teachers said: "Due to the intimate atmosphere created in the class, most students attend class without fear, and this means strengthening self-esteem." Teachers have a lot of experiences with students who are confronted with self-esteem and sometimes even wet themselves. Therefore, reducing stress and anxiety, creating a friendly and honest atmosphere that attributes the consequences of this type of assessment, is effective in increasing self-esteem.

Third question:

3. How do teachers feel about qualitative evaluation?

Most teachers find descriptive evaluation useful. They believe that providing the necessary arrangements for this type of evaluation can be effective. One of the teachers says:

Descriptive evaluation is very effective in teaching and learning. In this type of assessment, which we try to evaluate while learning, the student will not be stressed. There will be no fear of the exam. There is no fear of question and answer, so it can jolly the class up. Of course, if we can succeed in achieving these goals, we need to make sure that the necessary preconditions are met. Including the number of the students in classrooms is dropped. If the number of classes is like this, then you cannot afford enough time for each student. Most teachers (8 people) have such a view. Most teachers (8 people) have such a view. Descriptive evaluation is considered useful if the conditions for the formation of classes are met.

Of course, two of the teachers surveyed still have to rely on traditional evaluation and prefer to consider this type of evaluation. For them, the score is the key to success. By eliminating the score, motivation has also been eliminated, and so learning is not much depth.

Forth question of the study:

4. What do teachers do in qualitative-descriptive evaluation?

This question has been answered by the respondent: At any moment when the teaching is carried out, I'm doing an evaluation. " I use a variety of tools to fit the lessons. I compare each student with himself /herself and his/her learning. I've eliminated stress. I report the results to the parent. Due to the individual differences, I deal with the assignment. I give students an opportunity to evaluate themselves and others. "This is a summary of the teachers' views on the work they do in qualitative-descriptive evaluation. All teachers point out that they compare each student with her/himself. And most teachers emphasized the importance of providing a work folder.

Fifth question of the study:

5. What don't teachers do in qualitative-descriptive evaluation?

Several examples of work that teachers do not do in descriptive evaluation are mentioned. Responder of the question number 8 has stated these points as follows, which seems to summarize the views of teachers: "I never compare my students. I do not give the same assignments for the whole class -I do not provide negative feedback-I do not just cover the results of a written test-I do not value it at a particular time-I do not put everything in the work folder - I'm not forgetting the logging- I do not act without coordination with the parent - I do not ignore the evaluation of the provided assignments."

All teachers emphasized that they did not compare students. The comparison of students, especially in the scoring system, is normal and common. In this system, student scores are clear and it is possible to compare each individual with another only on the basis of the scores they earn.

Sixth question of research:

6. What is the difficulty of describing qualitative-evaluation?

Several difficulties and limitations were expressed by teachers for this type of evaluation. These weaknesses are mainly related to the tools and instruments of this type of evaluation. Teachers' comments in this field represent at least three problems and weaknesses that are referred to as descriptive evaluation instruments and tools. The first problem is the inaccuracy of descriptive evaluation criteria in differentiating students from each other. For example, some teachers have pointed out that "the evaluation of students is not accurate, that is, the evaluation is general; the distance between the indicators leads to a difference in student's assessment, and uncertainty of the evaluation criterion.

Another problem is the lack of enough time from the teachers and time consuming. Almost all teachers point to this as a major problem in descriptive evaluation. For example, these comments suggest that "descriptive evaluation is very time-consuming, there is a shortage of time, and work folder make the teacher tired". "While I have 30 students, I have to evaluate all of them in different ways. I often review the student's work folder outside the school, which takes a lot of time. Unfortunately, the amount of work involved in this type of assessment of teachers is overlooked." "

The third problem is that descriptive evaluation requires training to fill out the related forms. For example, it says that "the work folder has increased the writing job, and less time is left for repetition and practice, and the workload has gone up."

The following table summarizes the findings. The main categories that teachers referred to in their life experience from qualitative-descriptive assessment are related to the strengths and weaknesses of this type of assessment in the educational, cultural, psychological and social fields.

**Table 2: Major categories and subcategories**

General Categories	Minor Categories	Subcategories
Advantages	Educational	Deepening Learning
		Delete score
		Increasing the inclination towards Participation
		Student motivation
		Self-assessment and peer assessment
	Educational and Cultural	Comparison of each student with himself / herself
		Students' contribution together
		Reducing false competition
		Increased intimacy among Students
	Psychological and Social	Creativity
		Self-confidence
		Reducing stress and anxiety
		Social skills (collaboration, workgroup, group discussion)
		Self-esteem
	Disadvantages	Educational
Time –consuming Evaluation		
Being General		
Need to be reinterpreted		
Not differentiating between students		
Eliminating Score		
Lack of motivation among students		
Undesirable and inadequate educational resources and in-service training		
Educational and Cultural		Students' neglect of others
		Weakening teacher position
Social and Psychological		Creativity reduction
		Anxiety weakness
		Indifference and lack of responsibility of students

### Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the quality of life assessment of teachers in descriptive evaluation. The main research topics include the positive and negative points of descriptive evaluation. Sub-categories are also considered in three educational, didactic and psychological fields. In three areas of interest, the qualitative and qualitative descriptive advantages and strengths are emphasized by teachers over its disadvantages. Most of the

teachers stated that by implementing a descriptive evaluation plan, students were more interested in less interesting lessons, more engaged with homework. By using descriptive feedback, the student and family accurately identified the weaknesses and participated more, and because of the lack of pressure and stress, the depth and durability of learning increased and learning was done at higher levels. And in general, descriptive evaluation through feedback provides useful information for teachers, students and their families, which improves the quality of teaching-learning process.

Most teachers stated that gradually, over time, due to the familiarity of students and families with the objectives of the plan, their sensitivity to the privileged scores decreases and a little more pressure will be entered into the teacher; that is, by implementing a descriptive evaluation plan, an appropriate field for the removal of culture of inclination towards the score of twenty is provided. However, in order to fully realize it, comprehensive information and enough time are needed, but it can be concluded that by implementing a descriptive evaluation plan, a suitable field for the elimination of the culture of inclination towards the score of twenty has been provided by teachers.

Despite the fact that many teachers complained about the descriptive evaluation because of being time-consuming in the classroom, many of them said that they used some of the tools for continuous evaluation and its results that were collected in the work folder were given to the families and students as feedback. In this case, the student could compensate for the opportunity, and the teacher helped improve the learning method by modifying the teaching method wherever needed. From the perspective of the early teachers, the implementation of the descriptive-qualitative evaluation program has had positive educational, didactic and psychological consequences, and this has been reflected in the experiences of teachers living in different ways. Elementary teachers involved in such an assessment method have faced many advantages and disadvantages in their life experiences, in particular, most of them believe that if the conditions for implementing such a plan are provided, that is, the teachers have an appropriate incentive, they have sufficient knowledge of it. And if specialized courses are to be held, appropriate media coverage should be made, classroom and student density standardized, and ... there could be very good outcomes from such an assessment method. The findings are consistent with the results of some researchers.

The results of the study that Rezaie and Seif (2006) and FathAbadi (2006) have done also showed that the academic achievement level of school students included descriptive evaluation in cognitive and psychological variables was significantly higher than that of normal school students. The results of the research, Farajollahi and Haghghi (2007), also describe the deepening of students' learning through a descriptive evaluation plan. The results of the study, Zarf et al. (2010), also showed that learning and academic achievement, durability and depth of learning and understanding of students' performance have increased as the result of project implementation. In their study, Fijani et al. (2011) point out that increased mental health is achieved through reducing stress induced by scores.

However, in a situation where such a method is implemented, due to shortcomings and deficiencies, the expected objectives of descriptive-qualitative evaluation are not fully realized. So that its negative consequences are reflected in the experiences of the teachers surveyed.

The time consuming process of descriptive evaluation is the category most teachers acknowledge. Especially when class density is high, this becomes a major concern. In this context, Hasani (2014) considers time-consuming to be one of the main problems of traditional valuation tools and believes that the authors of the descriptive evaluation project have focused more on the rapid, operational and operationalization of the project, and this issue has led to paying less attention to descriptive evaluation because of being time-consuming and to the need to give more time to teachers to fill descriptive evaluation forms (Hasani, 2014). Another issue that some teachers have emphasized is the student's motivation decline because of eliminating the score. Hasani (2014) considers motivation decline as one of the traditional evaluation problems, so that in the traditional evaluation system, the students' score was like a positive booster, which in this evaluation system did not pay much attention to this issue and this issue is the cause of student's lack of motivation.

Also, differentiation between hard-working students and low-level students has been difficult. Of course, one of the goals of implementing this method is the lack of distinction between students. The goal is to get the student to enjoy the learning process and learning does not occur during evaluation but occurs during training. To achieve this goal, as mentioned, the necessary platform for its implementation should be prepared. Teachers believe that families

have not yet been justified. The qualitative categories for most families are obscure, and they must be interpreted again. Little is the issue that most teachers are involved with, that is, something that is totally eliminated from the elementary education system, should be replaced by qualitative categories for a better understanding of the parent's educational situation. The above are some of the most frequent negative outcomes presented in the experiences of teachers. These results are consistent with the findings of some researchers.

Descriptive evaluation due to variety of tools (Hasani and Ahmadi, 2007) extreme concern of practitioners, descriptive evaluation approach for introducing and employing a variety of methods and tools for collecting and organizing data resulted in "time consuming descriptive qualitative evaluation" and the phenomenon." In such a way, this valuable opportunity for the development and fairness of judging the student's academic achievement becomes a threat to its inefficiency. This finding is also consistent with the researches of Beiramipour et al. (2011) and Hasani and Ahmadi (2007). The researchers point to some of the negative consequences of descriptive evaluation and the damages that this type of evaluation faced, such as being time-consuming, reducing motivation, requiring reinterpretation of qualitative categories, lack of awareness of parents, the lack of familiarity of teachers in a specialized way with this evaluation method.

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