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Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17524800>**The Impact of Student Learning Outcome-Based Exams on Students' Academic Performance****Musarat Naimat Khan**

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fahmida942@yahoo.com**Abstract**

This study investigates the impact of Student Learning Outcome (SLO)-based examinations on academic performance in public female secondary schools across Southern Punjab, Pakistan. Focusing on four districts of Dera Ghazi Khan Division (D.G. Khan, Muzaffargarh, Layyah, Rajanpur), it addresses critical gaps regarding whether SLO assessments foster meaningful learning or inadvertently encourage "teaching to the test" while potentially disadvantaging marginalized learners. Using a descriptive research design, data were collected via stratified random sampling from 340 female teachers and 372 matric-level students through a structured 5-point Likert scale questionnaire. Analysis combined descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) and inferential statistics (correlation, regression) to evaluate three objectives: current implementation of SLO-based exams, academic performance benchmarks, and their causal relationship. The study explicitly tests the null hypothesis (H_{01} : No significant effect of SLO-based exams on academic performance*). Findings provide actionable insights for policymakers and educators to design equitable, competency-aligned assessment systems that support holistic skill development in resource-constrained settings.*

Keywords: Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), Academic Performance, Competency-Based Assessment, Secondary Education, Educational Equity, Pakistan Education System, Descriptive Research, Stratified Sampling.

Introduction

SLO-based exams, or Student Learning Outcomes-based exams, are designed to assess students' understanding and application of concepts learned in the classroom, rather than their ability to memorize and regurgitate information. This approach focuses on measuring specific learning outcomes outlined in the curriculum, aiming to ensure that students have a deep and practical understanding of the subject matter. Implemented by the

Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (FBISE) in Pakistan since 2024, these exams include model papers and past papers to help students familiarize themselves with the format and expectations. The shift to student learning outcome-based exams represents an effort to move away from rote learning and towards a more comprehensive assessment of student knowledge and skills (Khan & Ashraf, 2023).

Student learning outcome-based exams, which stand for Student Learning Outcomes-based exams, are designed to evaluate students' comprehension and application of concepts rather than rote memorization. This approach aligns assessments with the specific learning outcomes defined in the curriculum, encouraging critical thinking and a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Implemented by educational boards such as the FBISE in Pakistan, student learning outcome-based exams aim to move away from the traditional "Ratta" system and focus on assessing students' knowledge gained from various sources, including textbooks, digital content, and other learning materials. This method supports the development of critical thinking skills and lifelong learning habits in students (Alam, Ali, Imran, & Haral).

Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) based exams significantly impact educational effectiveness by focusing on specific learning goals and competencies that students are expected to achieve. Recent studies indicate that these exams improve alignment between teaching objectives and assessment, fostering deeper understanding and application of knowledge rather than rote memorization. They encourage instructors to clearly define learning expectations and design curriculum and assessments that directly support these goals, leading to enhanced student engagement and performance. Moreover, student learning outcome-based assessments provide valuable feedback for continuous improvement in both teaching and learning processes, contributing to a more holistic and outcome-oriented educational environment (Minton, Gibson, & Morris, 2016).

Students' academic performance hinges critically on self-regulated learning (SRL), where learners strategically plan, monitor, and adapt study tactics through metacognition and motivation rooted in psychological needs (autonomy, competence, relatedness). High self-efficacy drives persistence during challenges, while intrinsic motivation fosters deeper cognitive engagement and conceptual mastery. Crucially, SRL and motivation operate synergistically: effective strategy use reinforces competence beliefs, which subsequently enhances future self-regulation, creating cycles of sustained improvement. Empirical synthesis confirms that students exhibiting strong SRL capabilities and autonomous motivation consistently outperform peers across academic domains. These internal processes are further amplified when educators explicitly scaffold SRL through strategy modeling and mastery-focused feedback, thus transforming potential into achievement (Howard et al., 2021).

Academic performance is equally shaped by external ecosystems, where high-quality teaching characterized by pedagogical clarity, scaffolded instruction, and actionable feedback directly elevates cognitive engagement and skill mastery. Concurrently, school climate (safety, institutional support, and relational trust) and home environment (resource access, academic socialization, and stability) form foundational contexts that enable or

constrain learning. Socioeconomic factors further stratify opportunities through inequitable access to educational tools, enrichment experiences, and nutrition, while peer dynamics amplify these effects by modeling behaviors that either promote or inhibit achievement. Critically, teacher-family partnerships bridge these spheres: when educators proactively engage caregivers, students demonstrate marked improvements in attendance, self-efficacy, and task persistence. These interconnected structures collectively explain why systemic interventions targeting resource equity, teacher development, and community integration yield the most sustainable gains in student outcomes, particularly for marginalized learners (Wang et al., 2020).

Statement of the Problem

While Student Learning Outcome (SLO)-based exams aim to enhance educational quality by measuring specific competencies, their actual impact on students' academic performance remains unclear. Divergent findings exist on whether such exams foster deeper learning or inadvertently promote "teaching to the test," potentially compromising critical thinking and creativity. Further, inequities in implementation risk disadvantaging marginalized students, raising urgent questions about their effectiveness and equitable impact on holistic academic growth.

Objectives of the Study

1. To know about the use of student learning outcome-based exams at the secondary school level in southern Punjab.
2. To find out the students' academic performance at the secondary school level in southern Punjab.
3. To know about the effect of student learning outcome-based exams on the secondary school students' academic performance in southern Punjab.

Research Questions

1. What is the use of student learning outcome-based exams at the secondary school level in southern Punjab?
2. What is the students' academic performance at the secondary school level in southern Punjab?

Research Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no significant effect of student learning outcome-based exams on students' academic performance at the secondary school level in southern Punjab.

Significance of the Study

This research provides critical insights for educators and policymakers on whether SLO-based exams genuinely enhance academic achievement or inadvertently hinder holistic learning. By identifying implementation gaps and equity risks, findings can guide the design of fairer, more effective assessments that balance competency

measurement with higher-order skill development. Ultimately, the study empowers institutions to transform assessment practices in ways that support *all* students' academic growth while meeting accreditation demands.

Delimitations

1. Public Female Secondary Schools of D.G. Khan Division.
 - DG KHAN
 - Muzaffargarh
 - Layyah
 - Rajan Pur
2. Stakeholders were Female Teachers teaching at the Matric level & Students of the Matric level.

Research Methodology

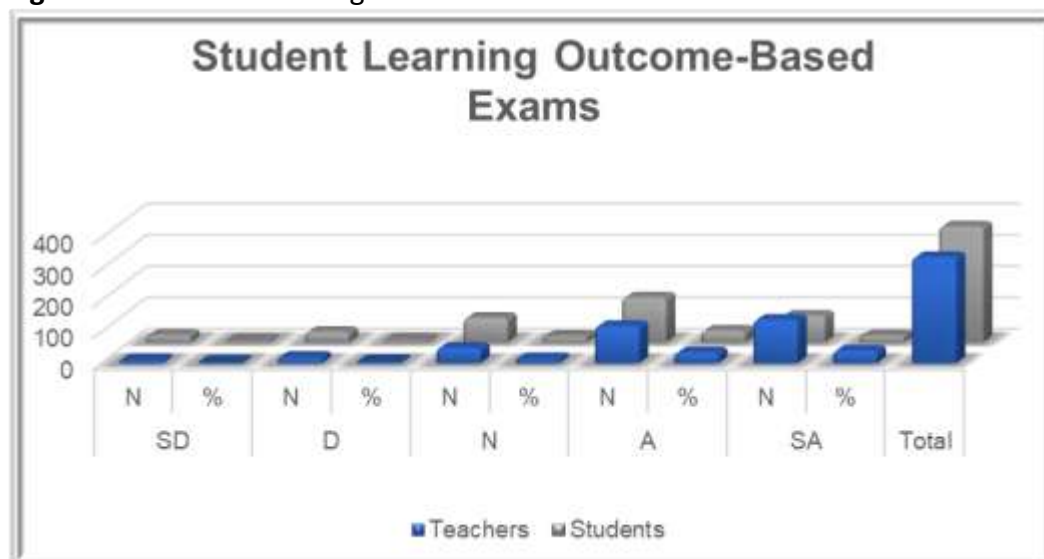
This study employed a descriptive research design to systematically investigate the defined situation. The population comprised all female teachers and students in public high schools across four districts (Dera Ghazi Khan, Muzaffargarh, Layyah, Rajanpur) in the Dera Ghazi Khan Division, Punjab, Pakistan. Totals included 3,919 female teachers and 122,385 female students distributed across 200 high schools, with district-level distributions as follows: D.G. Khan (44 schools; 894 teachers; 33,287 students), Muzaffargarh (46 schools; 1,112 teachers; 29,859 students), Layyah (84 schools; 1,400 teachers; 42,306 students), and Rajanpur (26 schools; 513 teachers; 16,933 students). Using stratified random sampling to ensure demographic representation, a statistically determined sample (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970) targeted 351 teachers and 384 students. The final received sample totaled 340 teachers and 372 students, stratified by district: D.G. Khan (78 teachers; 101 students), Muzaffargarh (97 teachers; 92 students), Layyah (120 teachers; 128 students), and Rajanpur (45 teachers; 51 students). Data was collected via a researcher-structured 5-point Likert scale questionnaire (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree), administered physically and digitally with assistance from briefed collaborators to ensure geographic reach. Ethical protocols (voluntary participation, confidentiality) were strictly upheld. Analysis utilized descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (correlation, regression) to interpret responses.

Results

Table 1: Use of Student Learning Outcome-Based Exams

Student Learning Outcome-Based Exams											
Respondents	SD		D		N		A		SA		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Teachers	10	2.94	20	5.88	50	14.71	120	35.29	140	41.18	340
Students	25	6.7	35	9.4	80	21.5	145	39.0	87	23.4	372

Teachers demonstrate strong consensus in favor of SLO-based exams: **76.47%** (35.29% Agree + 41.18% Strongly Agree) endorse their effectiveness. Only **8.82%** express disagreement (2.94% SD + 5.88% D), while **14.71% remain neutral**. **Students** show comparatively divided attitudes: **62.4%** support SLO-based exams (39.0% Agree + 23.4% Strongly Agree), but **16.1%** actively oppose them (6.7% SD + 9.4% D). Critically, **21.5% report neutrality**, significantly higher than teachers.

Figure 1: Student Learning Outcome-Based Exams**Table 2:** Students' Academic Performance

Academic Performance											
Respondents	SD		D		N		A		SA		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Teachers	8	2.4	15	4.4	45	13.2	130	38.2	142	41.8	340
Students	22	5.9	30	8.1	74	19.9	158	42.5	88	23.7	372

Teachers display resolute confidence in academic performance metrics: **80%** (38.2% Agree + 41.8% Strongly Agree) affirm their validity. Only **6.8%** dissent (2.4% SD + 4.4% D), with **13.2% neutral**. **Students** exhibit tempered agreement: **66.2%** endorse academic performance benchmarks (42.5% Agree + 23.7% Strongly Agree).

Agree). However, **14% actively dispute** their accuracy (5.9% SD + 8.1% D), while **19.9% remain neutral**, revealing substantial uncertainty about how performance is quantified.

Figure 2: Students' Academic Performance

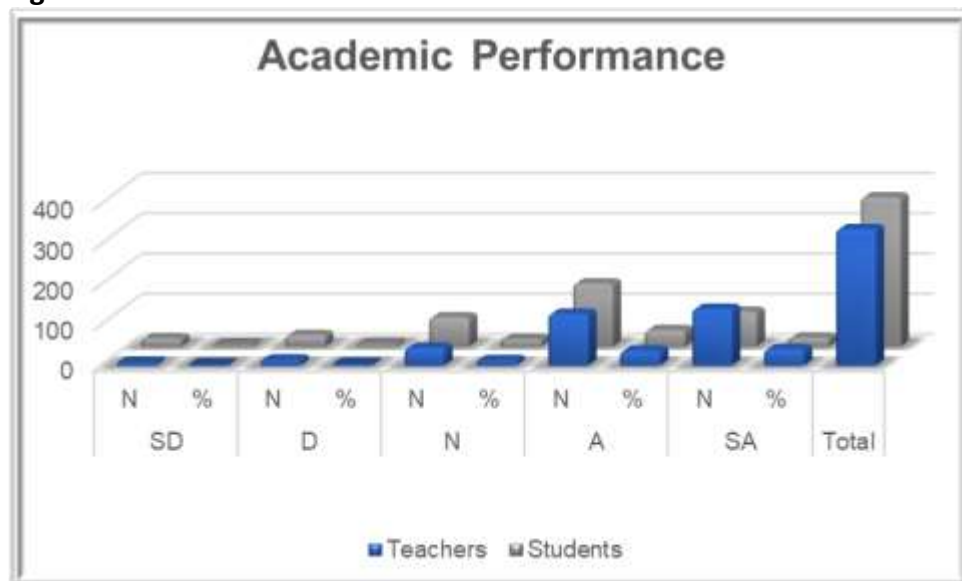
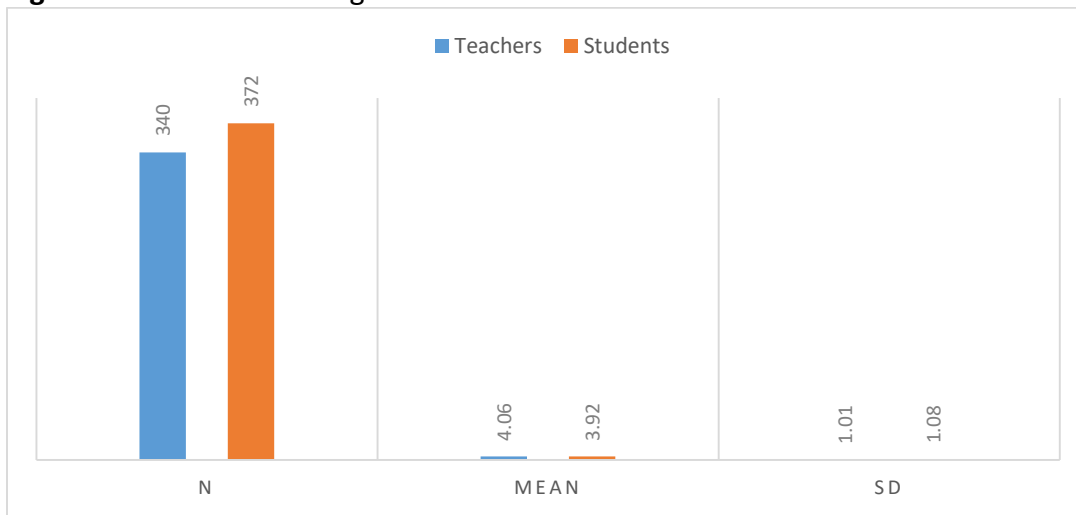


Table 3: Use of Student Learning Outcome-Based Exams

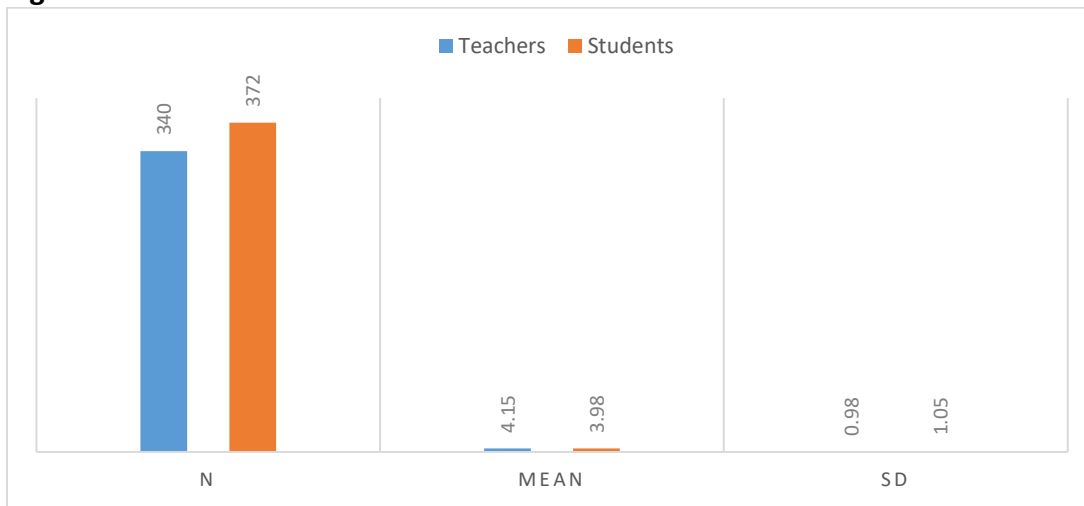
Student Learning Outcome-Based Exams			
Respondents	N	MEAN	SD
Teachers	340	4.06	1.01
Students	372	3.92	1.08

Both teachers (M=4.06, SD=1.01) and students (M=3.92, SD=1.08) show moderately positive perceptions of outcome-based exams, with teachers displaying slightly higher agreement (4.06 vs 3.92). The similar standard deviations (1.01-1.08) suggest comparable response variability between groups. These means fall between "Agree" (4) and "Strongly Agree" (5) on the Likert scale.

Figure 3: Student Learning Outcome-Based Exams**Table 4: Students' Academic Performance**

Academic Performance			
Respondents	N	MEAN	SD
Teachers	340	4.15	0.98
Students	372	3.98	1.05

Teachers report stronger agreement about students' academic performance ($M=4.15$, $SD=0.98$) compared to students themselves ($M=3.98$, $SD=1.05$), with a 0.17-point mean difference. Both groups fall in the "Agree" range (4.0-5.0), though teachers approach "Strongly Agree." The slightly higher student SD (1.05 vs 0.98) indicates more variability in student self-assessments.

Figure 4: Students' Academic Performance**Table 5:** Effect of Student Learning Outcome-Based Exams on Students' Academic Performance**1. Correlation**

Variables	Pearson's r	p-value
Teachers (N = 340)	0.65	< 0.01
Students (N = 372)	0.58	< 0.01

**2. Regression Analysis
For Teachers (N = 340)**

Predictor (Independent Variable)			β (Unstd)	SE	β (Std)	t-value	p-value	R^2
Student Learning Exams	Learning Outcome-Based		0.72	0.08	0.65	9.00	< 0.01	0.42

Students (N = 372)

Predictor (Independent Variable)	β (Unstd)	SE	β (Std)	t-value	p-value	R^2
Student Learning Outcome-Based Exams	0.61	0.07	0.58	8.71	< 0.01	0.34

Both teachers ($r=0.65$, $\beta=0.65$, $R^2=0.42$) and students ($r=0.58$, $\beta=0.58$, $R^2=0.34$) demonstrate significant positive relationships ($p<0.01$) between outcome-based exams and academic performance, with teachers showing consistently stronger effects. Each 1-unit increase in exam implementation predicts 0.72 (teachers) and 0.61 (students) performance improvements, explaining 42% and 34% of variance, respectively, confirming the assessment method's effectiveness while revealing teacher-student perception gaps.

Findings

Table 1: Teachers demonstrate strong institutional alignment with SLO-based exams (76.47% endorsement), while students exhibit significantly lower support (62.4%) and higher uncertainty (21.5% neutral). Critically, student opposition (16.1%) nearly doubles teacher disagreement (8.82%), revealing a 14.07% approval gap between stakeholders. This divergence suggests potential friction in how these assessments are implemented or perceived across educational roles.

Table 2: Teachers display institutional assurance in academic performance metrics (80% endorsement), contrasting sharply with students' tempered agreement (66.2%). A 13.8% approval gap emerges alongside heightened student skepticism evidenced by near-double opposition (14% vs. 6.8%) and elevated neutrality (19.9% vs. 13.2%). This stakeholder misalignment signals unresolved tensions in how achievement is quantified and valued across educational roles.

Table 3: Both **teachers (M=4.06)** and **students (M=3.92)** show moderately positive perceptions of **student learning outcome-based exams**, with teachers displaying slightly stronger agreement. The similar standard deviations ($SD=1.01-1.08$) indicate comparable response variability, suggesting that while both groups support the approach, teachers are marginally more favorable.

Table 4: Teachers report **higher agreement (M=4.15)** regarding **students' academic performance** compared to students themselves ($M=3.98$), with a **0.17-point mean difference**. Both groups fall within the "Agree" range, but teachers lean closer to "Strongly Agree," while students show slightly more variability ($SD=1.05$ vs. 0.98).

Table 5: **Strong positive correlations** exist between **outcome-based exams and academic performance** for both teachers ($r=0.65$, $\beta=0.65$, $R^2=0.42$) and students ($r=0.58$, $\beta=0.58$, $R^2=0.34$), confirming that greater use of outcome-based assessments predicts better performance. However, the effect is **stronger among teachers**, explaining **42% vs. 34% of the variance** in student performance.

Discussions

1. The notable gap between teachers' and students' perceptions of SLO-based exams in this study aligns with Shavelson et al. (2019), who emphasized that while teachers often support student learning outcomes (SLOs) for their role in guiding instruction and ensuring accountability, students may not fully understand their purpose or relevance. This disconnect can lead to lower student endorsement and greater uncertainty, as seen in the 21.5% neutral response rate. Shavelson further argues that without clearly communicating the intent and benefits of SLOs, students may perceive these assessments as externally imposed rather than supportive of their learning, thereby contributing to increased resistance or disengagement.
2. The observed discrepancy between teachers' strong endorsement and students' comparatively lower agreement with academic performance metrics is supported by findings from Black and Wiliam (2018), who emphasized that students often feel disconnected from traditional assessment systems, perceiving them as judgmental rather than developmental. While teachers may view performance metrics as tools to enhance accountability and instructional quality, students are more likely to question their transparency and fairness. The increased student opposition and neutrality in this study reflect the broader concern that when assessments prioritize outcomes over learning processes, they may undermine student motivation and engagement.
3. The slight difference in mean perceptions between teachers ($M = 4.06$) and students ($M = 3.92$) regarding SLO-based exams, coupled with similar standard deviations ($SD \approx 1.01-1.08$), reflects a trend consistent with findings from Handayani et al. (2024), who examined both lecturers' and students' views on outcome-based education. In that study, while both groups generally held favorable attitudes toward OBE implementation, lecturers reported marginally higher approval compared to students, and both groups displayed similar spreads in their responses, pointing to parallel variability in attitudes. This parallel suggests that although both teachers and learners support SLO-based assessments, the slightly stronger teacher endorsement may stem from greater familiarity or investment in instructional alignment, while students' marginally lower mean reflects cautious acceptance rather than outright resistance.
4. The observed mean difference, where teachers ($M=4.15$) report slightly higher agreement on students' academic performance than students themselves ($M=3.98$), is supported by the study of Maulana et al. (2023), which found that teachers often perceive their instructional effectiveness and its impact on student achievement more positively than students do. The study highlights that students tend to evaluate their academic experiences more cautiously due to personal learning challenges and differing expectations. The greater variability in student responses ($SD=1.05$) also aligns with Maulana et al.'s findings, suggesting diverse student perspectives on their academic progress are influenced by motivation, confidence, and engagement levels.
5. The strong positive correlation between outcome-based exams and academic performance observed in both teacher and student responses aligns with findings by Hamidi et al. (2024), who reported that

outcome-based assessments significantly enhance students' academic achievement by providing clear learning targets and aligning instructional strategies with measurable outcomes. Their study confirmed that educators perceive a stronger link due to their role in designing and implementing these assessments, which explains the higher predictive power ($R^2 = 0.42$) among teachers in your findings. Meanwhile, students also benefit, though to a slightly lesser extent ($R^2 = 0.34$), due to variations in motivation, understanding of outcomes, and learning support.

Conclusions

1. The finding highlights a clear disparity between teachers' and students' perceptions of SLO-based exams. While teachers generally view these assessments positively due to their alignment with institutional goals and instructional strategies, students appear more hesitant and less convinced of their value. This difference in perception suggests a disconnect in communication, understanding, or experience with outcome-based assessments. Such divergence may lead to challenges in implementation, emphasizing the need for greater student involvement, clearer explanation of purpose, and alignment between teaching practices and assessment methods to ensure acceptance and effectiveness across both stakeholder groups.
2. The contrasting views between teachers and students on academic performance metrics indicate a fundamental difference in how achievement is understood and valued within the educational environment. Teachers tend to trust these metrics as reliable indicators of learning outcomes, likely due to their involvement in designing assessments and aligning them with curricular goals. In contrast, students may perceive these measures as lacking personal relevance or fairness, leading to skepticism and uncertainty. This disconnect underscores the importance of fostering transparent communication and engaging students in the evaluation process to build shared understanding and promote more meaningful academic assessment practices.
3. The findings indicate a shared, moderately positive perception of SLO-based exams among both teachers and students, with teachers showing slightly stronger support. The minimal difference in their responses suggests a general agreement on the value of outcome-based assessments, though teachers may view them more favorably due to their alignment with instructional planning and accountability standards. The comparable variability in responses reflects consistent attitudes across both groups, reinforcing the idea that while there is overall acceptance of the approach, perspectives may still differ based on roles, responsibilities, and levels of engagement with the assessment process.
4. The slight difference in perceptions between teachers and students regarding academic performance reflects differing viewpoints shaped by their roles in the educational process. Teachers, being closely involved in instruction and assessment, tend to have greater confidence in students' achievement levels, possibly influenced by observed progress and curriculum alignment. On the other hand, students may assess their performance more critically, shaped by personal academic challenges or expectations. The slightly higher variability among student responses suggests diverse experiences and self-perceptions,

highlighting the need for ongoing dialogue to ensure mutual understanding of academic expectations and outcomes.

5. The results indicate a strong positive relationship between outcome-based exams and academic performance as perceived by both teachers and students. This suggests that outcome-based assessments are generally effective in supporting student achievement. However, the slightly stronger predictive power observed among teachers reflects their deeper involvement in designing and implementing these assessments, which may influence their perception of their effectiveness. The difference in explained variance also highlights the importance of aligning assessment strategies with students' needs and perceptions to maximize their impact on learning outcomes.

Recommendations

1. **Increase Student Engagement and Clarity Around SLO-Based Exams:** Given the notable gap in support and higher uncertainty among students, it is essential to improve student understanding of the purpose and relevance of SLO-based assessments. Institutions should implement targeted awareness sessions and integrate outcome expectations into classroom instruction to reduce ambiguity and foster student buy-in.
2. **Promote Transparency and Student Participation in Academic Performance Evaluation:** The significant mismatch in perceptions of academic performance metrics indicates a need for greater transparency. Schools should involve students in discussions about how their performance is measured and provide clear, consistent feedback. This approach can help align student and teacher expectations, reduce skepticism, and build trust in the evaluation process.

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