

A TEACHER WITH A VISION AND SCHOOL BASED ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

School based assessment has a major role to play in the education of our children. Children spend the best part of their young lives with teachers and it is through the teacher assessments that we can better understand their capabilities. To rely solely or to a large extent on the one time examinations as is common practice in most countries is to obscure the vision of a teacher and deny them a voice of creativity. The role of school based assessment in the final grading of students in senior secondary schools in Botswana needs to be given an uplifted face. Teachers in senior secondary schools continue to assess students on a day to day basis but the fruits of their hard labour are easily swallowed by the national examinations which are prepared by an external body. This could be due to lack of confidence in the way teachers assess or that the importance of such assessment is not readily seen. In this paper, results of a study in which views of teachers were solicited about the importance of school based assessment in senior secondary schools in the South Central district of Botswana will be shared. Recommendations on what could be done to enhance visibility and usability of school based assessment are presented.

Introduction

The quality of education in the 21st century has become even more of a concern than before. Societal shifts from being content with reading and arithmetic skills to information age which requires ability to apply, analyze, interpret and use information for decision making necessitates a shift in skill demands. In Botswana, educators, policymakers, politicians and parents have all come to realize the need for lifelong education and this has been reiterated in many government documents.

Developing critical thinkers has become central to education systems. This development will require changes in the assessment of students both at classroom and school levels and large-scale and high stakes assessment. The changed focus in the skills and knowledge needed have direct implications for the relationship that exists between assessment and instruction. Student assessment is an important component if not a fundamental one, in improving or reforming education.

The reliability and validity of any assessment are important aspects if any decisions are to be based on the results of such assessment. The absence of such technical properties of tests prepared by teachers makes people doubt if teachers can really be tasked with assessment that is useful. It is against this background that this study was conceived.

Background to the study

The education system in Botswana at the moment is 7-3-2-4 showing years of primary education-junior secondary-senior secondary-university first degree. From primary to secondary, the curriculum is controlled by government through a ministry of education (MoE). The university level is not directly controlled by the ministry. The end of primary education is marked by a diagnostic examination while the junior secondary level is marked by selection examination. The senior secondary school level is marked by a subject based examination which is supposed to show performance on a number of subjects as opposed to an overall performance. This means automatic progression from primary to junior secondary and a selective progression thereafter. The primary and secondary end examinations are national examinations and are currently controlled by a MoE department. The end of senior secondary school marks the exit of government safety net and it is a point where some level of independence should show on the part of the learner. This can be expected even earlier as some exit the school system at the lower levels. This study is driven by a concern on the exit skill package of the senior secondary school learner.

The subject based examination at the end of senior secondary school level is a high stakes examination and has been used to hold schools accountable for such things as improving instruction and student learning. The results of this examination attract a lot of attention

as these are used to make decisions such as admission into university and other tertiary education institutions. This would therefore require that teachers prepare learners to do well on such examinations. What is bothersome is that an examination driven curriculum runs a risk of being narrowed to meet the requirements of the examinations. When this happens, teachers are forced to “teach to the test” thus leaving out important facets of the curriculum which were meant to provide learners with life long education and not just what is examined. This is bound to happen when a single test to measure student learning as in the case of end of level examination in Botswana. End of level examinations are seen as isolated events which teacher spend years preparing for. The assessment of learners that goes on in the years that teacher spends preparing for these examinations are not given the attention that they deserve. Teacher made assessment is viewed as being less important than the isolated final examination. This defeats logic in that “preparing” the learner is an entire block of years of learning while the examination takes a few hours. The contribution of the teacher/school based assessment to the final grade should be directly proportional to the amount of time of preparation. Shouldn't we then be having a reversed equation of importance to compensate and uplift teacher made assessment? Are we not short circuiting what teachers could do to improve on the learning process of their students? It is against this background that this study was conceived.

School based assessment in Botswana Senior Secondary schools

The National Commission on Education(1993) emphasized on acquisition of basic competencies and skills for learners and the requirement of an assessment strategy that would measure the extent to which learners acquire them. This saw a shift from norm-referenced testing which was predominant in the education system to criterion-referenced testing. This was seen as a necessary move to equip school leavers with skills necessary for survival and world of work. Botswana is using the subject based examination as part of the move from norm-referenced testing to criterion-referenced testing. The focus of the move is to measure students' skills and competencies against a set of criteria to indicate levels of performance rather than relative standing in a group. For Botswana, the importance of such a move was earlier emphasized by Somerset(1977) as a more informative assessment system going beyond ordering students by performance.

Nitko(1998) in his consultancy report to the MoE in Botswana made recommendations on the modalities of including school based assessment as part of CRT. These were earlier attempts to uplift school based assessment.

The performance of students during the preparation (for end examination) years often does not tally with the finale examination performance. In Botswana, forecast grades which are school derived have a long history of not being reliable and therefore of no use. The correlation between the forecast grades and final examination grades in each subject is supposed to be high for stable performance. The unreliable nature of these grades is due to many facts such as teachers inflating their students' performance to make their students "look good" hoping this will help their case to have their students pass. This behavior from teachers' side can be corrected by raising the importance of what they do so that they are not aiming for the isolated event examination. The contribution of the school based assessment ranges from 20-50 percent with most subjects' contribution at the lower end of this range. This raises concern again about the importance of school based assessment.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was therefore to find out the perceptions of senior secondary teachers' on the role school based assessment plays and the contribution of school based assessment towards the final grade.

Research Questions

1. What are senior secondary school teachers' views on the importance of school based assessment?
2. What are teachers views on their preparedness to handle school based assessment?
3. What are senior secondary school teachers' views on the contribution of school based assessment to the final grade in BGCSE?
4. To what extent are teachers' visions supported by current assessment strategies at senior secondary school level?

Methodology

Survey design using a questionnaire as a data collection tool was used in the investigation. This type of design is cost effective and allows for data to be collected from a large sample in a short period of time. The population for the study was senior secondary school teachers in the six government senior secondary schools in the South Central district in Botswana. A random sample of 120 teachers responded to the questionnaire.

Results

The total number of respondents from the six schools was 120 as shown in Table 1.

Include subject

School	Male	Female	Total
A			20
B			15
C			23
D			18
E			24
F			20
Total			120

The sample of teachers consists of more male teachers.

The results are presented by the research questions they address. On the importance of school based assessment, all respondents indicated that school based assessment was important (73.1% and 26.9% chose strongly agree and agree respectively).

Eighty four percent of the respondents indicated that their training as teachers prepared them to be competent in handling SBA. However, 61% indicated that they needed in-service training to be able to carry out SBA with only 19% indicating that they do not

need to be in-service trained on SBA. The rest of the respondents were not certain of where they stand in terms of training. On how their departments handled working on SBA, 92% indicated that staff worked together and 75% indicated that this work was moderated.

On teachers' views on the contribution of SBA to final grade, 88% indicated that SBA did contribute to final grade in their subjects. . On whether they were happy with the amount of contribution of SBA to final grade, 61% indicated that they were while 31% could not make a stand (neutral) and 8% said they were not happy. At the same time, when asked about the effort they put into doing SBA and the contribution it made to the final grade, 84% of the teachers indicated that they would like the contribution to be more than what it was at the moment. When asked about the extent of their creativity in assessing students given the current assessment strategies, only 31% indicated that their creativity was limited while 35% said it was not. The remaining 34% could not decide on where they fall. The need for freedom in assessing students was expressed by 60% of the teachers while 36% indicated that they did not need it. Sixty eight percent indicated that if they were allowed more freedom in assessing students, they would teach them better for lifelong education while 16% did not think that would be the case. On their teaching vision, there was an equal split as 38% indicated hampered vision while 38% indicated no such limitation.

Discussion, conclusion and recommendations

In this century, there is tremendous need for a change in the way learners are assessed. This need is mandated by the shift in knowledge and skill acquirement that are necessary for full functional products of the global village we live in. It is through the overhaul or shift in instruction and assessment strategies that such changes can be achieved. The quest for learners who have a knowledge base that can help them be critical thinkers, decision makers and problem solvers is every nation's cry. In aligning curriculum with activities and the environment of the classroom, teachers have a critical role to play. The teacher needs to know how to mimic the real world to develop the holistic being of every

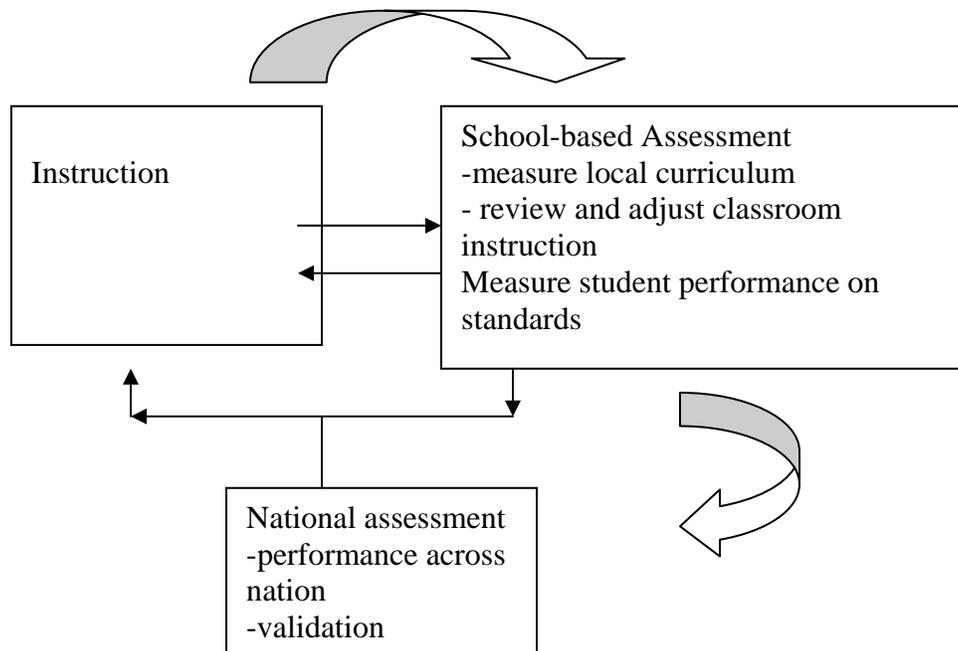
learner. The need to change the educational experience for learners is central to the issue of developing critical thinkers. The individualized instruction and assessment strategies that go with this requires a lot of creativity on the side of the teacher. The changes in the roles of both teacher and learner lie with the teacher as a facilitator of learning.

The importance of school based assessment can therefore not be over emphasized. The findings of this study show that indeed there is no doubt about this. All teachers do understand that what they do is of paramount importance.

Teacher training is an important element in implementing a viable SBA. The significant of this is a validity and reliability stand. School based assessment requires monitoring to ensure that marks awarded are technically sound. The findings show that teachers collaborate in SBA and this needs to be strengthened to facilitate the monitoring.

The move from one time isolated assessment such as the final examinations is backed by the need to broaden the kind of information that is collected about students and the way that this information is used in the evaluation of student learning(Kulieke et. al.,1990). Assessment needs to tap and build upon the strengths that learners, in all their diversity, bring to the learning situation.

The proposed model of assessment:



References

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