**Theme: “Designing the Assessment of Learning Outcomes to Make Positive Impact on**

**Individual and Institutions”**

**Sub Theme: Classroom Assessment in Primary and Secondary School.**

**Topic: Critical Issue: Improving Classroom Assessment in Secondary Schools in Nigeria.**

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***Abstract***

*Classroom assessments are designed and administered by classroom teachers. These assessments plays essential role in determining students progression from one class to another and as continuous assessment for high-stake examinations. It is through these assessments that classroom teachers can effectively target instruction in the academic content standards and arm students with the knowledge and skills needed for success, both in and out of school. However, if the content and the target of assessment do not match what is taught, the results would be meaningless and harmful. Also, if assessment tools are not of high quality, decisions affecting students’ futures based on these results would be misleading and consequently have negative impact on them. This paper sought to examine assessment practices in secondary schools in Nigeria and how they can be improved upon to ensure quality.*

***Keywords: assessment, classroom assessment, quality, classroom teachers, secondary schools.***

**Introduction**

Classroom assessment is a ‘prime mover’ of learning, and according to American Federation of Teachers (AFT), National Council of Measurement in Education (NCME), and National Education Association (NEA) (1990), good teaching cannot exist without good assessment, but most teachers in African schools are not trained even in the basic skills of classroom assessment. To Nenty (1997) “many persons are certified to teach with little or no training on basic assessment skills. Some teachers’ training institutions do not offer courses that impart such skills at all, while some make such courses optional as if assessment is an optional duty of the classroom teacher” (p. 56). The consequences of this are that teachers are deprived of the skill with which to create and maintain a coducive classroom environment within which learners would want and like to learn (Nenty, 2007). Consequently, there is no efficient use of assessment to ensure effective teaching and learning in African classrooms. This is the situation in classrooms in Nigeria where many teachers do not have teacher training at all. For instance, in the secondary schools, many teachers have qualifications ranging from diplomas to Masters Degrees in their discipline area but have no teacher training qualifications at all. Those that have had some training have not had any professional development courses since they graduated from their teacher training programs hence cannot utilize essential classroom assessment skills. This does not augur well for learning in such classrooms. The need for quality education cannot be over emphasized if African nations must achieve economic and technical development in the 21st century. Standard in assessment and hence quality education is closely tied to quality in classroom assessment. Classroom assessment is the fundamental means of developing human potentials; hence effectiveness in classroom assessment provides a good foundation for such development. Effectiveness in classroom assessment depends, amongst others, on the quality of teachers’ training on assessment. The regularity of teacher’s exhibition of desirable assessment skills in the classroom cannot be achieved if teachers do not possess such skills in the first place. Learning in the classroom depends a lot on effective teaching which in turn depends on the exhibition of effective assessment skills during lessons. According to (AFT, NCME & NEA, 1990), ‘students assessment is an essential part of teaching and good teaching cannot exist without good assessment’ (p. 3). Effective assessment involves the extent to which the teacher is able to use assessment to enhance learning by creating and maintaining a welcoming and conducive environment within which learners would want and like to learn (Nenty, 2007). Assessment informs the teacher about what students think and about how they think while classroom assessment helps teachers to establish what students already know and what they need to learn. Ampiah, Hart, Nkhata and Nyirenda (2003) contend that a teacher needs to know what children are able to do or not if he/she is to plan effectively. Studies on teachers’ assessment practices revealed that teachers are not generally well prepared to meet the demands of classroom assessment due to inadequate training (Mertler, 2003; Vandeyar & Killen, 2007; Zhang & Burry-stock, 2003). It is obvious that a significant number of teachers received little or no guidance about what to teach or how to teach it therefore, they are left to their own devices, they struggled day to day to prepare content and materials. It is on this premise that this study critically examines classroom assessment practices in Nigeria and seeks ways for improving them in order to make positive impact on individual and institutions.

**What is assessment?**

We begin by distinguishing among four related terms (Keeves, 1997; UNESCO, 2000b): measurement, testing, evaluation, and assessment. Measurement refers to the process by which a value, usually numerical, is assigned to the attributes or dimensions of some concept or physical object. For example, a thermometer is used to measure temperature while a test is used to measure ability or aptitude. Testing refers to the process of administering a test to measure one or more concepts, usually under standardized conditions. For example, tests are used to measure how much a student has learned in a course of mathematics. Evaluation refers to the process of arriving at judgments about abstract entities such as programs, curricula, organizations, and institutions. For example, systemic evaluations such as national assessments are conducted to ascertain how well an education system is functioning. In most education contexts, assessments are a vital component of any evaluation. Assessment is defined as “the process of obtaining information that is used to make educational decisions about students, to give feedback to the student about his or her progress, strengths and weaknesses, to judge instructional effectiveness and curricular adequacy and to inform policy” (AFT, NCME, NEA, 1990: 1). This process usually involves a range of different qualitative and quantitative techniques. For example, the language ability of learners can be assessed using standardized tests, oral exams, portfolios, and practical exercises.

**Classroom assessment**

Classroom assessment is a formal process that involves a deliberate effort to gain information about a student’s status in relation to course objectives. This process includes a wide range of procedures and has the ultimate goal of obtaining valid and reliable information on which to base educational decisions. Teachers have to make decisions about students, decisions that affect students’ live. This is to say good decisions are based on information. For us to have effective and efficient classroom assessment, students are to be assessed before, during and after instruction.

**Purpose of classroom assessment**

Classroom assessment is carried out to:

* Diagnose students’ strength and weaknesses;
* Monitor students’ progress;
* Provide feedback on teacher’s effectiveness;
* Measure and report students’ achievement;
* Promote fairness.

**Types of classroom assessment**

Classroom assessments generally fall into one of the following categories, based on what students do in the assessment and what data is generated by the assessment as shown in table 1 below:

**Table 1: Types of classroom assessment**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Assessment types** | **Format** | **Usefulness and resulting evidence** |
| Closed tasks | Multiple-choice items.  True-false items.  Fill in the blanks. Solve (without showing process) | Useful for assessing content-based standard; not useful for process-based standards.  Assess students’ knowledge of facts, skills or concepts.  Take less time, thus allowing time for opened-ended and performance tasks. |
| Open tasks and constructed responses | Tasks with different possible answers.  Tasks with different possible processes. | Useful for assessing students:  Use of processes or strategies.  Ability to ability apply information.  Ability to interpret information.  Reasoning.  Ability to communicate thinking. |
| Performance tasks | Integrative tasks that yield specific products.  Authentic assessment. Extended projects. | Useful for assessing students:  Ability to organize, synthesize and apply information and skills.  Use of resources. |
| Informal assessment | Teacher observations. Teacher checklists. Conversations or interviews. | Depending on what is discussed or observed, these informal assessments may not reveal student:  Process or strategy use.  Reasoning.  Understanding of a topic or concept.  Ability to communicate and collaborate. |
| Self-assessment or reflection | Student journals or reflection logs.  Student checklists. Group (whole class or small group) reflection activities.  Daily or weekly self-evaluation.  Teacher-student interviews. | Develops student awareness of strengths and weaknesses and conscious use of thinking skills (metacognitive skills).  Can show student process and thinking and reasoning skills.  Reveals student disposition toward topic or leaning.  Helps teachers and students identify student’s personal goals. |

*Adapted from NCTM (2000) with additional information from Marzano & Kendall (1996).*

**Forms of classroom assessment**

To obtain the most accurate and extensive information about students to meet their needs for instruction, it is essential to incorporate a wide variety of assessments into your teaching plans. Almost any instructional activity can become a useful form of assessment. The following are examples of classroom assessments regularly developed and used by teachers as shown in table two below:

**Table 2: Forms of classroom assessment**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Forms | Type | What it is | How is it useful |
| Journal | Self-assessment or reflection | A designated notebook in which students can write independently, either freely or in response to specific prompts.  To be used for assessment, journals must be collected and review regularly. | Can be used before, during or after activity n for:  Planning or organization. Making connections.  Monitoring thinking. Metacognition.  Reflection on recognition. |
| Quiz | Usually closed, possibly with some open-ended items | A means of checking students’ understanding or progress in meeting benchmarks and indicators. Typically brief. | Can be used as:  Pre-assessment (prior to introducing a unit (Ongoing assessment (to determine if further instruction or practice is needed).  Post-assessment (to ensure that all students have met goals and are ready to move on) |
| Interview or conferencing | Self-assessment or reflection | A meeting with an individual student or small groups of students. | Can be used to collect reflective information that may not emerge through other kinds of assessment. Serves as a way to “check in” with students at any point in instruction. Data can be used to make decisions about instruction. |
| Essay or extended writing activity | Open task | A written product in which students convey, apply and synthesize information and ideas or create a poetic or fictional work. | Can be used as a post or summative assessment in which students demonstrate learning as well as writing and communication skills. |
| Extended project | Performance task | A series of related tasks in which: students engage in a variety of processes, often including research and cooperative group work; student solve a problem or create a designated product or products that may be written, oral, visual or performance-based or a combination of these. Examples include: reports, presentations, plays or skits, debates, graphs or tables, demonstrations, exhibits, videotapes. | Can be used to apply and assess a wide body of knowledge and a variety of skills that span across standards, benchmarks and indicators. Can incorporate a range of academic disciplines. |
| Test | Usually a combination of closed and open tasks, such as multiple-choice followed by an essay. | A means of measuring achievement. | Can be used as a summative assessment at the end of an instructional unit. Can also be used by teachers to monitor effectiveness of instruction. |
| Portfolio | Open task or performance task, as well as self-assessment | A collection of students’ products gathered over period of time. | Can be used to measure long-term progress, and as a student self-assessment tool. |

*Adapted from NCTM, (2000), with additional information from Marzano & kendall, (1996)*

**Classroom assessment practices in Nigeria**

In Nigeria classroom assessment (CA) is synonymously referred to as continuous assessment or school-based assessment (SBA). As part of the implementation of the 9-year Basic Education curriculum a framework for implementing CA has been approved (Obioma, 2008). CA is seen within the context of a larger SBA, a reform that is taking a central burner in schools. The interest in SBA is a shift in teaching for examinations to teaching for acquisition of knowledge and understanding. SBA is expected to expand the form, mode, means, and scope of assessment in schools to facilitate and enhance learning (Osunde, 2008). The implementation calls for the utilisation of assignments, projects, practical work, group work, and indeed the conventional assessment techniques which is otherwise called authentic techniques. The guiding principle is ensuring that the complete person is what is of interest; focus is on cognitive, affective and psychomotor outcomes (Afemikhe and Omo-Egbekuse, 2010). However, since the introduction of CA as part of assessment in schools the various state governments in Nigeria worked out implementation guides which in most cases reflected what was contained in a book ‘Continuous assessment: A new approach’ written by Ojerinde and Falayajo (1994). In the implementations guides it is stipulated that continuous assessment tests be administered twice every school term in addition to an end of term examination combined in the ratio: 15:15:70. At the end of the year, the results for the first two terms’ examinations and third term examinations are equally combined in the ratio: 15:15:70. This again is a sore area in the implementation of CA. The performance in the last term of the year is generally used to decide on students’ progression in many state owned schools and in most cases information on the psychomotor and affective domains which supposed to be collected and included tests school examinations are neglected. This is so because there is no federally agreed implementation guide and test items pool from which teachers can draw items for the respective tests. For effective classroom assessment practice, the three domains are to be considered while constructing items to assess the students so that the information generated from such results would be valid and reliable for decision making.

The scenario is such that in most cases tests are not administered but scores awarded to fulfill all righteousness of the policy that states there must be two tests in a term. This problem is further compounded with the faking of continuous assessment scores that is required by examining bodies particularly for the examination conducted at the end of senior secondary school. The reason for this is not farfetched because of the high stake on certificates. This practice is unethical, illegal, and otherwise inappropriate assessment method. Therefore, there is need to improve on this current practice by reviewing the classroom assessment policy for proper implementation.

**The place of classroom assessment in educational instruction**

Classroom assessment is a formal process that involves a deliberate effort to gain information about a student’s status in relation to course objectives and this process includes a wide range of procedures. Its ultimate goal is to obtain valid and reliable information on which to base educational decisions. In educational instruction, planning, teaching and instruction are three interactive components. Planning involves the establishment of instructional objectives that will enable students to successfully achieve the required outcomes. The desired learning outcomes and instructional activities then guide the assessment techniques. Also, the assessment results help to direct and modify the teaching approach. The need for effective assessment instrument cannot be over emphasized. A well designed assessment plan assists the teachers to optimize their teaching by identifying their strength and weaknesses. The relationship between planning, teaching and assessment in educational instruction is shown in figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Interaction of planning, teaching and assessment in educational instruction

Figure 1 describes effective assessment instrument which provides accurate, meaningful and appropriate information. This illustration shows that, classroom assessment is a continuous process which provides valuable feedback for students, thus reinforcing successful learning which offers information about further learning needs.

**Improving on classroom assessment in Nigeria**

The National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004) stipulated that no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers. Creating and using classroom assessment effectively requires skill and practice; however, teachers can improve on classroom assessment with the following guidelines:

* View assessment as an integral part of everyday lesson;
* Choose appropriate and relevant forms of assessment which will suit the different styles and ability levels of all students;
* Show the plan of their assessment in the learning programme, work schedule and lesson plan;
* Apply the principles of test construction to develop items that satisfy the consideration of content-related validity;
* Develop mark-scheme to enhance reliability of marks awarded;
* Inform learners of what is expected of them before the assessment;
* Report the performance of each student on a test using appropriate scoring and grading techniques;
* Complement learners sometimes by using self, peer and group assessments;
* Help learners to know their strengths and weaknesses;
* Offer learners expanded opportunities to improve their performance;
* Provide learners with regular feedbacks on their progress.

**The way forward**

To reposition classroom assessment to yield its desired goals, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. Trainee-teachers should be equipped with relevant skills in assessment;
2. Recruitment, training, retraining and retention of qualified teachers should be given priority attention;
3. Adequate funding of the teacher education should be paramount to the government and all stakeholders;
4. Organization of Workshops, Seminars and Conferences to sensitize teachers and all stakeholders;
5. Training facilities for teacher education programme should be provided;
6. Examining bodies should focus on moderation of CA scores to remove check all forms malpractices;
7. The government and curriculum planners should review the continuous assessment guideline to ensure uniformity;
8. The Ministry of education should embark on proper monitoring of classroom assessment to ensure effective implementation.

**Conclusion**

The National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004) states the purpose of Teacher Education which include the production of highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of education system; production of teachers with intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment; and, to enhance teachers’ commitment to the teaching profession. As a matter of fact, the essence of teacher education should be production of intellectually grounded and professionally committed teachers. Although, commendable efforts are being made on teacher education in the country, yet there are many problems. In Nigeria, the prevalence of semi- skilled / unskilled teachers remained a detriment to the educational sector because, a critical look at the educational sector, revealed that most teachers in our schools engaged in teaching without requisite teacher training certificate and this goes a long way to reduce the quality and morale of teachers. This could be adduced to why most secondary teachers are not skilled in measurement concepts and practices hence they remain hesitant to use assessment strategies that will yield valid and reliable information on students’ performance. Fred (1991), asserted that, the poor quality of those joining the teaching service results from lack of observable impact of pre-service training in teachers’ classroom assessment. This maybe as a result of perceived misalignment between what is taught in terms of assessment skills and techniques, and what teachers actually practice in the schools.

According to Osunde (2008) most of the teachers in the Nigerian primary school system lack adequate skill to develop and validate teacher made tests for use in school based assessment. This indeed is true for a majority of teachers in secondary schools. Omo-Egbekuse, Afemikhe and Imobekhai (2010) in a study on teachers’ expressed competency on assessment issues found that many teachers claimed that they are competent on almost all issues raised but experience on the field finds no match between what is claimed and what actually is observed. That is the situation with research with human beings; the research yielding reliable scores but lacking in experiential validity. This low quality of teachers’ training in classroom assessment is of great concern, because competence in classroom assessment has been identified as being significant to successful teaching and assessment constitutes a large part of teachers’ professional activities (Stiggins, 1997). This scenario does not apply to Nigeria alone but to most developing Nations of the world. Chapman and Snyder (1991) stated that, until recently in many African countries, primary teacher’s training was an option pursued mostly by primary school graduates who did not have adequate credentials to continue to secondary schooling. Given the low salaries and unfavorable teacher assignment policies, those going into teaching were often students who lacked skills that would secure them a job in the private sector or a better paying government position (p. 3). Therefore the onus lies not only on the teachers but the government, curriculum planners, educators and examining bodies to counteract this syndrome by ensuring proper implementation of classroom assessment in secondary schools, since it plays a central role in making decisions that affects students lives.

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