



Attaining Standard through Quality Assessment Practice in Nigeria Educational System

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Abstract

The essential key to improve standards of schools lies in the teacher's ability to provide an accountability and oriented assessment. That is, teachers to become high – quality – assessment literate persons who are able to tap the true benefit of assessment to maximize students' achievement and confidently provide authentic evidence of students achievement profiles for public accountability. Assessment in education entails many processes in order to achieve educational aims and objectives. Assessment helps and shapes students disposition towards learning and influence their motivations to learn. It provides cogent information about students learning ability of easy accountability, internal programme, decision – making" monitoring students' progress and helping them to structure their learning. Quality assessment of teachers will make the teachers to be in front line to lead the education reform by taking advantage of the power of assessment to improve standard, by employing quality assessment methods in their classroom practice. Educational standard has many dimensions and therefore any argument about its falling standard could be misleading. Whether standard is falling, rising or static there is always the need for improvement practices. This is what the paper sets out to do to assist schools and teachers to gain insight and deeper understanding of quality assessment for high academic standard of students. The objectives of the paper is to provide an overview of (i) the need to adopt correct practice of continuous assessment as the main instrument for improving the quality of education in Nigeria. (ii) Classroom assessment techniques that are powerful and effective for motivating, measuring and reinforcing learning with a view to empowering teachers.

Introduction

Educational system, especially in the Nigeria setting has been undergoing fast and tremendous changes, growth and expansion since independence in 1960. Brown (1994), points out that the need to assess institutions appear to be paramount in an attempt to ascertain their performance. Assessment as stated by Anikweze (2004) can be seen to be a measuring process of investigating the status or standard of a learner's or of an institution's attainment, with reference to expected outcomes. Obioma (1998) also defined assessment as the process of using the results obtained from measuring to take relevant decisions about a programme being assessed.

Quality on the other hand is important to the development of a nation as the products from it are expected to serve in nation building. Maduwesi (2005) sees quality in education as multifaceted and comprising how learning is organized and managed in terms of contents of learning, level of learners, outcomes and totality of the environment in which education takes place. In view of these, educational quality is therefore a conglomerate of input, process and outcome factors (UNESCO, 2002).

Standard is a level of quality especially on that which people think as acceptable. Standard involves some attributes measurement and value attachment Afemike (2007). Standard and quality are relative to the particular purpose, place and time of student's clientele. To achieve standard and quality, therefore, teachers must be accountable to student.

What is Assessment?



As defined by Deital et al (1991) "Assessment is a technique or method used to make a student understand the current knowledge that student possesses". Assessment helps and shapes students' disposition towards learning and influence their motivation to learn. "Assessment provides vital information on students learning ability for easy accountability, internal programme, decision – making" monitoring students' progress and helping them to structure their learning (Stiggins 2001). For teachers to be in front line to lead the education reform, they must be enthusiastic to take advantage of the power of assessment to improve achievement standard, by employing quality assessment methods in their classroom practice. Stiggins (2001) identified quality assessment as those that:

- (a) Are specifically designed to serve particular purpose for uses
- (b) Are designed, developed and used or distortion that interfere with the accuracy of the information provided;
- (c) Provide a representative sample of students' performance that is sufficient in this scope to permit confident conclusions about achievement;

It follows ethnically that for standards that quality, teachers must be supported to provide quality assessment and improved pedagogy in classroom instruction, in conjunction with management of other emerging issues relating to personal, emotional and social needs of learner.

The pursuit of standards and accountability based assessment requires teachers to be knowledgeable in high quality daily classroom assessment to aid learning and decision making, as well as school to establish its vision of accountability system that will guide school reform. Generally, assessment is the procedures and processes employed in collecting information about human behaviour. The process involves observation, interview, rating skill, check list, inventory, projective and psychological tests, assessment of the level or magnitude of some attributes of person.

Classroom Assessment and Evaluation

Classroom assessment can then be seen as the appraisal technique which systematically combines all the students' performance in class tests, home assignment, project and other school activities. It is a mechanism whereby the final grading of students in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domain of behaviour systematically take account of all his performance during a given period of schooling, such an assessment involves the use of a great variety of models of evaluation for purpose of grading and improve the learning and performance of the students.

Manghan (2001) describes the questions underline assessment as what an institution or programme has learnt about student's learning. Maki (2002) suggests that classroom assessment should be more than a set of questions. She advocated creating cohort groups that chart the academic progress of students throughout their secondary school careers or at least for significant segment of these careers. Only then can you access performance and see improvement.

Oke (2001) defines classroom assessment as the process by which the quality of an individual work or performance is judged in school assessment learning is unusually carried by teachers to the basis of impression gained as they observed their students at work or by various kind of test given periodically. Classroom assessment and evaluation provide useful information that help to optimize learning, and to improve teaching effectiveness.

Quality assessment as described by the National Forum Assessment (1995) must rest on strong educational foundation which include organizing schools to meet the learning needs of their students, understanding how students learn and providing equitable and adequate opportunity to learn.

Wilking and Bond (1995) say that "understanding and clarifying the purposes for assessing are critical and should be the first step in developing an assessment system". these purposes could be high stake or low stake or a combination of the two. High stake assessments are assessments that have specific positive and negative consequences for school programmes and or students (such as students' retention, promotion, graduation). While low stake assessments that enco5uage students and teachers' reflection are used to inform the teaching and learning process within classroom. These assessments are primarily formative for determining context coverage and conceptual understanding or diagnosing learning styles (Jones 1990).



Overview of Classroom Assessment Techniques

Classroom assessment techniques are characterized as follows (Angela and Cross 1993).

- Learner – Centred: Guiding teachers in measuring and improving learning.
- Teacher – Directed: Giving teachers the freedom to design their assessment, select the content and the assessment procedure.
- Mutually Beneficial for Students and Teachers: The feedback reinforces students' grasp of the course while teachers also sharpen their teaching focus and acquire good teaching skills.
- Formative: Helping teachers to monitor learning through periodic assessments (formative test) given at interval during teaching – learning process. An important note to teachers is that formative tests are not intended to provide evidence for evaluating or grading students, rather the feedback serve to empower teachers and students.
- Context Specific: Ensuring that every assessment is designed to serve specific purpose and needs.

The Need for Quality Assessment

There is a great difference between testing and assessing. To test is to ask while to assess is to judge, to analyze and put value on. Tests are administered to obtain data or information which will be used for assessment. A test is an assessment about progress. Many teachers test their students regularly often in the form of end-of-topic tests; believing that those actions inform their students and other interested parties such as parents (Afemike 2007).

Testing can have other effect on the way that students learn. Poor results in tests can lead to low self-esteem and with some students, it may result in lack of motivation or refusal to participate actively in future learning. Such students prefer to opt out of task because their future is inevitable, whatever effort they put in (Osokoya, and Odinko 2005).

An examination is said to be reliable if a candidate gets the same marks in different circumstances, such as different examiner marking the questions or the examination being held on a different day (Okpala 1993). Validity is the most important characteristics of a test or examination. There is a conflict between achieving high reliability and high validity. Probably the most reliable test is a single multiple – choice item. A teacher must evaluate the effectiveness of his effort during the course of his lesson by oral drill, written work, tests of various types etc (Darling-Hammond 2003). For effectiveness of school assessment, Afemike (2007) outlined the following:

- i. It is therefore reasonable that the class teacher be involved in the assessment of his students.
- ii. The procedure should take into account the child's perform throughout the entire period of schooling.
- iii. There should be the readiness of the teachers to introduce innovations into their teaching and such innovations should become a part of the final assessment.

Suggested Standard Improvement on Assessment

- a) The common practice of administrating weekly test for continuous assessment is a negation of the principles for which it was introduced (Duze 1988). Testing should not be separated from teaching and it forms an integral part of the teaching-learning process. A teacher must evaluate the effectiveness of its effort during the course of his lesson by oral drill, written work, tests of various types etc.
- b) The traditional method of reporting students' performance is the raw scores associated with the scores of the continuous assessment, standard scores could be used to facilitate comparison of marks of students in different subjects. This can be done using a common scales. The T-scores appear the most useful and popular and it is expressed as:
$$T = \frac{10 Z + 50}{S}$$
 with $Z = \frac{x - \bar{x}}{s}$

Where T has a mean of 50 and a Standard Deviation of 10



- c) The difficulty of comparing standards across schools arises due to (i) differences in the quality of test and other assessment instruments used by different schools and (ii) differences in procedures for scoring and grading the various assessment instruments in various schools. To resolve these problems, purely objective tests items are to be used, developed from a large pool or bank of items designed overtime from different schools. This will make it easy to compare the performance of students from group of schools using a common denominator bearing in mind that the items in a pool of subject must have the same level of difficulty, and objective in format.

Conclusion

The need to adopt correct practice of continuous assessment as the main instrument for improving the quality of education has been stressed. Massive support is needed to make assessment a successful tool for standardization in the quest for educational reform. Many students will perform well in public examinations if teachers teach them to do so in their daily assessment practices. In the same vein, teachers also need professional development to adequately tap the power of assessment for improved performance. Therefore, there is need for improvement of the system of administration, management and funding of education to enhance quality standard.

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