

MANAGEMENT OF ASSESSMENT MATERIALS FOR EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION IN NIGERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This paper is focused on the management of assessment materials for effective instruction in Nigerian Primary Schools. The assessment materials needed in Nigerian Primary Schools include test and examination questions, non-test instruments, marking schemes, answer scripts, examination records,, and children's portfolios. The above assessment materials need to be properly managed for effective instruction. The relevance of assessment materials for effective instructions were highlighted which included clarifying of instructional objectives, pre-assessment of pupils' needs, monitoring of learning progress, diagnosing and remedying learning difficulties as well as appraisal of learning outcomes. The role of head-teachers in the management of these materials, which include procurement of relevant assessment materials, assurance of quality of test and non-test instruments, regular monitoring of the utilization of assessment materials and adequate keeping of examination records, were discussed among others. The usefulness of assessment materials at different stages of instruction for providing feedback for improving teaching and learning were highlighted. It was recommended that judicious effort by head-teachers in the management of assessment materials is imperative for the promotion of effective teaching and learning in Nigerian Primary Schools,

Introduction

Assessment is an integral part of the teaching-learning process. It can be regarded as an activity carried out to find out what knowledge, skills, or behaviour a learner possesses before, during and after instruction. This description of assessment implies that it is a purposeful activity and constitutes a very important category of classroom activities.

The relevance of assessment in the teaching-learning process cannot be overstated since the effectiveness of instruction depends to a large extent on the quality of assessment information on which decisions are based (Gronlund, 1981). This implies that a teacher cannot be good at teaching if he/she does not possess some important assessment skills. The adoption of continuous assessment in Nigeria demands that teachers need to be skillful in classroom assessment.

Unfortunately, studies (Barber, Paris, Evans, and Garden, 1992; Ugodulunwa and Musa, 1996; Emah, 1998) have shown that many classroom teachers lack necessary knowledge and skills for education. Assessment by teachers has implications for the quality of teaching in Nigerian schools. Interactions at measurement and evaluation lectures with primary school teachers on B.Ed Part-Time Programme at the University of Jos has also revealed that a majority of them lack competence in the development of use of test and non-test instruments for continuous assessment in the different domains of behaviour as well as in record keeping and interpretation of assessment data. The situation may not be different in other universities.

In light of the foregoing, this paper examined assessment materials that should be available in Nigerian primary schools, suggested how the materials should be managed by head-teachers, and the relevance of use of assessment materials for effective instruction.

Assessment Materials Needed in Primary Schools

Relevant assessment materials needed in Nigerian primary schools include test and examination questions, non-test instruments, marking schemes, answer scripts, examination records. and children's portfolios. These assessment materials are described in this section of the paper.

Test and Examination Questions

The practice of continuous assessment in primary schools implies that tests and examinations are conducted. Teachers set questions for weekly tests, which are usually written on the blackboard for pupils to respond to and these tests contribute 40 percent of the total score of 100 percent

obtainable in each subject by the pupils. Examinations are also conducted at the end of each term to determine the extent to which pupils have mastered specific curriculum content. These examination questions are usually typed, cyclostyled and stored by the head-teachers in private primary schools and usually written on the blackboard in public schools. The tests are used for assigning grades to pupils and for promotion to the next class in the case of end of year examination. The security of live questions at this level of education is predominantly too poor (Nwana, 2001). This calls for effective management of assessment instruments at this level to prevent examination leakages, which is a major form of examination malpractice at other levels of education.

Non-Test Instruments

Other assessment materials to be effectively used and managed in primary schools are non-test instruments such as observational rating scales, checklists and anecdotal records; self-report instruments such as interview schedules, questionnaires, inventories; and peer appraisal instruments such as 'guess-who' and socio-metric techniques. These instruments should be prepared and used by teachers for assessment of affective and psychomotor behaviours, which cannot be effectively assessed with paper-and-pencil tests. It has been shown that teachers more frequently use tests than non-test instruments for assessment and that they haphazardly rate pupils' behaviour in effective domains on the basis of pupils' performance in the school subjects (Anakudo, 2001 and Ugwuanyi, 1999). This implies that assessment of learning outcomes in the skill areas and behavioural changes in personal-social development such as reading skills, work habits, social attitudes, interests and adjustments are either neglected or rated on the basis of teachers' subjective impressions. Since the assessment of affective and psychomotor domains is emphasized in continuous assessment (FRN, 1998), head-teachers need to pay adequate attention to the assessment in these two domains of behaviour. The affective behaviours are those associated with feeling e.g. expressions of love and appreciation in pupils. While psychomotor behaviours are associated with physical action e.g. in arts, crafts, drawing etc.

At the primary school level, tests and examinations answer scripts are usually provided by pupils and in some schools the answer scripts for terminal examinations are stamped by the school authority. Answer scripts for weekly tests and examinations are not preserved for a long period of time before they are given to the pupils and marking of the answer scripts are done by the class or subject teachers. The security of grades awarded by teachers is usually fair as was found by Nwana (2001). Head-teachers need to monitor the marking of examination answer scripts and encourage teachers to note the errors in pupils' answer while marking and need for correction of learning errors for improving instruction.

Marking Schemes

A marking scheme is an outline that shows the model answer to each question in a test, the marks allotted to each question as well as the component parts of the question. Marking schemes are prepared by teachers before marking of tests and examinations answer scripts. The integrity of teachers is very relevant in fair marking of pupils' answer scripts. The monitoring of the preparation, use and storage of marking schemes is another area of challenge for head-teachers. It has been noted (Ali, 1983; Gronlund 1981) that a significant proportion of teachers are careless in scoring of tests.

Examination Records

Examination records are important assessment materials to be properly managed in primary schools for improving instruction. These records include teachers' mark sheets, class weekly progress charts, report sheets, cumulative record folders, and transcripts.

The mark sheets are the sheets used by teachers for recording scores of pupils in weekly tests, assignments, and terminal examinations in different subjects. The results are usually recorded and finally added to obtain each pupil's summative examination results at the end of each term. The mark sheet is an important record to be kept and used for monitoring learning progress of each pupil by each class or subject teacher.

The class weekly progress chart is a record that should be kept in each class for monitoring learning progress and for motivating pupils to work hard in school. It contains a record of

performance of each pupil on weekly tests conducted per term in different subjects.

The report sheet is mainly used for recording pupils' scores in various tests, assignments, terminal examinations and teacher's ratings of pupils affective and psychomotor behaviours. The parents or guardians of the pupils are issued the original copy of pupils' report sheets, while the school keeps duplicate copies.

Cumulative record folder is regarded as the most important assessment record every school should keep as noted by Ipaye (1982). It is used for recording biographical data, health and physical development, personality, emotional and psychological problems, academic scores, behaviour ratings, significant achievements, and talents of pupils throughout their period of schooling. Unfortunately, this record is very likely to be kept in most primary schools.

The transcript is another important record that needs to be kept and issued to pupils who are transferring to other schools. It should contain the overall summary of each pupil's performance and behavioural rating throughout his/her stay in a particular school.

Children's Portfolios

A portfolio is defined as a purposeful collection of a child's work that exhibits to him/her and others his/her efforts or achievements in one or more areas (Arter and Spandel, 1991). Components of the children's portfolios should include work samples, record of various forms of systematic observations, and different tests. Bertrand and Cebula (1980) noted that such systematic observations must be objective, selective, unobtrusive, and carefully recorded.

The usefulness of portfolio identified by Murphy and Smith (1990) include motivation of children, promotion of learning through reflection and self-assessment and evaluation of children's thinking and writing processes. The use of portfolios in assessment of young children provides teachers with built-in system for planning conference during open days in private schools. With the portfolios as the basis for discussion, the teacher and parent can review concrete examples of each child's work rather than discussing the child's progress in the abstract. Since portfolio method of evaluation promotes a shared approach to making decisions that will affect children's attitudes to work and school in general, teachers need to keep portfolios of children in primary schools. Although children's portfolios are kept work sample and nothing else and are not used for evaluation in public primary schools.

The relevance of assessment in effective teaching and learning requires that assessment materials should be adequately managed in primary schools.

Management of Assessment Materials by Head-Teachers

The head-teacher is regarded as an educational leader, an executor of educational policies, a counselor and a decision maker (Yalokwu, 1991). As a leader he/she has the responsibility of effective planning coordination and control of all human and material resources at his/her disposal in order to achieve the objectives of teaching and learning in school. In broad terms the role of head-teachers' information management and utilization are presented here.

It is the duty of the head-teachers to ensure that relevant assessment materials and records are procured and properly used and kept by teachers. The procurement of the relevant materials could be achieved through official requisition to appropriate authority, contact with experts in education measurement and evaluation, direct purchase by school or involvement of parents and guardians. An effective administrator should therefore not wait for government provisions but should use his/her initiative to provide most of the assessment materials required for promoting effective teaching and learning.

Monitoring and Supervision of the Use of Assessment Materials in Schools

Monitoring here refers to regular process of keeping the use of assessment materials under the watchful care of the head-teacher, the assistant head-teacher(s), and the sectional heads in order to obtain information for instructional improvement and decision-making. The monitoring exercise should ensure that teachers use appropriate instruments and techniques for assessment of learning outcomes, that the results of the assessment are properly recorded and kept. The head-teacher and his/her assistant should observe the teaching-learning process to ensure that the teachers carry out

evaluation before, during and after instruction.

Assurance of quality of instruments used for assessment and the procedure for administration of the instruments should be an important managerial function of head-teachers. Teachers should be properly trained and retained and retrained through workshops and seminars on different aspects of educational assessment in order to ensure quality of work. Qualified resource persons according to Nwana (2001) perform the following functions:

- (i) Procedure for construction of test and non-test instruments;
- (ii) Testing skills and knowledge beyond mere recall;
- (iii) Administration and scoring of test and non-test instruments;
- (iv) Procedure for item analysis;
- (v) Principles of continuous assessment;
- (vi) Gender issues and other forms of bias in examination questions;
- (vii) Problem of examination malpractice; and
- (viii) Criteria for evaluating good tests such as validity, reliability, credibility, civility, and availability.

The head-teachers should ensure that assessment records are kept for monitoring development of pupils as they progress from one class to another. Such records are valuable tools for the counseling activities by teachers and for discussion of pupils' progress with parents or guardians. They should also ensure the security of assessment materials and records.

Effective management of examination materials requires head-teachers to organize for moderation of question papers, marking schemes, answer scripts, and marks awarded by teachers by a constituted examination committee that should consist of the head-teacher of his/her assistant, and heads of pre-primary, junior primary, and senior primary sections and any other experienced teacher with relevant qualification in educational evaluation, guidance and counseling and primary education. The moderation exercise should pay attention to appropriateness of questions. Efforts should also be made to ensure the security of the questions from the drafting to the final production stages. The examination questions should be produced with good quality materials and be kept under lock and key before their administration.

Head-teachers should create conducive school climate that will promote effective teaching and learning. This can be done through establishment of cordial relationship with both teachers and pupils and fostering the growth of high morale among teachers and pupils, and motivation of teachers and pupils through award of prizes and provision of other incentives (Nwana, 2001). Head-teachers should also instill discipline in teachers and pupils through their leadership by example.

The next section of the paper is devoted to discussion on how assessment materials can be used for effective teaching and learning in schools.

Relevance of Assessment Materials for Effective Instruction

Gronlund, (1981) noted that evaluation can facilitate pupils' learning directly or indirectly. Since objective evaluation cannot take place without the use of valid instruments., the relevance of assessment materials for effective instruction cannot therefore be over-stressed. The uses of assessment materials for instruction in primary schools include clarifying of instructional objectives, pre-assessment of pupils' needs, monitoring of learning progress, and diagnosing and remedying learning difficulties, as well as appraisal of learning outcomes.

The evaluation process used during instruction can help in clarification of objectives for teachers and pupils. Defining instructional objectives in performance terms contributes to better instructional planning, and effective guidance of learning activities by teachers and for pupils, it provides the general direction for learning, while evaluation procedures can provide operational definition of tasks to be learned. Assessment instruments will be most effective in guiding pupils' learning if the nature and purposed the instruments are communicated to them in early stages of instruction. This can be done by giving pupils questions they will answer at the end of every lesson, before teaching commences and asking the questions during instruction to clarify the types of tasks to be learned.

Pre-assessment of pupils' needs involve reviewing the examination records and pre-testing in

form of test of entering behaviour. These procedures can be used to ascertain whether pupils possess prerequisites skills, which planned instructional objectives they have already possessed, as well as guide the teacher in selecting relevant learning activities for pupils. Proper understanding of pupils' need at the early stage of instructional process will enable teachers to remedy deficiencies in prerequisite knowledge and skills and to adapt instruction more closely to group and individual needs.

Another purpose of using tests and other instruments during instructional process is to guide and direct learning and to monitor progress toward achievement of lesson objectives. The oral questions posed by teachers while a lesson is in progress are useful for monitoring learning progress, planning corrective actions for overcoming learning deficiencies, motivating learning and increasing retention and transfer of learning. Periodic assessment of learning progress using oral questions, weekly tests and other observational techniques provide general clues that enable teachers to adjust their instruction to the needs of the pupils.

Evaluation of classroom instruction also serves the purpose of diagnosing and remedying of learning difficulties. Informational classroom evaluation procedures can be used for detection of learning difficulties (Pertrand, A. and Ccbula, J. 1980). This can be done by teachers through item-by-item analysis of pupils' responses to items of tests to detect group and individual learning errors. Detection of learning errors should not be confined to learning of academic subjects and skills but also be directed at identification of pupils who have difficulty in social relations, emotional adjustment, and other aspects of personal social development because they have direct bearing on pupils' cognitive and psychomotor behaviours. The use of test and non-test instruments can also help teachers identify factors such as improper teaching methods, unsuitable curriculum, complex content that may cause learning difficulties that should be corrected in order to enhance instruction. The use of assessment instruments are also relevant during remedial teaching for clarifying specific types of expected responses to pupils, giving pupils a feeling of success, and providing information on the effectiveness of the remedial procedures (Ipaye, 1982J).

Recommendations

1. There should be concerted effort by teachers and head-teachers to ensure that available instruments are used for evaluation in the classroom.
2. Inevitably this calls for adequate incentives for teachers and head-teachers in form of prompt payment of salaries and allowances and provision of necessary materials for effective teaching and learning in schools.
3. There is need for head-teachers to undergo training and retraining on primary school management and educational assessment if they are to meet the challenges of managing assessment instruments for instructional improvement in primary schools.

Conclusion

The use of assessment instruments for evaluation at the end of each term serves the purpose of obtaining a general measure of learning progress that can be useful for assigning grades to pupils, reporting learning progress to parents, pupils and school personnel, as well as improvement of learning and instructional strategies.

It is clear that assessment instruments can be used for effective teaching and learning in school. What is needed is the provision of appropriate assessment materials that appear to be non-existent in most primary schools.

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