

PERFORMANCE TEST: AN IMPERATIVE INSTRUMENT FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Measuring what and how well students learn is an important building block in the process of strengthening and improving our schools. Performance test attempts to access how well students make use of fundamental knowledge to perform complex tasks under realistic conditions. This paper attempt an insight into the importance of performance test in enhancing and improving the standard of education in Nigeria thereby, fostering economic and national development. It also highlights some ways of conducting a performance test for efficiency. In conclusion, the paper recommends that performance test be conducted without fear or favour at all level of education. In so doing the economy can be further strengthened and improved.

Introduction

The general out cry of parents, teachers and the society in general is a fall in standard of education in Nigeria. This is observed to be associated with the stereo typed method of assessment adopted by teachers. This method does not challenge learners to manifest their creative thinking. This is identified to be related to the fact that teachers do not endeavour to progressively identify the strength and weakness of their students.

Teacher spend a substantial part of each day assessing their students learning, and much of this assessment involves activities according to Stiggins (1986)

activities according to Stiggins (1986) giving and scoring types of written test book report, home work exercise, oral presentation, question and answer session of various sorts which teachers employ to measure students learning and this according to Stiggins (1986) accounts for about 55% of a typical students performance.

Performance test according to Gay (1988) is one which requires the execution of an act or the development of a product in order to determine whether or to what degree, a given ability or trait exists. It implies that the performance can take the form of a procedure (e.g.) 'serve' in tennis

or volleyball, pass in basketball, or football, setting margins on a typewriter, taking blood pressure, drawing a map or geometric figures with a protractor or a product e.g. a typed letter, a painting or product. Determination of how well a student can type a letter, for instance is better assessed through performance than true-false or multiple choice test.

Attitudes for instance, can be better assessed by asking persons to respond to a number of questions, but observation of actual behaviour is normally a valid way of determining attitude. Major drawbacks in the use of performance test are that it is very time-consuming and may require resources not readily available according to Elias and Momotro (2001).

However, despite the time teachers spend assessing students learning, goals and objectives of curriculum are not met, the reason being that teachers are often found measuring the range and accuracy of learner's knowledge with written test ignoring to measure how well the learners can do something. Hills (1994) observed that many teachers have little or no in-depth knowledge of assessment principles. What then is assessment?

What is Assessment?

According to Badams and Omonifo, (1998) assessment is a term used for the process of investigating the state of individual learners or group of learners usually with reference to expected outcomes or criteria or treatment. It involves identifying, obtaining and providing information. Classroom

assessment can be broadly conceived into two major types of activities namely; collecting information about how much knowledge and skills students are acquired (measurement) and making judgment about the adequacy or acceptability of each student's level of learning (evaluation).

Evaluation permits critical questions to be asked and answered e.g. have the goals and objectives of new curriculum met? It assess learners achievement and provides information that can be used to improve curriculum and to document accomplishment or failure (Andizeg, 2001), evaluation provides feedback and motivation for continued improvement for learners and innovative curriculum developers. It is worthy of mention that to ensure that important questions are answered and relevant needs met, it is necessary to be methodical in the process of evaluation. This is where performance test is required.

Performance Test and Types

In recent years many teachers and measurement experts have argued that the typical written test should be used less often because it reveals little or nothing of the depth of student's knowledge and how students use their knowledge to work through questions, problems and tasks. (Bichler, 1997). The solution that emerged gave birth to the best guidance based assessment called performance test or authentic assessment.

Performance test attempts to assess how well students use fundamental knowledge to perform complex tasks under more or less realistic conditions. Jacob and

Chase (1997) stated that with performance test, students are likely to demonstrate proficiency in conducting an experiment, exercising a series of steps in a reasonable amount of time following instructions, creative drawing, manipulating materials or equipments or reacting to real or stimulated situation and also write an essay under highly standardized condition that are similar to those of real life.

Types of Performance Test

Currently there are four ways in which the performance capabilities of students are typically assessed. These are, direct writing assessment, portfolios, exhibition and demonstrations.

Direct Writing Assessment

These tests requires the students to write about a specific topic (e.g. describe the person you admire most, and explain why you admire that person) under a standard set of condition to set of definite criteria.

Portfolios

A portfolio may contain one or more pieces of a student's work some of which demonstrate different stages of completion, for example a students writing portfolio may contain business letters, pieces of picture, poetry, an outline, rough draft and final draft of a paper. Portfolio can also be constructed for mathematics and science, as well as for projects that combine two or more subjects areas. Often, the students should be involved in the selection of what is included in his portfolio. According to Ruptic (1994)

portfolio functions as a showcase to illustrate examples, pieces of art work as well as a collection of pieces that represents a student's typical performance. It is a means of self-reflection and self-analysis for an individual student. This process enables the students to discover his/her academic ability.

Exhibition

Exhibition involves just what the table shows, a diagram of such production as painting, drawing, photographs, sculpture, video-tapes and models. As with direct writing assessment and portfolio, the product students choose to exhibit are evaluated according to a predetermined set of criteria.

Demonstration

In this type of performance testing, students are required to show how well they can use previous learned knowledge or skills to solve some unknown problem, such as answer a question or diagnose the causes of a malfunctioning engine and describing the best procedure for fixing it or perform a task such as reciting a poem, performing a dance, or playing of music.

To carryout a performance test, Anderson (1987) recommended the following guidelines,

1. Specify the criteria to be used for rating and scoring for instance, the level of accuracy in performing the task within a specified time.
2. State the problem so that students know exactly what they are supposed to do. If

- possible, conditions of a performance test should mirror a real life situation.
3. Give students the change to perform a task more than once or to perform several tasks samples.

Performance Test and National Development

The falling standard of education is a menace to national development. To this end, if student are poorly assessed, they turn out to affect national development negatively. Therefore, for a developing nation like Nigeria to experience national development and growth, the place of performance test in our educational system should be given utmost attention.

According to Biehler (1997), assessment is done to diagnose specific strength and weakness in an individual learner. When this is properly done, the issue of half backed graduate will be a thing of the past. As there will no longer be a case of putting a square peg in a round hole as with the case of most firms in our society. In the same vein, Rooks, (1988) pointed out that classroom assessment guides students judgment of what is important to learn. Also it affects their motivation and self perception of competence, structure their approaches to and timing of personal study. The best thing that could happen to any students in understanding the ability to do the right thing at the right time. This involves planning with proper assessment of our students; they turn out to be good planners

which they in turn, invest in the socio-economic development of the nation.

To this end, any nation desiring national development must pay attention to the place of performance test in educational system.

Conclusion

In light of the above, one can safely say that performance test is indeed an imperative for national development. Therefore, teachers, test experts, curriculum developers, students and parents alike should wake up to the need of performance test in the Nigeria educational system. It should be borne in mind that performance test when properly used is one of the most objective ways to measure students performance and if otherwise, can have an adverse consequence o the students who turn out to be a burden on the society rather than being a society developers. For any society to experience national development therefore, performance test must be of immense priority

Recommendations

In a bid to promote performance test; as an imperative instrument for national development the following recommendations are made: -

1. Due to the fact that performance test is very time consuming, a high level of patience is required of test experts, curriculum developers, teachers and students alike.
2. The need for promotion of the use of performance test in our schools should be emphasized.

3. The use of technology should be introduced in carrying out a performance test.
4. Teachers, test experts and curriculum developers should be adequately motivated so as to build up their interest in the use of performance test.
5. The need for organization of science conferences and workshops should be emphasized on regular basis.

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