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GRT **OVERCOMING INCOMPATIBLE PRACTICES
AND PROCEDURES IN ASSESSMENT OF
INCREASING MULTI-CULATURALISM AND STUDENT
DIVERSITY IN SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract: Assessment of learners in schools for various purposes is flawed by some practices and procedures which do not favor multiculturalism and diversity that characterize the learners in schools in Nigeria. Those practices and procedures are explored and solutions proffered.

Key words: Incompatible Practices , Procedures , Multi-Culaturalism , socio economic .

INTRODUCTION:

Nigeria is a multicultural nation. It has numerous ethnic groups with diverse cultures and languages. These cultural groups contain innumerable subcultures exhibiting a variety of complex beliefs, attitudes and values. In addition, diversity occurs as a result of different socio economic and educational backgrounds, gender, experiences, aptitude, interest, and disability. These characterize the learners found in schools in Nigeria. Learners who are multicultural and diverse are more likely to find themselves challenged by a multitude of factors that put them at risk of unnecessary unsatisfactory outcomes.

Teaching diverse school learners requires that schools infuse the view of diversity across curricular especially as it regards assessment. The Nigerian Government partly recognizes this challenge and in an attempt to solve it introduced continuous assessment through classroom and school based assessment. In continuous assessment, the learner is assessed in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains, a number of times, and at certain intervals using a variety of assessment techniques such as tests, project, portfolios, interviews, observation, among others. As laudable as this policy is, research and experience have shown that teachers still adopt the traditional assessment technique, a practice which discriminate against the majority of learners in the school. In other words, while educators understand that not all learners are the same and that their needs are diverse, very few teachers accommodate these differences in their use of assessment in classrooms and beyond. Uniformity, rather than attending to diversity, dominates the culture of contemporary classrooms (Gable, R; Hendrickson J.; Tonllson S. and Van Acker R. 2000). The use of traditional assessment has resulted into assessment bias occurring at different points in the assessment process, from the selection of the instruments to the decision making process. This paper examines these

incompatible practices and enumerates solutions to overcome them.

ASSESSMENT IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

Assessment in education can be defined as the process of documenting in measurable terms, knowledge, skills, attitude, progress of learners and other related activities. One of the purposes of assessment is to evaluate student's general academic performance. This can be done through administering an achievement test to a group at different interval in a term. In addition, assessment can be formative in which assessment is used to get an indication of how well a learner is learning skills or knowledge being taught. According to Smith (2000), this form of evaluation is more direct because students actual school work and classroom behavior are used. The third purpose of assessment is to determine whether a student has disability and whether that disability seriously affects his or her educational performance. The data obtained is useful in planning interventions. These procedures; summative, formative and diagnostic evaluations are necessary to determine effectiveness of students and programs (Eskay, 2013).

Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning and an effective tool in promoting learning. Nwana (1979) strongly opined that no matter how effective the teacher, how intelligent the pupils and how adequate the institutional materials, if no provision is made for some evaluation of progress and strength, the teaching efforts are completely invalidated. The major purpose of assessing the child is to help him learn. The Nigerian Government has introduced formative form of assessment to add to the former one, summative assessment earlier in use, to take care of all aspects of pupils' learning. In the year 1982, continuous Assessment was formally introduced in the Nigerian educational system. This is formative mode of assessment.

According to FME (1980), it is a method of ascertaining what a pupil gains from schooling in terms of knowledge, skills, and character development taking account of all his performance in tests, assignments, projects and other school activities during a given school period and his recorded performance to help improve his learning by identifying and remedying areas of difficulties in learning.

The policy further stated that teachers are to construct those series of tests, mark and score the students through school and classroom based assessment. It further states that each school sets up a continuous assessment committee, with head teacher, assistant head and three most senior teachers (one of whom must be in the junior section) as members. They are to coordinate and monitor what the teachers are doing in terms of actual implementation of the policy in the classrooms. Moreover, it is expected that promotion and certification in the primary and secondary schools will be based in part or in whole on continuous assessment. However, assessment in use in schools today deviates from the above stipulations in so many ways. Afemikhe (2000) described the current assessment of test learners in Nigerian schools as a caricature. Educators still stick to the traditional methods of assessment.

Incompatible Practices and Procedures in the Use of Assessment in Nigeria

Experience and research have proved beyond doubt that assessment in Nigerian schools today does not reflect diversity among learners. Educators stick to using only summative form of assessment and ignore formative and diagnostic forms, among others. Apparently, assessment in schools today is filled with incompatible practices and procedures resulting into assessment bias. According to Ysseldyke, Algozzine and Thurlow (2000), assessment bias occurs at many different points in the assessment process.

Many teachers in schools use single tests only in assessing the diverse learners in schools. The use of single tests as against multiple instruments leads to assessment bias. Test measures expected academic achievement or intelligent functioning among students and ignore all other aspects of learning very important in promoting child's well being. Use of single tests alone especially test of intelligence do not reliably predict an individual's abilities, they discriminate against culturally and linguistically diverse students and do not lead to educationally useable results (Artiles, A. Hary, B.; Chinn, P.C. 2002; National Research Council 2007). Even within the scope of intelligence alone, Gardner (1999) proposes linguistic intelligence, logical mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, musical intelligence, bodily kinesthetic intelligence, inter-personal intelligence and intra-personal intelligence. Smith (2007) posited that test results of students from different cultures and languages often present incorrect and distorted pictures of their abilities especial when those tests assess only one aspect of the student's abilities, that is academic achievement.

Moreover, assessments as used in most schools are usually done at the end of teaching to identify those who have satisfied the teaching objectives. In other words Nigerian teachers still embrace the summative procedure of assessment only and ignore the formative and diagnostic procedures. For such teachers, assessment is rarely used to

determine strengths and weaknesses with the view of remedying deficits. In order words, assessment done only at the end of instructions do not help in solving difficulties, misconceptions among learners and readjusting the teaching methods. Students who have learning disabilities, mother-tongue interference difficulties, among others, live with their difficulties a life time. As a result, students loose confidence in school work, develop hatred for the teacher and become deviants (Anikweze, 2005).

Construction and selection of test items are not devoid of discrimination as most teachers hurriedly set questions even on the day the tests are administered to the students. Test selections have deeply ignored changes in children's needs. Table of specifications and test item pools are not prepared. An item pool is a collection of test items thought to effectively represent a particular domain. Moreover, other personnel in the schools like the head teacher, etc is not included in test selection. The continuous assessment committees are not in existence. Classroom teachers often set questions that are very easy to mark at the expense of the students and objectives of teaching. Experience has shown that school heads order teachers to set a very few number of questions to cut down cost of typing questions. As a result, teachers set very few questions that rarely cover the content areas needed to cover. Very little concern is shown for higher mental tasks, thinking and application skills. According to Osunde (2008) most of the teachers in the Nigerian primary school system lack adequate skills to develop and validate teacher-made test for use in school based assessment. The issue of teacher incompetence in assessment is common across all levels.

Test administration, also, is not rid of incompatible practices. Not much is done to make the students feel at ease during tests and examinations. Instead, educators often use the testing period to force students to pay up debts they owe the school, punish students for breaking rules and regulations of the school, much shouting about do's and don'ts, to mention a few. Students with such disabilities like Attention Deficit Disorder, behavioral disorders and those who have anxiety related challenges are much affected negatively by such distractions. Sometimes, instructions are not explained in a familiar fashion. Necessary changes in format, response mode, setting, or scheduling that will help students especially those with disability to complete general education curriculum tests are not available in schools. Students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who are not proficient in the language of the test are not given accommodations by assessing them in the language in which they are proficient. Postponement of tests and examinations has become so common that shows teachers give little or no considerations about their psychological effect on learners.

Nevertheless, as a result of much dependence on test for assessing how much a child is able to understand and retain after a term or a long period of instruction, emphasis has shifted to the ability to pass tests and examinations for promotions and certifications. The purposes of test are no longer to identify child's weaknesses with a view to correcting them, improve on the child's learning and method of instruction but to acquire certificate as a prove of mastery

of instruction. This has brought misconducts and malpractices as most learners strive to pass by all means. This takes many forms ranging from copying to impersonations and leakages of examination questions before date of examination. It is not surprising to get pupils who graduate from primary schools without acquiring basic skills like reading, writing and numeracy.

Overcoming Incompatible Practices and Procedures in Assessment

Assessment is essentially critical in over all education of a nation. The place of assessment in the education of the learners is so vital that without it no meaningful learning can be said to have taken place. A country like Nigeria, with its diverse cultures, educational and economic backgrounds as well as different abilities of learners needs to have a rethink on its current assessment practices in use in schools. Inter and intra-difference among learners affects the way they learn and behave in schools (Garcia 2001, Smith 2007 and Eskay, 2013). Therefore, assessment that recognizes the various approaches to learning that naturally characterize students should be adopted to avoid discrimination in order to promote learning. There is much need for adequate training of teachers on the use of assessment from its planning stage to decision making stage. Research has proved that teachers lack competencies in the use of assessment in schools (Nwaogwugwu 2000; Joshua and Basse 2007 and Osunde 2008). Teacher preparation programs should prepare teachers who are culturally competent by the knowledge, heritage and tradition of their students and create learning environment where curriculum includes multiple perspectives and examples (Kozleski, Sobel and Taylor, 2003).

Learners are different in abilities, interests, mode of learning and behaviors, they need to be assessed in a variety of areas in order to determine the strength, weakness, improve on teaching methods and provide remedial instruction where needed. A variety of assessment techniques such as authentic assessment, portfolio, checklist, interviews, observations, homework and projects should be included in the assessment. A variety of assessment aims at addressing the diverse needs of all learners. Addressing student differences and interest appears to enhance their motivation to learn while encouraging them to remain committed and stay positive (Strong 2004).

Moreover, teachers need adequate training in test construction and selection to enable them generate items that cover a wider range of domain, behavioral traits, cognitive ability, motor ability or language ability, to name a few areas. Moreover, test items needed to be scrutinized for appropriateness, wording, content, mode of response required and developmental level of the learners. The training in test construction enables teachers become competent and equipped to assess learners frequently in a variety of areas. Continuous assessment committee with wide experience on test construction in schools should monitor and vet assessment instruments on those vital areas mentioned.

Since children with various disabilities and different cultural and linguistic backgrounds are part of the school population, teachers need training on possible

accommodations. Accommodations include possible change in the format of the assessment, the manner in which the students respond, the setting of the assessment or in scheduling (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2000). In addition, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who are considered to have limited English language proficiency, for example, may require accommodations to ensure that academic skills and knowledge are being assessed rather than English skills. Eskay (2013) opines strongly that teachers ought to be considerate and flexible. He further added that efforts be made by teachers to understand the learner's backgrounds, learning and testing environments.

With the adoption of inclusive education in Nigeria, there is high rate of enrollment of children with different learning difficulties. As a result, the purpose of assessment should be for identification, placement and in ascertaining the appropriate special service needed for development and active participation in the general curriculum, among others. In such a situation achievement tests can rarely be useful rather alternative methods of assessment can also be used which assess life skills as alternative to mastery of curriculum content. This can be done using checklists, observations, developmental scale, portfolios interviews from parents and significant others.

Following the aforementioned evaluations for individuals with disabilities and others, it is pertinent to note that teachers need to work closely with parents of children with various disabilities, cultural and linguistic difference and indeed all. For examples, the identification of concerns regarding children's behavioral disorders is most appropriately in the domain of the parents. Information relevant about the child's behavioral problems is sought from the parents and it is used to plan a meaningful screening assessment process. Parents report the child's health history and efforts made for addressing any health challenges. Garcia (2001) noted strongly that the strength of families and their involvement in school can make real differences in the lives of children. Moreover, children must feel confident that their teachers and schools value diverse cultural heritages and languages. To encourage confidence and cooperations, a teacher can bring strengths, contributions, culture and language of the family directly into the school experience especially during assessment.

Assessment must not be left with the classroom teachers alone rather it should be multidisciplinary. This is pertinent considering the fact that assessing and evaluating any child in the classroom setting can be both tedious and comprehensive. Professionals like school nurses, educational diagnostician, school psychologists, physical therapist, behavioral consultants, school counselors, to mention a few are to work with classroom teachers to ensure proper screening, identification, diagnoses and adequate placement options. Parents guide their children in writing home works and in caring out projects given to them by the teachers. Constant home works should be given and duly marked by teachers. Home work is expected to tighten the bond between home and school and also help the teacher understand the child better in relation to family background. Assessment of psychomotor and affective domains and use

of authentic assessment generated through checklists, portfolio, observations, and interviews should be used for students' promotion from one class to another class as well as certification. For purpose of accountability in assessment, it is expected that assessment instruments be the same in all schools while teachers are duly trained to use these instrument for the child's growth in learning.

Government needs to provide adequate facilities like computers, typewriters, stationary and other materials in adequate quantity to enable schools type examination questions and assessment papers that have wide content coverage, mark their responses and provide record of performance of all students.

Moreover, teachers need to be well paid and given handsome allowances to motivate them to work harder. It also will help minimize examination malpractices and misconducts found among educators, students and others.

Learning is continuous. Teachers should be given adequate and up to date information on the needs of the child in school and changes in assessment procedures.

CONCLUSION

Practices and Procedures of assessment in schools in Nigeria fall short of global best practices. Teachers and special educators in particular need to diversify assessment instruments to be able to accommodate not only the various domains of knowledge, but also learners with various disabilities. There is need to train teachers in current practices and trends in test construction to empower them adequately for effective service delivery, especially with regards to the implementation of the continuous assessment regime in Nigerian school system.

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