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How Friendly are the School-Based Assessment Practices in Oyo State?: A Study in School Effectiveness

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Abstract

There have always been complaints about students' performance in any set of assessments given to them. Some of the complaints given by the students why they do not perform well are always based on the fact that the assessment practices are not friendly. Therefore, this study was designed to evaluate how friendly the school based assessments practices were. All teachers and three primary five pupils in twelve schools were used. Therefore, a total of 346 teachers and 36 primary 5 pupils participated in the study. Two types of instruments were developed for the study, one was used to collect qualitative data and the other was used to collect quantitative data. There are some schools where teachers did not know whether or not school-based assessment time table exist or not. Some teachers believed that school-based assessment took place twice a term where some thought it is for three times in a term. Not many teachers inform their pupils when school-based assessment is schedule to take place. In addition, the environment of taking test was friendly in some schools and not friendly in some schools. The implications of the findings are discussed.

Key words: school-based assessment, friendly environment, assessment practices, school effectiveness.

Introduction

One of the measures of school effectiveness is how low or high are students' scores in school assessments (Adewale, 2004). School assessments are difficult to be separated from schooling. School assessments are regular practices in education and is used to determine how far learners have learnt or mastered a prescribed task in a school. It is also used to determine the extent to which an educational process has addressed its set objectives. Anikweze (2005) refers to an assessment as the process of investigating the status or standard of learners' attainment, with reference to expected outcomes that must have been specified as objectives before exposing students to educational processes. The assessment of learners is often an on-going activity in any school set up. In fact, it is even undertaken as a basis for admitting students into the school in the first place. Assessments are used to monitor

the quality of school systems, evaluate education policies and programs, make important instructional decisions about students, and leverage major educational change (Baker & Linn, 1997; Linn, 1986).

The assessment of students' knowledge and understanding has always been a powerful influence on how and what teachers teach. Assessments are effective means of bringing about changes in students' behaviour. Fulfilling this role, however, requires different kinds of assessment instruments designed to serve specific purposes for which the instruments are designed. These purposes typically include: (a) allowing governments or other agencies to monitor and compare the performance of schools and education systems; (b) using test results to allow progression through a school system or selection within it; (c) providing employers with confidence in, and details of, the outcomes of schooling; and (d) providing teachers with information about students' knowledge, understanding and skills so that teachers and students can monitor both teaching and learning.

The strategies available to help teachers monitor students' progress include: (a) activities such as reading, viewing video or other material, conducting simple experiments, Classroom debates, explaining or making class presentations about natural phenomena and 'pre-tests', to establish what students already know; and (b) familiar Classroom or laboratory activities, such as oral questioning and writing assignments, to provide 'feedback' to both students and teachers that the latter can use to improve the effectiveness of further instruction.

Students in schools are exposed to two types of assessments. The first and the most frequently used in any school setting is the school-based assessment. The second one which could be for only one time known as systemic evaluation is conducted to determine what students can do at critical points of their educational cycle (critical points are the end of schooling periods - primary six for primary schools and JSS 3 for Junior Secondary Schools and SSS 3 Senior Secondary Schools). The former assessment can be regarded as formative evaluation and the latter is summative evaluation. Formative or diagnostic assessment is an integral part of teaching since it is concerned with establishing what students have learnt and able to do as a result of lessons received. It is a form of evaluation that needs to be undertaken on a regular and frequent basis and there is no doubt that it is of central importance to effective teaching. The latter assessment offers a profile or summation of student achievement, often in the form of the results of an external examination, whereas the former is essentially concerned with advice, support and guidance and is directed towards improved learning - formative evaluation. Formative assessment can also be described as the school based assessment.

School based assessment according to Griffith (2005) refers to the process where students, as candidates, undertake specified assignments during the course of the school year under the guidance of the teacher as part of a subject examination. School based assessment brings assessment and teaching together for the benefit of the students and provides the teacher with the opportunity to participate in a unique way in the assessment process that leads to the final

grade obtained by his or her students. For this reason, Njabili, Abedi, Magesse and Kalole (2005) add that the fundamental role of assessment is to provide authentic and meaningful feedback for improving student learning, instructional practice and educational options which means that assessment is not and should not be seen as an end in itself but a means to a justifiable end of learning. It is expected that the school environment in its totality provides a conducive situation to facilitate learning and subsequent assessment procedures. However, it may be obvious that current school based assessment practices leave much to be desired. As hard as institutions struggle to make their examination standard, incidents of examination malpractice abound, so, the fate of school based assessment which has little standard is certainly worse (Onjewu, 2007).

In Nigeria, school-based assessment is conducted on a regular interval of time. Previously, pupils' assessment in the form of tests, assignments, homework, projects, etc served as authentic methods of measuring pupils' performance/achievement in schools. However, in recent times, tests are not only used to assess all the components of education such as methods and strategies of instructional delivery, materials, etc, but are also used to appraise the effectiveness of the educational programme as a whole. In addition, it serves to ascertain whether the educational system is on course, and if, otherwise, information on how it can be remedied is provided. This is purely a formative evaluation. Any fault or misconceptions observed in the children on a particular issue are taken care of and appropriate remediation is provided. Usually, school - based assessment is conducted by the use of achievement tests.

Achievement tests (measures of cognitive domain) are usually designed as a regular (i.e. terminal or yearly) evaluation to determine the status of an individual on completion of a course of study or training. These tests are characterized in terms of their content validity. There is the need for value judgement and rational decision on what the tests should be measuring. This judgement and decision are informed by the objectives of the course of study or training. These objectives which are stated in terms of desired behaviour provide clues for the achievement test construction. An achievement test should be measuring fully the status of the individual in all the hierarchical levels of understanding as proposed in the Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives. The test should measure:

- i. Remembering previously learned materials (knowledge)
- ii. Grasping the meaning of learned materials (comprehension)
- iii. Making use of learned materials in new and concrete situation (application)
- iv. Breaking learnt materials into its component parts so as to understand its organizational structure (analysis)
- v. Putting parts together to come out with new whole form (synthesis) and
- vi. Judging and assessing the value of learnt materials for a given purpose (evaluation).

Test experts have classified achievement tests using different parameters. For example, achievement tests may be classified on the basis of the essay-type and the objective-type.

The two major types can be classified further as shown in Fig. I.

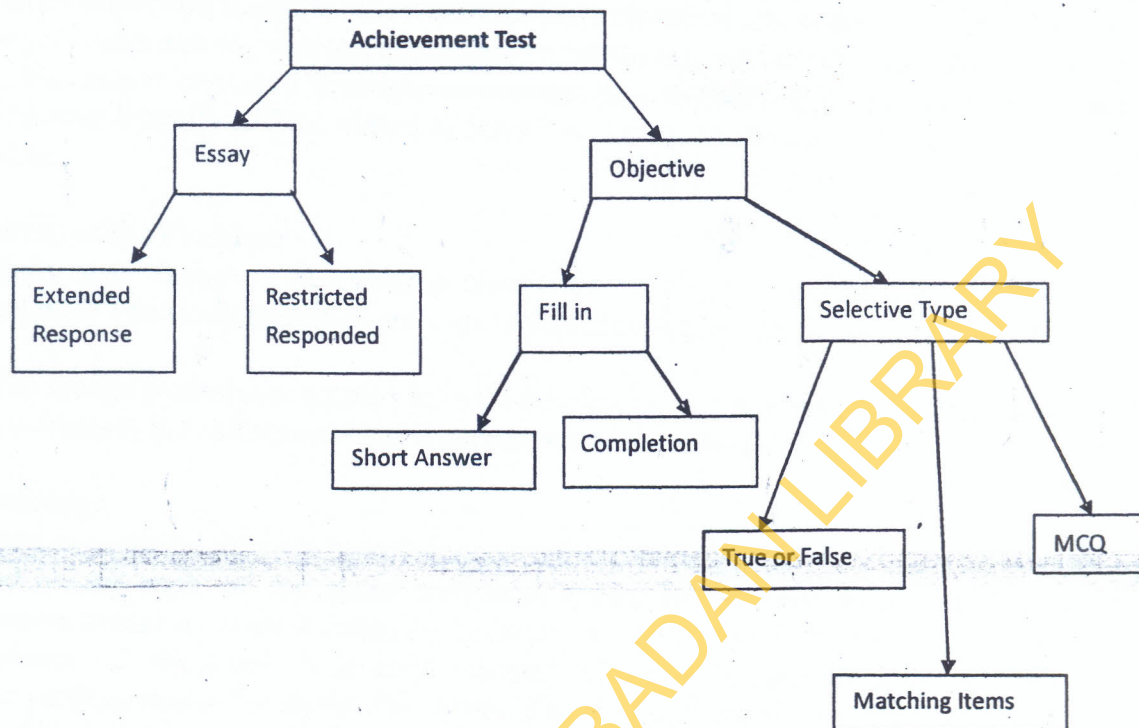


Fig. 1 Types of Achievement Tests
(Source: Institute of Education, V.I. 2006)

Achievement test described so far belong to the assessment of the cognitive domain, the second and third types of assessment are the affective and the psychomotor respectively. Benjamin Bloom and his cohorts worked extensively on the domains of educational objectives. Most times, more emphasis is placed on the first domain (cognitive) and third (psychomotor) but no emphasis is placed on the second domain (affective). This may explain why the value and interest of the students are different from the norm or the ideal. Most of the times, we placed values on the paper qualification and we often do not ask ourselves how the results presented by the students were earned. Many students engage in some of the educational problems, some of them are examination malpractice, sexual harassment, cultism, laziness, instant success with little emphasis on hard work and integrity and so on. Although, the focus of this paper is not on social ills in the school system but the import of this work will not be so evident if such aberrations which could render school-based assessment meaningless are not discussed.

Many researchers reported some social ills in the Nigerian educational system. For example, Makoju, Adewale, Nwargwu, Shuaibu, (2004) identify one counter productive phenomenon in the educational system (examination malpractices). Apart from this counter productive phenomenon, Nwana (2000) listed 6 more problems which he tagged as aberrations in the Nigerian education system. These are: sexual harassment, cultism, laziness, instant success syndrome, absenteeism and students' general misconduct.

The conducts of school-based assessment may be as important as the assessment itself or even more important than the assessment but in a situation where some of the school-based assessment rules and regulations are not enforced, the conduct of such assessment is likely to render the scores obtained through assessment meaningless. It is therefore, necessary to examine how friendly is the conduct of school-based assessment in some primary schools in Oyo State.

Statement of the Problem

The study was designed to evaluate how friendly are the practices of school - based assessments? The study provided answers to the following research questions:

- i. What are the procedures employed in the practices of school-based assessments?
- ii. How friendly are the school-based assessments environments?

Methodology

Oyo State is stratified into 3 senatorial zones and two local government areas were randomly selected (since each of the three senatorial zones' has almost equal number of local government areas) from each zone. Two primary schools were also selected from each local government. All the teachers in each selected school were used in the study. In all, 346 teachers participated in the study. Two types of instruments were developed for the study, one was used to collect qualitative data and the other was used to collect quantitative data. The qualitative instrument deals with these instruments were given to colleagues for content and face validity. They were also tried tested on a sample of 15 teachers.

Results and Discussion

Research Question 1

What are the procedures employed in the practices of school-based assessments?
Some questions from the questionnaire in the quantitative data instrument are used in answering this research question.

Table 1 Availability of Time Table for School-Based Assessment

	Yes	No
Availability of time table for school-assessment	287 (82.9)	44 (12.7)

Figures in parenthesis are percentage responses.

Many of the teachers were aware that there was a time table for the conduct of school-based assessment. The time-table is usually sent to the school by the State Ministry of Education from the beginning of a term. The 12.7% teachers who indicated that there was no time table for conduct of school-based assessment are not likely aware that such time table is usually sent to the school. The school may not be using the time-table and that may be the reason those teachers were not aware of the time-table. The 4.4% of the teachers who did not indicate whether or not there was any time-table for conducting school-based assessment may probably not be aware that such information exists in the schools and they are likely to be the category of teachers who just administer the assessment any time they like.

Table 2 Number of School-Based Assessment

	Twice termly	Thrice termly
Number of School-Based	90	248
	(26.0)	(71.7)

Figures in parenthesis are percentage responses.

Majority of the teachers indicated that they conduct school-based assessment three terms a term and about a quarter of the teachers conduct school-based assessment twice. One of the interesting findings in this study is that there are some teachers (2.3 percent) who did not know how many times school-based assessment is conducted in their schools. Though, the proportion of these teachers is minimal. It shows that such teachers are not likely to be teaching well in school because assessment should be part of teaching and learning process.

Table 3 Informed Consent on Conduct of School-Based Assessment

	Yes	No
Do you inform the pupils before you conduct a school-based assessment?	259	87
	(74.9)	(25.1)

Figures in parenthesis are percentage responses.

Majority of the teachers (three quarters of the teachers) informed the pupils before they conducted school-based assessment and the remaining one quarter of the teacher found it difficult to tell the pupils before they give them tests.

Table 4 Length of Notice

	A week	4 days	3 days	2 days	1 day	Same
Length of notice	9	13	19	26	53	74
	(3.5)	(4.9)	(7.4)	(10.0)	(20.6)	(28.5)

Figures in parenthesis are percentage responses.

The information in the table shows that as the length of notice is decreasing, the proportion of teachers who gave the notice of school-based assessment is increasing. Out of 259

teachers who indicated that they informed their pupils before the conduct of school-based assessment, it is interesting to find out that higher (28.5 percent) proportion of the teachers informed the pupils about the test the same day the pupils were to write the test. This cannot be regarded as actually informing the pupils before the conduct of school-based assessment.

Table 5 Pupils Reactions to non-information before the conduct of school-based assessment

	Frequency	%
They dont react because they are use to it	34	39.3
They ask me why I dont tell them	11	12.5
They report to higher authority (Headmaster)	9	10.2
They report to their parents	33	37.6

Out of 87 teachers who indicated that they did not inform the pupils before they conduct a school-based assessment, very few teachers (9 of them) reported that the pupils actually reported them to higher authority (headmaster). Some pupils were bold to confront the teachers why (s)he did not give them notice of when they were to write their tests. Some of the pupils who found it difficult to be passive and at the same time could not face the teachers or higher authority found solace in discussing with their parents.

Research Question 2

How friendly are the school-based assessments environments?

Table 6 rules governing the school-based assessment explained to the pupils

	Yes	No
Are the rules governing the school -based assessment explained to the pupils before any assessment in the school?	27 (7.9)	319 (92.1)

Figures in parenthesis are percentage responses.

Majority of the teachers do not explain the rules governing the school-based assessment to the pupils before any assessment in the school. So, some of the pupils were left in darkness as to what they were to do and not to do during any assessment in the school. One may wonder whether the teachers who always inform the pupils about the rule governing the conduct of tests in the school do so each time the pupils are to write a test.

Table 7 Type of Penalty given to Defaulters (those who trespass the rules governing the school-based assessment)

Title	Frequency	%
Send them out of the class	20	5.8
Tear their answer sheet	1	0.3
Ask them to stand up for 10m	302	87.2
Deduct their marks	2	0.6
Report them to higher authority	8	2.3
Report them to their parents	13	3.8

It is interesting to note that all the teachers mint out one form of punishment or the other on the pupil starting from simple one like asking the pupils to stand up for 10 minutes to a more severe one of tearing pupils' scripts.

Table 8 Availability of Sick Bay or First Aid Box in the School

	Yes	No
Is there sick bay and/or first aid box to take care the school?	75 (21.7)	271 (78.3)

Figures in parenthesis are percentage responses.

Majority of the teachers indicated that there are no sick bay and/or first aid box in the school to take care of sick children. The implication is that when a child is sick during a school-based assessment, s(he) needs to be given medical attention, but in a situation where majority of the schools did not have either sick bay or first aid box then the environment is not friendly so s(he) will not be able to perform at his/her optimum.

Table 9 Equipping of Sick Bay and/or First Aid Box in the Schools

	Yes	No
How equipped are the available sick bay and/or first aid?	38 (50.7)	37 (49.3)

Figures in parenthesis are percentage responses.

Just half of the schools that had sick bay and/or first aid box are equipped with necessary medicine that could be used to take care of the children and the remaining half of the schools had to depend on other means of managing the situation.

Table 10 Methods of Handling Sick Children during School-Based Assessment

How do you take care of these children?	Frequency	%tage
Ask them to go home	91	26.2
Children in my class are hardly sick	35	10.1
Ask their parent to come for them	82	23.7
Do nothing	47	13.6
Ask them to sleep	47	13.6
Ask another child to buy medicine for the sick child	44	12.8

here are five different possibilities for a teacher to explore in reacting to a sick child during school-based assessment. (S)he may ask the child to go home all alone, asks another pupil to buy medicine for the sick child, call the parents to come for him/her, (s)he may even decide not to do anything, s(he) may ask the pupil to sleep. Teachers' reaction in that critical moment will determine whether or not the school-based assessment environment is friendly or not.

Table 11 Availability of toilet facilities in the school

	Yes	No
Are there toilet facilities in the school?	279 (80.6)	67 (19.4)

Figures in parenthesis are percentage responses.

Only few schools did not have toilet facilities. However, questions were not asked about the adequacy toilet facilities or type of toilet facilities available. One of the features of examination among pupils is what is known as examination fever. Teachers were asked how they cope with examination fever. Their responses include: pupils used toilets more frequently than during the normal class but the problem is that not all the pupils can be accommodated at the same time. In some schools, there are no toilet facilities and some girls may not just use anyplace the way boys will. So, they are under two levels of pressures; one, the demand to use toilet facilities (because they are pressed) and responding to the test items in the school-based assessment situation. If their desire to use toilet facilities is not achieved, it is not likely that they will do well in such assessment.

Discussion

The findings revealed that not many schools plan for the school-based assessments since they indicated that there is no time table for such assessments. When a school does not prepare for a test, usually, it is the pupils that bear the brunt. Information from interview conducted on three pupils in primary 5 of a particular school on the conduct school-based assessment revealed that school-based assessment should take place three times in a term. Each assessment has a maximum of 10 marks. The implication is that the three school-based assessments should account for 30% of the total terminal score in a particular subject. However, the pupils indicated that a teacher conducted three tests in one day. The investigator went further to ask the teacher why he conducted three tests on his pupils in one day; he was not able to give any convincing reason. The pupils were asked and they indicated that the teacher always tells stories and seemed not to be organised. The implication of these responses from the children is that the teacher does not prepare for the test, he waits until it is almost the end of the term and suddenly remembers that school-based assessment should account for 30% of the total score in his subject, he then quickly conducts series of tests which should be conducted three times on the pupils in one day.

Some of the teachers did not know how many times school-based assessments are to be conducted in a term. One may wonder whether or not these teachers were the new intakes (new teachers). If they are new teachers, they should be inducted into the teaching profession. During the induction programme, issue that relate to school-based assessment should be stressed. Another interesting finding of this study is the fact that there was no agreed number of times in the school-based assessment. If the time table is handed over by the State Ministry of Education to the schools, the time table must contain the number of times assessment is done in each school. This then implies that many of the schools do not adhere strictly to the agreed time table.

One of revelations from this study is that some teachers (although in the minority) do not inform their pupils when they were to have a test. However, it should be noted that one of the characteristics of continuous assessment which is used interchangeably as school-based assessment is that it should be planned; pupils should be told ahead of times about the day and time when they are to have school-based assessment.

Majority of the teachers indicated that they did not inform their pupils about the rule and regulations governing the conduct of school-based assessment. Since majority of the teachers indicated that they did not inform the pupils about the rules governing the conduct of tests in the school, it is likely that they will not also tell the pupils types of penalty that will be given to those who are likely to default. The general saying from the Holy Scripture is that if there is no law there is no sin. Even if we assume that 92.1 % of the teachers did not inform the pupils about the rules governing the conduct of test in the classroom situation, the teachers were not making the environment of the conduct of school-based assessment friendly. This is because there are a lot of penalty measured against the pupils. Some of them could be termed mild and one of them severe, although, the number of teachers who would mint out severe penalty such as tearing pupils' scripts is low, but it should be noticed that there are some teacher who when they have not told the pupils about the rules of taking test were still prepared to tear pupils' scripts.

A child may leave home well and healthy in the morning, but during the day's work (especially during assessment), (s)he may develop some sort of illness that will require attention of his/her teacher. In such a situation, the teacher is expected to react positively to the demand of the pupil by giving him/her necessary support that will make him continue his/her assessment. The situation is not particularly so in some schools. For example, majority of the teachers usually send their pupils home when they are sick. The question one would have asked is whether or not these children are old enough to know their way around to their homes. Even if they know their way through, one, they are children and it may not be safe to send them home without an adult accompanying them, secondly, a sick person will need the help of a healthy person to conduct him/her round. It is rather unethical to send a sick child home all alone. Another unfortunate finding was that some teachers indicated that they would not do anything; this implies that they will pretend nothing happens. This type of situation is not considered good enough. One may ask if the sick pupil were to be the

teacher's child, would he not look for a way of managing the situation? Another amazing finding is that some of the teachers indicated that they will send another child to buy medicine for the sick child. If the medicine is not sold within the school compound, it is likely that the child will like to cross the main road and could be knocked down by a vehicle, thus making the environment for the conduct of school-based assessment unfriendly for the pupils. Some of the teachers indicated that they would ask the pupils to sleep till the closing time without being cared for. This practice cannot be said to be friendly. Very few teachers would have preferred to call the pupils' parents. One can propose two reasons to account for only few teachers calling the children's parent; one is that it is not likely that the teachers took record of the pupils' parents telephone number and when some of them have the phone number, they may not want to call because they are likely to use their credit and they are not likely to receive a refund.

Conclusion and Recommendations

There are some schools where teacher did not know whether or not school-based assessment time table exist or not. Some teachers believe that school-based assessment takes place twice a term while some thought it is for three times in a term. Not many teachers inform their pupils when school-based assessment is schedule to take place. In addition, the environment of taking test was friendly in some schools and not friendly in some schools. In order to make environment for the conduct of school-based assessment friendly, the following should be put in place: During pre-service teacher training, issues that pertain to the conduct of examinations should be discussed. Number of time school-based assessment is to be conducted; teachers' responsibilities to children when they are sick should form parts of the training course for the teachers. There are few toilets available in the schools and during assessment, the anxiety level of the students is raised and they go to toilet more frequently, therefore, more toilet facilities should be provided in the schools.

Teachers should be exposed to induction course on the conduct of both school-based and external based assessments. New teachers should be allowed to undergo induction course compulsorily before they are allowed into the classrooms while the older teachers should be encouraged to attend the course as an in-service training.

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