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**PUBLIC EXAMINATION BODIES AND THE EXIGENCIES OF  
SCHOOL-BASED ASSESSMENT**

BY

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**Abstract**

Literature has revealed that public examination bodies face numerous problems in the process of using school-based assessment scores for the certification of students. Therefore, there is need more than ever before, to evolve a sound method of integrating school-based assessment in the certification grades of secondary school students. Unfortunately, studies have shown that some teachers lacked competent experience in the practice of school-based assessment, while some award marks arbitrarily thereby bringing to question the validity and reliability of school-based assessment scores. This paper addresses the issues raised above and more, in order to ameliorate some of the problems (*Journal of Vocational, Science and Educational Development*, 8(3), August, 2009; 41 - 48).

**Examining Bodies and Dependability of School Based Assessment**

Public Examination Bodies in Nigeria, include West African Examinations Council (WAEC), National Examinations Council (NECO), National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB), Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (JAMB) and different professional bodies like the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN). According to Falayajo (2004), these Examination bodies deal with what has been referred to as 'high stakes' examinations because the outcome of these examinations have very profound if not decisive effects on the life aspirations of the examinees.

Public examinations are typically formal, summative and controlled by an agency external to the school where the student has studied. It has been argued that education would be better served by less formal, continuous, school-based assessment (World Bank 2008). The World Bank report further added that in many public examination systems, a mixture of external tests and internal assessments is used, although in highly competitive situations, external examinations are usually preferred because these allow greater standardization of tasks and conditions, hence greater comparability of results.

According to NECO (2007), the quest for quality assurance required the teacher to collect comprehensive information on students' performance, using a wide variety of assessment instruments. The report added that, it is imperative for practicing teachers to acquaint themselves with adequate knowledge and skills required not only in gathering of assessment data but also in analysis, interpretation and use of assessment results. However, Israel (2005) is of the view that unreliability in school assessment is an in-house problem because gross inflation is usually

detectable when continuous assessment scores are compared with examination scores in South Africa. In this light, Adebowale & Alao (2008) claimed that issues facing 3<sup>rd</sup> World Countries in terms of implementation of continuous assessment are very different from those facing the developed countries.

Many times, it has been discovered that SBA scores cannot predict students' performance in public examinations. Tracing the source of such unpredictability, Mgbor & Mgbor (2004) declared that:

*Experience has shown that when continuous assessment is required by State Ministry of Education or FME or WAEC and NECO for JSCE or SSCE examination respectively, the school gives each student high scores to enable them pass well. Furthermore, the marks are far from being uniform. Some schools inflate their figures so as to attract students.*

NTI (2007) then submitted that, often the correlation between school based assessment scores and those of central examination bodies are negative, and that disparity had been observed from school to school, rural to urban location among others.

### School Based Assessment Practice

According to Ojerinde (1997), to assess is to estimate the nature, quality, value of worth of something. Okpala, Onocha & Oyediji (1993) defined assessment as the process of organizing measurement data into interpretable forms on a number of variables. School-based assessment (SBA) is a comprehensive assessment practice which is extensive in form, mode, means and scope operated in school to enhance learning. School based assessment according to Griffith (2005) is the process where students as candidates, undertake specific assignments during the course of the school year under the guidance of a teacher as part of subject examination. Onjewu (2007) affirms that school based assessment actually brings together assessment and teaching for the benefit of 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 student.

What this boils down to, is that school based assessment (SBA) is an innovative and objective way of assessing the course of instruction as well as the total learning outcomes of learners. NTI (2007) submits that, unlike the conventional methods of assessment, school based assessment permits the teacher to assess and monitor a wide range of learning outcomes such as skills, attitude and knowledge. Thus, the feedback is not only reliable, but also objective and valid. Supporting this view, Njabili et al (2005) asserts that the fundamental role of assessment is to provide authentic and meaningful feedback for improving students' learning.

School based assessment practice is not only teacher-student oriented but also include other stakeholders that could impact positively on students' preparedness ability and interest to learn – such as subject teachers and other teachers, class peers, parents, relevant educational agencies (i.e. school inspectors) and the student himself/herself. In the practice of school based assessment, all the

stakeholders mentioned above combine to support, motivate and enable the student to be eager to learn and achieve learning progress. Other components of school based assessment practice include written test in its various formats, assignments, home work, projects and group work portfolios. All other forms of continuous assessment which include reviewing previous assessment, provision of feedback, use of different tests (such as oral, written and performance tests) are still part and parcel of the practice of school-based assessment.

School-based assessment could be operated from three fronts, namely:

- a) Pre-Instruction Assessment
  - b) Assessment during Instruction
  - c) Assessment at the End of Instruction
- a) **Pre-Instruction Assessment:** Assessment at this point may be formal or informal because it has to do with the entry behaviour or previous knowledge of the students. The teacher may decide to observe the characteristics or the behaviour of the learners or may decide to test the students formally or informally.
  - b) **Assessment during Instruction:** Assessment during instruction is formative in nature and so it is formative assessment.
  - c) **Assessment at the End of Instruction:** Assessment at the end of instruction is termed summative because it provides information on whether or not students have mastered the concepts taught. Summative assessment typically comes at the end of a course or unity of instruction. It is a way of determining the extent to which the instructional objectives have been achieved and it is used primarily for assigning course grade or certifying students' mastery of intended learning outcomes.

In conclusion, variety of assessments is used, covering the cognitive, the affective and the psychomotor by means of tests, projects, observations, assignments, questionnaires and interviews. Through these techniques of assessments, learners, abilities or difficulties in learning are detected and necessary steps are taken by the teacher to advice the students to improve on their performance as the case may be.

### Current Assessment Practices in Schools

Educational assessment is one of the reforms going on in the educational sector of many countries. The reformational measures have become a focal point to educators because of their value and contribution to qualitative education. Over the years, the import of educational assessment has been noticed and advanced to be indispensable to teaching and learning (NECO 2007). In this regard, NTI (2007) submits that there is an urgent need to evolve new, effective and more practical ways of measuring, evaluating and reporting student's progress towards the various targets and learning goals, particularly those contained in the EFA document. Most of the existing literature on the evaluation of student performance, according to NTI (2007) indicates that it is unfair to evaluate students using only one-short school based examination. This may be the reason why many countries as exemplified by Nigeria in her National Policy on education (FGN, 1981, 2004) adopted the use of continuous

assessment. It has however been noticed that assessment is not taken seriously in some schools. This explains why Onjewu (2007) contended that continuous assessment does not attract the kind of attention accorded to examination, although globally, attention is being paid to the need to ensure equity and fairness in assessment. School based assessment, we must note is wider in scope than Continuous assessment even though both are systematic and carried out at predetermined intervals for the purpose of monitoring and improving the overall performance of pupils and the teaching-learning environment.

Continuous assessment, according to EQ Review (2003) is a classroom strategy implemented by teachers to ascertain the knowledge, understanding, and skills attained by pupils. Teachers administer assessments in a variety of ways over time to allow them observe multiple tasks and to collect information about what students know, understand, and can do. Continuous assessment occurs frequently during the school year and is part of the regular teacher-student interactions. Students receive feedback from teachers based on their performance and this allows them to focus on what they have not yet mastered. Teachers are able to identify the students who need review and remediation and those who are ready to move on to more complex work.

The result of continuous assessment, which is a part of school-based assessment, helps to ensure that all learners make learning progress throughout the school cycle. This progress increases the students' academic achievement. Continuous assessment is expected to cover the three areas or domains of learning, namely, Cognitive, Affective and Psychomotor. In all primary and secondary school, continuous assessment accounts for 30 percent of a student's performance in each subject. Most higher institutions allow between 20 and 30 percent for in-course assessment. Thus, there seems to be some de-emphasis on the once-and-for-all assessment. Continuous assessment is not a new concept in education. In the United States for example, continuous assessment is built into the teaching-learning process. In Nigeria, there are different views about the concept to the extent that some of them are misconceptions.

### **Misuses of Continuous Assessment**

Continuous assessment is not testing of the cognitive ability of students. What is practiced in many schools is continuous testing where teachers administer tests on students on fortnightly or monthly basis. Some schools set-aside specific days in the month for what is referred to as continuous assessment testing. Test scores are computed as continuous assessment scores for the terms or school years. This approach does not differ from the old system of assessment. The mode of interpretation does not take into account other factors that may affect the student and the learning process. Furthermore, the affective and the psychomotor domains are neglected. Thus, the implementation of continuous assessment seems to have derailed from the plan of operation.

In some developing countries, the current assessment practices are farfetched from the original intention of continuous assessment practices. It is disheartening to see schools in some of such countries still embarking on out-dated assessment practices such as concentrating on "pencil and paper" assessment. As a result, students are assessed to pass examination as against preparing them to apply

concepts learnt to solving real-life problems. Again, assessment, even continuous assessment, seems to be carried out in many schools at the end of course, thereby making it summative instead of formative assessment. Moreover, assessment is concentrated mainly on the cognitive domain while the affective and psychomotor domains seem to be neglected. In other words, the formative aspect of assessment is neglected. There seems to be overemphasis on examination. This tendency sometimes lead teachers to hastening to cover the syllabus and students obtaining marks without the students being able to apply the concept they have learnt to solving real-life problems. The current haphazard practices of assessment in some schools lead to studying habits of students being impaired for lack of adequate feedback from their performances.

### Problems of Assessment in Schools

Educators seem to argue that it is unfair to evaluate students using only one-short examination, which often comes at the end of a learning cycle (NTI 2007). Thus assessment may be considered fair only if it is truly based on the three domains of learning – the cognitive, the affective and the psychomotor.

Assessment practices in many educational institutions have become a matter of concern to stakeholders in education. The value of and uses of educational assessment data, according to NECO (2007) underscores the need for qualitative assessment and assessments instruments. The task and responsibility of school-based assessment, NECO reaffirms, rests squarely on classroom teachers. So, for assessment data to be valid, the methods and tools employed by the class teachers should be such that ensure quality.

Emeke (2004) declared that the practice of continuous assessment is surrounded by laxity while NTI (2007) accused teachers of subjecting assessment to a great deal of abuse because most of them lack the required training in assessment. Osunde & Ughamadu (2004) also submit that it is a common knowledge that standards of all assessment by different teachers across the country, states and local government areas cannot be assumed to be the same. Alarmed by the nature of assessment scores emanating from schools, NTI (2007) submits that "often, the correlation between such scores and those of the central examination bodies is negative". In the same vein, the Examination Council of Zambia assisted by USAID, hosted a sub-regional conference on "Learner Assessment for Improved Education Quality" in July 2003, reported by EQ Review (2003) among other key issues, emphasized the need for teachers to acquaint themselves with administration, interpretation, recording, and reporting of continuous assessment practices.

Mghor & Mghor (2007) hinted on the fact that there are no records on affective and psychomotor domains assessment in schools, and Oyinloye (2002) informed teachers that the curriculum formulation of subject matters now transcends the cognitive domain and extended to the affective and psychomotor domains. From literature and from our various experiences in the school system, it can be deduced that some of the burning issues that have hitherto affected the smooth running of continuous assessment in schools may rear its head in the operation of School Based Assessment:

- Moreover, assessment, to a large extent is teacher centred because many teachers have formal in assessment practices. It is doubtful if teachers can



- effectively practice school based assessment without a sort of training in assessment practice.
- Most teachers seem not to understand the rationale behind school based assessment in the school system. One wonders actually, if teachers understand the rationale behind school based assessment in the school system. This doubt is arising following the levity which some teachers handle assessment practices in their schools, such levity include, some teachers usage of any assessment score as continuous assessment, the concentration of assessment on the cognitive domain of learners, some teachers arbitrarily awarding scores as calling it continuous scores.
- Teacher-made tests presently suffer from shortcomings like validity and reliability.
- Validity scores from school based assessment have been revealed by some studies to have been arbitrarily inflated thereby making nonsense of the possible predictive validity of such scores.
- Reliability – since some of the scores from school based assessment have no validity, it has made the predictions of learners' performance difficult in summative examinations in schools and in public examinations. The implications is that school based assessment scores are doubtful and most times do not correlate with public examination results.

#### **An Evaluation of How Examination Bodies are dealing with the Problems of School Based Assessment Scores**

The various examination bodies have noted the problems inherent in school based assessment scores, especially the level of dependability of such scores. Some of these bodies, like WAEC and NECO have fashioned out some methods in handling the reliability of SBA scores emanating from these schools. The issue of manipulation of school based assessment score is more serious than one can imagine. Apart from arbitrarily awarding school based assessment scores to students, some schools have gone to the extent of even sending score values for 30% or even more than 30%. It has also been reported that some schools award 30% to each of their candidate in WAEC or NECO. In this wise, some public examination bodies in Nigeria and elsewhere have devised a method of critically examining continuous assessment scores coming from schools and subjecting such scores to moderation. Sometimes, scores are sent back to some offending schools for review, with a report from WAEC or NECO (as the case may be) to the schools' ministries of education or the inspectorate divisions on the abnormalities observed in the SBA scores. The examination bodies also convert the raw scores of continuous assessment received from schools to standard scores before adding such scores to the examination scores of candidates. Some examination bodies like WAEC, NECO, NABTEB etc, sometimes organize training workshops and seminars for teachers on the proper handling of school-based assessment practices and scores.

#### **The Way Forward in Resolving Issues Bordering on School Based Assessment**

There is urgent need for teachers to be exposed to training on the practice of school-based assessment (Emeke, 2000). One way of doing this is to send teachers regularly to workshops, seminars or in-service training on the effective practice of

school-based assessment. There is also need for a regular monitoring team to be jointly formed by examination bodies, Federal and State Ministries of Education and other stakeholders in education. The joint monitoring team should not only ensure the proper practice of school based assessment but should also ensure the validity and reliability of school based assessment scores.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, school-based assessment should be taken seriously. A variety of assessments should be used, to address the cognitive, the affective and the psychomotor domains by means of tests, projects, observations, assignments, questionnaires and interviews. Through these techniques of assessments, learners' abilities or difficulties in learning can be detected and necessary steps taken by the teacher to advice the students so as to improve on or maintain their performance as the case may be.

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