

# OPINION OF UPPER BASIC EDUCATION TEACHERS IN THE FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY ON POLICY AND PRACTICE OF EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT

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## Abstract

*This study investigated opinion of Upper Basic Education teachers in the Federal Capital Territory on policy and practice of educational assessment. The study employed a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised all public junior secondary school (Upper Basic) teachers in the FCT. There are 5,215 teachers in public upper basic schools in the FCT (FCTUBEB, 2022). A sample of 520 teachers from public schools were involved in the study. The selection was done by using a multi-stage approach involving both stratified and simple random sampling techniques. A researcher designed questionnaire titled “Issues in Policy and Practice of Educational Assessment among Upper Basic Teachers” was used for data collection. The instrument was validated through expert judgment made by three lecturers to establish the face and content validity. The researchers established the reliability of the instrument through a test-re-test method (within three weeks intervals) on upper-basic teachers that did not participate in the research. A reliability coefficient of 0.74 was established. Frequency and percentage were employed to analyze data collected on the three research questions put forward to guide the study. The results indicated that teachers were of the opinion that students' performance could be used to hold all stakeholders accountable and not teachers alone. The teachers also agreed that teaching to test impacts negatively on curriculum implementation. It was recommended among others that teachers should improve on teaching and assessment practices to enhance their effectiveness as professionals and be accountable. They should avoid teaching to test and promote assessment that enhances comprehension.*

**Keywords:** Policy, Practice, Assessment, Teachers, and Upper Basic Schools

## Introduction

Educational assessment plays a significant role in the quality of student's learning experiences, teacher instructional activities, and evaluation of the curriculum. A high recognition is accorded assessment as a central part of education, with a proven role in helping learning and in reporting learning. An effective assessment system supports learning in a variety of ways, from providing formative feedback for use in short-term decisions about learning activities to providing

information about students' achievement for reporting to parents and others, for use in larger-term planning and as part of school self-evaluation. Assessment is not just a set of questions or scored tasks, it is an attempt to process a sample of a content or curriculum domain. Benneth (2018) is of the view that we develop an assessment that has a strong alignment with curricular ambition and values, which have an application to classroom content and process.

It is recognized that how the results of students' assessments are used has an important influence on the content and methods of teaching, which could be positive or negative (Harris & Brown, 2018). Therefore, the principle of good assessment should be emphasized. Navarro (2012) reiterated that assessment should start with the vision, mission, and goals of the schools. They should be based on clear instructional objectives, which must be comprehensive, continuous, diagnostic, and functional. They must be conducted through the cooperative efforts of the teachers, students, school administrators, parents and other stakeholders in the educational community. Bateman (2006) cited in Abudllahi (2020) indicated some of the benefits associated with consistent assessment for the improvement of quality education as; The establishment of high standards of academic excellence, which will go a long way to enhance the school's reputation and image. Improvement of communication across the school system and outcome so that the policies and procedures are constantly received through analysis and delivery of teaching and learning. Identification of systems' strengths and weaknesses.

The basic issue is how can assessment policy and practice work together effectively to improve students' outcomes at the upper basic level of education. In most countries, there is a widespread recognition that assessment and evaluation frameworks are key to building stronger and better school systems. The countries see assessment not as an end in itself, but as an important tool for achieving improved student outcomes (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, N.D.). In the classroom contexts, teachers make their best efforts to account for individual motivation, affect, and cognition to provide appropriate instruction, feedback, support, and questioning. However, the nature of these factors varies across time, locations, policy, priorities for schooling and assessment (Brown & Harris, 2009). This means that what constitutes a useful assessment to inform instruction in a classroom context needs to constantly evolve and be incredibly sensitive to individual and contextual factors.

There are some crucial issues concerning policy and practice of assessment at the upper basic level of education that should demand the attention of all that are concerned with the quality of teaching and learning process. One of them is the poor quality of tests with sufficient evidence of low validity and reliability index. (Osunde, 2008, Omo-Egbekuse, Afemike & Imobekhai, 2010). There is also the issue of the credibility of the assessment. Some teachers were found to be biased and faking the assessment scores (Ogunleye & Omolayo, 2016). Blatchford and Cline (1992) suggest that the assessment process should operate without bias with respect to gender, social class, ethnicity, language use, and religion. A teacher who has weak

cognitive domain understanding is unlikely to know: What questions to ask the students, what to look for in their performance, what inferences to make from that performance about student knowledge, and what actions to take to adjust instruction?

One of the most prominent issues in education policy today is accountability. It is a key element in the success of education improvement. Accountability based on performance is to encourage schools to focus their efforts on improving performance. However, to what extent can teachers be held accountable for students' performance? The expectations of parents and the public can sometimes be a burden on the teachers. Parents should not leave the entire responsibility of their ward to the school and the teacher. Nevertheless, teacher accountability helps teachers to engage actively in curriculum implementation. This also engenders quality education and resources put into proper usage.

According to Sama, Adegbuyi, and Ani (2021), the curriculum is an instrument through which educational institutions translate societal value into actual reality and consequently achieve learning outcomes. When teachers teach to test, it leads to surface learning. Teaching to the test is the system or process whereby teachers teach the content or subjects for the sake of students being able to pass the tests or examinations (Nyinge, 2018). Teaching to test does not prepare students for the world market after graduation. Kulamakan and Patangi (2018) cited in Sama, Adegbuyi, and Ani (2021) stated that when a teacher teaches to the test, it leads to surface learning, narrowing of the curriculum, surface teaching and performance goal orientation. On the other hand, teaching to the curriculum will lead to in-depth teaching and learning, learning goal orientation, active learning and full implementation of curriculum content. The curriculum should focus on attainment of competence by the students. According to Gardner (2008), test skills do not help students who have not developed critical thinking skills beyond middle school. Teaching based on the curriculum leads to in-depth and active learning on the part of the students. The acquired skills and knowledge can be deployed to everyday life situations. Good classroom assessment should accomplish a change from examination oriented to learning-oriented behavior on the part of the learners. Being in school should be seen as learning for life and not for paper qualification. (Ogunleye & Omolayo, 2016).

For continued economic prosperity of any nation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, academic standards and expectations should be tied to the demands of the global economy (Ozturk & Debelak, 2005). Raising standards is not synonymous to improvement in test performance or examination. A competitive industrial economy needs employees who can both communicate and listen, make flexible and intelligent use of their knowledge and skills, work effectively with others who are suitably motivated. These qualities cannot be tested by examination (White, 1999). All written tests cannot properly assess the extent of students' connected knowledge.

The problem of this study emanates from the fact that the policy of assessment at the basic level of education centers on continuous assessment, and how

it should be implemented. There have been concerns that there is a lack of uniformity in standards for implementation across schools. The success of the assessment programme is expected to culminate in an improved standard of teaching and learning at the basic level of education. However, Ogunleye and Omolayo (2016) reported that performance in the national assessment shows a downward trend in the performance of upper basic students (Junior Secondary Students). According to Hamlin and Peterson (2018), researchers have found no correlation between a rise in state standards and a rise in student achievement.

This study was designed to find out opinion of Upper Basic Education teachers in the Federal Capital Territory on policy and practice of educational assessment. Some of the issues concerning policy and practice are accountability, teaching to test, and the need for high standards in education.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were put forward to guide the conduct of the study:

1. What is the teachers' opinion on the use of assessment practice to hold them accountable for students' performance?
2. What is the impact of teaching to test performance on curriculum implementation?
3. To what extent do the improvements in test performance of students equate with high standards of education?

### **Methodology**

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The adoption was to enable the researchers to gather relevant data from the respondents to determine issues connected with policy and practice of educational assessment among upper basic education teachers in the FCT. The population consisted of all public upper basic education (Junior Secondary School) teachers in the FCT. There are 5,215 public upper-basic education teachers in the FCT. (FCT Universal Basic Education, 2022). The researchers selected a sample of 520 public upper-basic education teachers for the study using a multi-stage approach involving both stratified and simple random sampling techniques. The first step involved selection of schools from each of the six Area Councils through stratified random sampling, followed by selection of teachers from the selected schools using stratified random sampling taking into consideration teaching experience, qualification and gender. A simple random sampling technique was adopted for selecting sample from each stratum. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire designed by the researchers titled: "Issues in Policy and Practice of Educational Assessment among Upper Basic Education teachers". The instrument was made up of Four sections A, B, C & D. Section A elicited personal data while section B, & C made up of 20 items which required the respondents to respond to the items using a four-point rating scale of: Strongly Agree (SA); Agree (A); Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). Section D made up of 10 items required the respondents to respond based on High Extent

(HE); Moderate Extent (ME); Low Extent (LE) and Not at all (NA). A draft of the questionnaire was validated through expert judgment made by three lecturers in the Department of Educational Psychology, FCT College of Education, Zuba to establish the face and content validity. The researchers established the reliability of the instrument through a test-re-test method (within three weeks intervals) on upper-basic teachers that did not participate in the research. A reliability coefficient of 0.74 was established through Pearson Product Moment.

The researchers through personal contacts administered the instruments on the teachers. The assistance of some principals was sought to avoid instrument mortality. The instrument was scored based on 4, 3, 2, and 1 Strongly Agree (SA); Agree (A); Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) respectively for research question 1 and 2. To answer research question 3, the instrument was scored based on 4, 3, 2, and 1 High Extent (HE); Moderate Extent (ME); Low Extent (LE) and Not at all (NA) respectively. The researchers used frequency counts and percentage to analyze data collected on research questions 1, 2, and 3.

## Results

**Research Question One:** What is the teachers' opinion on the use of assessment practice to hold them accountable for students' performance?

**Table 1:** Frequency and percentage analysis of teachers' opinion on the use of assessment practice and teacher accountability

Range	Teachers' opinion	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1-25	Negative	108	20.8
26-40	Positive	212	79.2
<b>Total</b>		<b>520</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 indicates that 79.2% of the teachers had a positive opinion on the use of assessment practice to hold them accountable for students' performance, while 20.8% had a negative opinion. Majority of the teachers agreed that assessment of students' performance should be used to hold teachers accountable.

**Research Question Two:** What is the impact of teaching to test performance on curriculum implementation?

**Table 2:** Frequency and percentage analysis of teachers' opinion on impact of teaching to test on curriculum implementation

Range	Teachers' opinion	Frequency	Percentage
1-25	Positive	133	25.6
26-40	Negative	387	74.4
<b>Total</b>		<b>520</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 shows that 74.4% of the teachers were of the opinion that teaching to test performance has a negative impact on curriculum implementation, while 25.6% had a contrary opinion. They were of the opinion that teaching to test performance impact positively on curriculum implementation. Majority of the teachers were of the opinion that teaching to test had a negative impact on curriculum implementation.

### Research Question 3

To what extent do the improvements in test performance of students equate with high standards of education?

**Table 3:** Frequency and percentage analysis of teachers' opinion on improvement in test performance of students and high standard of education

Range	Teachers' opinion	Frequency	Percentage
1-17	High	124	23.8
18-26	Moderate	289	55.6
27-36	Low	107	20.6
<b>Total</b>		<b>520</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3 indicates that 55.6% of the teachers were of the opinion that improvement in test performance of students can be equated with high standards of education to a moderate extent, while 23.8% of the teachers agreed that improvement in test performance of students can be equated with high standards of education to a high extent. However, 20.6% of the teachers were of the opinion that improvement in test performance of students can be equated with high standards of education to a low extent. Majority of the teachers were of the opinion that improvement in test performance of students can be equated with high standards of education to a moderate extent.

### Discussion of Findings

The study reveals that teachers were of the opinion that assessment of students' performance could be used to determine teacher effectiveness, but should not be used to hold teachers accountable. A detailed analysis of the results show that assessment should be used to hold all stakeholders (teachers, students, parents, school administrators etc.) accountable. However, the results further show that when teachers are held accountable, it enhances the quality of education, improves teaching and learning, helps teachers to work harder and improves their skills.

Clotfelter and Ladd (1996) cited in Elmore and Rothman (1999) found that school level accountability encourages teachers to work together to improve instruction. They suggested that accountability mechanism should be based on a range of measures including indicators of instructional quality as well as students' outcome. The results of the study also show that teachers were negatively disposed to teaching to test. The teachers were of the opinion that teaching to test results into rote learning, use of teaching strategies that help students to pass examination and over stressing some topics in the curriculum. It was also established that teachers agreed that teaching to test results into narrow acquisition of knowledge and skills, and making the teachers job easy. It was observed that the respondents disagreed that teaching to test results in poor preparation of students for the world of work and poor attainment of educational goals. This was quite a surprise to the researchers. Omari (2011) cited in Nyinge (2020), reports that examination in 1960s had great backwash on teaching, as reflected in extended drilling using past question papers, unfortunately the situation still exists today due to most teachers teaching to test. Teaching to the test leads to getting wrong information on our students, which is not a reflection of the objectives of the school programme. Similarly, Tugba (2012) and Enwefa (2014) express regret that due to the importance accorded examinations, the aims of the curriculum seem to be defeated. Teachers see the kind of intellectual activity required by previous examination questions and prepare the students to meet the demands. As a result, they may concentrate on teaching those areas at the expense of the entire prescribed curriculum content to the detriment of the learner. Safa (2016) reports that emerging research is more rigorous about verifying practices that produce better test results than it is at describing the extent of "teaching to the test" in schools and classrooms.

The results of the study indicate that the teachers were of the opinion that improvement in students' performance can be equated with high standard in education to a moderate extent. The teachers opinion further indicate that this is possible when the tests are standardized, when there is the transfer of knowledge to daily life and when different types of assessment tools are used. However, students' performance could relatively be equated with high standards when students demonstrate skills that apply to the world of work, when there is a relationship between better test scores and when the tests involve applied knowledge. Lardieri (2018) reports that researchers found no correlation between a rise in state standards and a rise in student achievement. White (1999) points out that raising standard is not synonymous to improvement in test performance. A competitive industrial economy needs employees who can both communicate and listen, make flexible and intelligent use of their knowledge and skills, work effectively with others who are suitably motivated. These qualities cannot be tested by examination.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn. It was revealed that students' performance assessment should be used to hold all

stakeholders accountable. Teaching to test impacts negatively on the curriculum and students' performance cannot be equated with high standards in education.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study

1. Teachers should improve on teaching and assessment practices to enhance their effectiveness as professionals and be accountable.
2. Assessment is recognized as a practical and valid approach for determining students' knowledge and understanding. It is therefore, important that teachers explore how assessment could actually improve or impede teaching and learning by avoiding teaching to test. Teachers should not focus on what is memorized but on what is understood or comprehended.
3. High standards should be viewed from practical application of acquired knowledge and skills to meet the societal demands. It should not be seen to be synonymous with test performance.

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