

LOWER AND MIDDLE BASIC SCHOOL TEACHERS' CONCEPTIONS OF CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT IN ILORIN METROPOLIS

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Abstract

The place of classroom assessment cannot be jettisoned in the determination of cognitive growth and development of pupils. This study examined lower and middle basic school teachers' conceptions of classroom assessment in Ilorin metropolis. Two research questions were raised and one hypothesis was formulated to guide the study. The researchers employed descriptive survey research design for the study. The population of the study comprised all lower and middle basic school teachers in Ilorin metropolis while the target population consisted of all public lower and middle basic school teachers in Ilorin metropolis. Simple random sampling was used to select 20 basic schools and 300 teachers involved in the study. Teachers' Conceptions of Classroom Assessment Questionnaire of 4-point Likert type, developed by the researchers with Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient value of 0.77 was used to collect information for the study. The research questions were answered using descriptive statistics of mean, while the research hypothesis was tested using Two-way Analysis of Variance. The findings showed that the basic school teachers' conception of classroom assessment in Ilorin Metropolis was positive. Also, the study showed a non-significant difference in basic school teachers' conception of classroom assessment based on gender and qualification. It was, therefore, recommended that sensitization programmed be organised for basic school teachers on the importance of classroom assessment and the need to key into it for holistic development of their pupils.

Key words: Conception, Classroom Assessment, Primary School, Teachers

Introduction

Education is an indispensable tool for human and material development of every nation. It is the backbone of development of any nation as it is capable of improving the quality of a society through refinement of its potentials. Education enhances the application of man's achievement towards improvement of his environment. The role of education, therefore, cannot be ruled out in the quest for national development, as it is the most potent tool for the complete development of individual and the society. It is worth knowing that education is an indispensable instrument for achieving desirable change in learners' behaviour. Education is said to be a veritable instrument for achieving desirable change in learners' behaviour, but the quantity and quality of such changes are determined by the quality of classroom assessment.

Primary education is the foundation of formal education. It is an essential component in the echelon of educational system of every nation (Amadioha, 2011). In order to qualify for other levels of education one must first pass through primary schools, as such it is an institution upon which all other levels of education and educational achievements are built. It prepares the mind and trains the child for higher and tougher academic pursuits. It provides young learners with the fundamentals of reading, writing, skill acquisition, information and attitudes necessary for proper adjustment into the society. Primary education which constitute the lower and middle basic education in Nigeria is the form of education that enable the pupils to acquire, demonstrate, and inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy, and possess the ability to communicate effectively (Asodike, 2013). At the end of a child's primary education, he must be able demonstrate the above capabilities if translated into specific objectives and also demonstrate sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking. Primary education equips the pupils with the above skills through different school subjects. The school subjects contribute to this development in different ways through character and moral training, development of sound moral character and healthy attitudes, development of ability to adapt to societal changes and the opportunities to develop manipulative skills that will enable the child to function effectively in the society within the limits of his capacity.

Akinbote (2007) reported that the primary school years are very important years in a child's intellectual and overall development. Therefore, all primary school teachers should be intellectually sound to teach the school children with diverse interests, and capabilities. A teacher is the central point of learning in a classroom situation (Ojo, Akintomide & Ehindero, 2012). At the primary school level in Nigeria, a teacher teaches across all the subjects irrespective of his/her area of specialization. The teacher has a class and takes all the subjects. It is worth noting that the teaching methodology of a teacher influences students' interest in that particular subject (Ohiwerei & Nwosu, 2009). Lower and middle basic teachers often need to teach multiple subjects and possibly carry out assessment in the multiple subjects taught.

Assessment is the process of collecting, synthesizing, and interpreting information to aid in decision making. Assessment is any act of interpreting information about learners' performance, collected through any of a multitude of means or practices (Brown, 2011). Assessment is any activity in the classroom employed to gauge learners' level of academic progress and performance. This suggests that assessment is an integral part of any instructional process capable of establishing where learners are at present and what level they have achieved. Classroom assessment involves the use of number of strategies in finding out how proficient a learner is following a series of instructions or the extent of manifestation of trait expected to be brought about in determining whether the learner is following a particular lesson or not (Akpan & Etim, 2013). This suggests that classroom assessment serves as a means to determine how well a teacher has taught a specific concept or skills; such that the assessment process will inform the teacher about what the learners have learned and which concept and skills have to be re-taught (Hills, 2000).

Classroom assessment is an attempt to build on an existing good practice by making feedback on learners learning less complex, more systematic, more flexible and more effective. It gives a more valid and reliable measure of performances of a learner in overall activity. This means that classroom assessment makes evaluation of learning objectives and instructional goals more meaningful since it involves the use of number of strategies for checking how well learners are learning at the initial and intermediate points (Akpan & Etim,

2013). Through, efficient classroom assessment, teachers are able to understand and promote learning and increase their ability to help the learners become more effective and self-assessing which will consequently improve the quality of learning in the classroom.

Classroom assessment can be formative or summative in nature. Classroom assessment is formative when the data collected is utilized to accurately prescribe or measure a learner's level of learning and to alter lessons to assist learners in attaining an identified learning goal. Formative assessment involves systematic and continuously gathering of evidence about learning activities (Heritage, 2007). Summative assessment, on the other hand, is a means for documenting the nature and level of learners' attainment at various times throughout their academic pursuit (Hills, 2000); the purpose for which is either to report student achievement and progress, to summarize achievement for the purpose of selection and qualification, and/or to offer utilized data for determining teacher, school, and system effectiveness.

Whatever the differences and purposes of classroom assessment, teachers are the leading actor in the learning process and first interpreter of assessment information. The role of teachers in ensuring that assessment leads to the effective teaching and learning cannot be over-emphasized. Teachers are expected to play a dual role of facilitating learning, and of implementing classroom assessment in a manner that enhances meaningful learning outcomes (Nenty, Adedoyin, John, & Major, 2017). However, how teachers conceive of the nature and purpose of assessment matters to the implementation of classroom assessment.

The term conception is the general mental structure, encompassing mindsets, meanings, mental images, preferences, and the like. According to Xu and Brown (2016), teachers' conceptions of classroom assessment denote their mindset about the nature and purposes of classroom assessment which in turn determines their cognitive and affective response. The notion of mindset is used to refer to those basic statements about different aspects of reality that any person might accept as the truth at different period of his/her life. Mindsets are not immutable throughout life but they are subject to influences from the social and economic context in which the individual operates. Just as mindset is not static, it is believed that mindsets do not float loose in our minds either: they are organized and internally building up conceptions. This suggests that person's conception is an organized system of beliefs the person holds about an event or activity (Remesal, 2011).

Teachers' conception about the purposes of classroom assessment is capable of influences the implementation of assessment practices in the classroom (Deneen & Boud, 2014). Positive conceptions of assessment have been shown to precipitate beneficial assessment practices while negative conceptions of assessment (for example, assessment is bad for students or irrelevant to learning) may play a significant role in teachers resisting or subverting assessment policies and intended practices (Brown, 2008). The utilitarian value of any teacher is built on their ability to put what they have learnt into practice and such can only be determined through classroom assessment. Research shows that teachers' conceptions of assessment affect their teaching and assessment practices (Brown, 2011). Brown (2004) asserts that all pedagogical acts, including teachers' perceptions and evaluations of student behavior and performance (i.e., assessment), are affected by the conception teachers have about many educational artefacts, such as teaching, learning, assessment, curriculum, and teacher efficacy.

Brown (2003) found that teachers hold among others, the conceptions of assessment as: (a) it is useful because it can provide information for improving instruction; and (b) it is

irrelevant to teaching and learning. The improvement conception emphasizes the use of information to produce valid changes in teaching and learning (Brown, 2003). Teachers who view assessment as a process to provide information for improving instruction believe that assessment should improve students' learning and the quality of teaching (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & William, 2002); and by implication, this conception will help teachers to compose valid, reliable and accurate assessment as means of describing students' performance.

Another conception usually held by teachers is that assessment is irrelevant. The conception of irrelevance is held when, for number of reasons, teachers reject assessment. Under these conceptions, assessment is seen to be separated from the teaching and learning process (Yidana & Anti, 2018). Teachers with irrelevant conceptions might feel that assessment negatively affects their autonomy and professionalism and narrows the purpose of teaching and learning (Smith, 1991). Teachers are also likely to think that assessment is less valid and unreliable (Brown, 2003).

Researches exists on how teachers' conceptions are influenced by a number of independent variables, notably the teachers' gender, age and qualification, among others. For instance, Brown and Gao (2015) discovered differences in conception with respect to teachers' gender and teaching experience. Also, Ndalichako (2015) found that more female teachers, relative to their male counterparts, demonstrated a favourable perception of classroom assessment, and that there was a significant statistical difference between female and male teachers regarding the use of assessment to facilitate and support teaching. On the contrary, Yidana and Anti (2018) studied teachers' conceptions of classroom assessment in senior high schools in the Central and Ashanti Regions of Ghana, reported that majority of the teachers consented to the idea that classroom assessment leads to improvement in teaching and learning, as well as ensuring school accountability, and that gender and age did not influence teachers' conception of assessment. Based on the available literature at the researcher's disposal, there exist conflicting results on teachers' conceptions of classroom assessment, and most of the available studies were foreign based. There is therefore, need to have a better understanding of teachers' conceptions of assessment in Nigerian schools in general and Ilorin in particular.

Following more than a decade of experience in the academic related enterprise in schools, the researcher has witnessed the yearly disappointment, frustration and controversies in learners following the rate of failure and under-achievement of pupils in both internal and common entrance examination. In reaction to this, many parents, out of concern for their children's future continue to move them from one school to another in search for better education. For many years it has become customary everywhere to attribute the causes of success or failure of learners to factors of mainly contextual nature, such as a lack of resources, the lack of parental support, and ineffective school and teaching approaches (Jinks & Lorschbach, 2003), but hardly does it occur to many that the teachers' conception of assessment, being the heart of education, could be a factor.

Teachers are the main player of the actual education process and assessment is the means through which behaviours that results from such process is defined, observed and enhanced. However, generally there is acute paucity of research into the conceptions of primary school teachers, with respect to classroom assessment. Studies on teachers' conception of assessment have been conducted in different teaching and learning contexts. Based on the available literature to the researcher, there has not been a study conducted on

basic school teachers' conception of classroom assessment. It was on this regard that this study was carried out to fill the research gap. The main purpose of the study was to examine basic education teachers' conceptions of classroom assessment in Ilorin metropolis. Specifically, the study found out the:

1. lower and middle basic school teachers' conception of classroom assessment in Ilorin metropolis; and
2. difference in lower and middle basic school teachers' conception of classroom assessment in Ilorin metropolis based on gender and qualification.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in the course of the study.

1. What is the lower and middle basic school teachers' conception of classroom assessment in Ilorin metropolis?
2. Is there difference in lower and middle basic school teachers' conception of classroom assessment in Ilorin metropolis based on gender and qualification?

Research Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in primary school teachers' conception of classroom assessment in Ilorin metropolis based on gender and qualification.

Methodology

The researchers employed descriptive survey research design for the study. The population of the study comprised all lower and middle basic school teachers in Ilorin metropolis while the target population consisted of 2,608 public lower and middle basic school teachers in Ilorin metropolis. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 300 teachers from 20 simple randomly selected public lower and middle basic schools in Ilorin metropolis. Teachers' Conceptions of Classroom Assessment Questionnaire of 4-point Likert type was developed by the researchers. The questionnaire had sections A and B, in which the section elicited demographic data of the respondents, while the section B was used to obtain information on teachers' conceptions of classroom assessment. Section B of the questionnaire contained 15 items constructed on 4-Likert scale format of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The content validity of the questionnaire was ascertained by two experts in Educational Measurement and Evaluation. To establish the reliability of the instrument, the instrument was administered once to 30 selected lower and middle basic school teachers in Offa, Kwara State who had the same characteristics with the main respondents and the scores obtained were analysed using Cronbach Alpha reliability method with the aid of SPSS and a reliability coefficient of 0.77 was obtained. The research questions were answered using descriptive statistics of mean, while the research hypothesis was tested using Two-way Analysis of Variance at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question One: *What is the lower and middle basic school teachers' conception of classroom assessment in Ilorin metropolis?*

To answer the research question, lower and middle basic school teachers' conception of classroom assessment in Ilorin metropolis were summed and subjected to percentage analysis. The minimum score, maximum score and range score that each respondent could obtain from the questionnaire were 15, 60 and 45. The range was divided by the two levels of conception (positive and negative) and the cut off was 23. Scores between 15-38 and 39-60 are categorized as positive and negative conception respectively. The result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Lower and Middle Basic School Teachers' Conception Of Classroom Assessment In

Conceptions	Cut-off Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Positive	39-60	182	60.5
Negative	15-38	118	39.5
Total		300	100.0

Result in Table 1 indicates that 182 (60.5%) of the lower and middle basic school teachers had positive conception of classroom assessment while 118 (39.5%) had negative conception of classroom assessment. This shows that lower and middle basic school teachers' conception of classroom assessment in Ilorin metropolis was positive.

Hypothesis One: *There is no significant difference in lower and middle basic school teachers' conception of classroom assessment in Ilorin metropolis based on gender and qualification.*

Table 2: Two-Way Analysis of Variance on Difference in Lower and Middle Basic School Teachers' Conception of Classroom Assessment in Ilorin Metropolis Based on Gender and Qualification

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Corrected Model	172.959 ^a	5	34.592	1.175	.321
Intercept	259776.150	1	259776.150	8824.583	.000
Gender	1.524	1	1.524	.052	.820
Qualification	26.919	2	13.460	.457	.633
Qualification* Gender	83.847	2	41.924	1.424	.242
Error	8654.708	294	29.438		
Total	475324.000	300			
Corrected Total	8827.667	299			

Results in Table 2 show that there was no significant difference in basic school teachers' conception of classroom assessment in Ilorin metropolis based on gender and qualification. This is evident in the calculated F-value of 0.052 and p-value of 0.820 for gender, and

calculated F-value of 0.457 and p-value of 0.633 for qualification respectively. Since the p-values were greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in lower and middle basic school teachers' conception of classroom assessment in Ilorin metropolis based on gender and qualification was not rejected. The result in Table 2 also showed that there was no interaction of gender and qualification on lower and middle basic school teachers' conceptions of classroom assessment in Ilorin metropolis. This, therefore, means that there is no significant difference in lower and middle basic school teachers' conception of classroom assessment in Ilorin metropolis based on gender and qualification.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined lower and middle basic school teachers' conceptions of classroom assessment in Ilorin metropolis. The result of the study revealed that the lower and middle basic school teachers' conception of classroom assessment in Ilorin metropolis was positive. This means that majority of the lower and middle basic school teachers sampled for this study had positive conception of classroom assessment. This result is possible where the teachers have good knowledge of the nature and purposes of classroom assessment. This result corroborates the earlier work of Yidana and Anti (2018) who studied teachers' conceptions of classroom assessment in senior high schools in the Central and Ashanti Regions of Ghana and reported that majority of the teachers consented to the idea that classroom assessment leads to improvement in teaching and learning.

The result of this study further revealed that there was no significant difference in lower and middle basic school teachers' conception of classroom assessment in Ilorin metropolis based on gender and qualification. This means that gender and qualification does not influence primary school teachers' conception of classroom assessment. This result is plausible where teachers, irrespective of gender and level of education, conceived classroom assessment from the same perspective. This result is also possible where the teachers view assessment as a tool for improving instruction on the notion that assessment should improve students' learning and the quality of teaching. This finding is in contrary with the findings of Brown and Gao (2015) who discovered differences in conception with respect to teachers' gender and teaching experience. the result of this study refuted that of Ndalichako (2015) who found that more female teachers, relative to their male counterparts, demonstrated a favourable perception of classroom assessment, and that there was a significant statistical difference between female and male teachers regarding the use of assessment to facilitate and support teaching. The variations observed in the result of this study and that of Ndalichako (2015) might be due to differences in study location, differences in statistical method and the status of the sampled teachers.

Conclusion

The study concluded that majority of the lower and middle basic school teachers in Ilorin metropolis sees classroom assessment as something that is good. The study, on the final note, concluded that lower and middle basic school teachers' conception of classroom assessment in Ilorin metropolis was independent of their gender and academic qualification.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is therefore recommended that;

1. Teachers should be provided with assessment materials in order to sustain their conception of classroom assessment which was found to be positive.
2. The assessment conception of teachers, irrespective of gender and academic qualification, should be maintained through the organisation of professional learning communities for the teachers.

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