

EXAMINING THE ROLES OF THE SCHOOL BASED ASSESSMENTS ON LEARNERS' PERFORMANCE IN LUSAKA DISTRICT, ZAMBIA

Nephat Kasebusha^{1*}, Martin Banda²

¹Kapiri Girls National Technical Secondary School, Zambia

²University of Edenberg, Zambia.

*Corresponding Author Nephat Kasebusha

Kapiri Girls National
Technical Secondary
School, Zambia.

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Abstract: The aim of this study was to examine the roles of the School Based Assessments in selected secondary schools in Lusaka district. The study was guided by the three research objectives which were to determine the role of school assessments on learner performance in secondary schools, to establish the effects of school assessments on learner performance and to determine the factors to be considered in the conducting of school local assessments effectively in secondary schools. The study employed the quantitative research approach. Thus data was gathered using questionnaires. The sample size for the study was 309 respondents. Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS version 20 to generate descriptive statistics in the form frequency tables and percentage distributions in order to give clear presentation and interpretation of the research results. The study showed that School Based Assessments helps in skills and concept retention, prepare learners for exams, help identify learners' weaknesses, teachers evaluate learner' understanding, wide coverage of reading, expose learners to variety of questions, ensure qualitative scores and help diagnose learners weaknesses. The SBAs have positive effects on the academic performance of learners. Thus they enable learners work extra hard and improve learners' academic performance with a high retention of skills and concepts. Thus when assessing the learners the following should be considered: age of learners, grade of learners, abilities of learners, level of understanding, strength /weaknesses of learners, school resources, readiness of learners, time, work covered and environment/classroom.

Keywords: Assessment, school, based, examination, learners, performance, role.

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INTRODUCTION

Since independence the Zambian Educational sector has undergone a lot of transformation ranging from changes in the educational curriculum, upgrading of its infrastructure, re-grading of the schools (Educating our future (1996). It has further seen the teachers who have also migrated from the old system of teaching and learning to the modern ways of teaching. Coupled with this, the teachers have also undergone intensive retraining and attending of in service courses and training programs in order to improve on their career status (National Development Plans Policy Documents). Learning in particular starts from Nursery, pre-school primary, secondary and all the way to tertiary education (Educating Our Future 1996). All these stages of education levels in the years prior to independence did not see a lot of attachments in terms of learners being subjected to assessments and result analysis required of the administrators to undertake. In this contemporary era the education system requires now that all the learners must be assessed and their results analysed. This has raised a lot of questions ranging from the public and to the individual learners, teachers and administrators of these learning institutions. Hence this research tried to explore the role that the assessments and analysis of results play on the performance of learners.

According to the MOE (2005), School Based Assessment (SBA) is an on-going teaching and learning activity, diagnostic, classroom oriented based type of assessment tools used to measure learner performance. Over the years, the examinations have been used for the selection and certification without formal considerations on School Based Continuous Assessments (SBCA) as a component in the final examination at grade 9 and 12. The MOE introduced the SBA in order to improve teaching and learning and to collect school based marks to be added to the final examination marks and certification and selection.

Thomas (2003) conducted a study on how classroom assessments help to improve learning. The study by Thomas reported that teachers, who develop useful assessments, provide corrective instructive instructions and give learners second chances to demonstrate success can improve their instruction and help learners learn. These assessments are designed for a specific purpose. In most countries, they are designed to rank order schools and learners for the purpose of accountability of learner performance. Assessments facilitate improvement through a variety of venues. When schools are directly involved, in the development, implementation and analysis of assessment activities,

a number of specific benefits result. The school based assessment and results analysis are an integral part of instruction, as they determine whether or not the goals of education are being met. Assessment and results analysis affects decisions about grades, placement, advancement, instructional needs, curriculum, and, in some cases, funding. Edutopia (2018) indicated that school assessment inspire teachers to ask questions to find out if teaching and learning took place in the classroom, to find out if learners learn what they are supposed to learn and find out better ways of teaching.

The Malaysian Ministry of Education (2012), the new format of assessment, more information about learners' performance or development on a broader range would be gathered continuously and over a period of time. Through the school based assessments, learners can be assessed on their skills abilities without comparing to others. Ahmad and Warti (2014) added that by implementing school based assessments, learners are not judged just based on their results in examinations in schools. The SBA is a holistic assessment which is capable to evaluate learners' cognitive aspects of effective and psychomotor in line with National Philosophy of education and National Curriculum. The SBA is a major component of the teaching and learning process as these assessments serve to improve learners' understanding as well as to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning. The implementation of the SBA enables teachers give evidence about what has been achieved throughout the process of teaching and learning. On the other hand, the assessment are carried out by the teacher and the school starting from planning, construction items and assessment instrument, administration, checked or scoring, recording and reporting. The SBA is important to determine the effectiveness of teachers and schools in an effort to create harmonious and balanced individuals. Besides that, school assessment is an on-going activity that requires commitment and clear direction from teachers and schools to develop each learner's potential to the maximum.

According to the study conducted by Rohana (2014), SBA is a transformation in the education system because it scales down the emphasis on the examination oriented teaching and learning. It requires teachers to monitor learners learning progress and providing feedback from time to time. If compared to national or standardised examination which merely gains learners' results in academic, SBA provides more information about learners' performance and actual learners' learning level to a greater degree. This is the improvement in the assessment system where both concepts of assessment of learning are highlighted in SBA. Martin (2008) indicated that SBA promotes a good teaching when SBA does not fit comfortably into the subject areas. If a curriculum is to be encouraged away from transformative pedagogy to produce more inquiring learners focusing on skills and the application of knowledge, SBA itself will not deliver this change. Azlim (2013) in his study concluded that in order to produce learners with higher competency, SBA requires more questions that require higher order thinking skills. These questions set are based on four higher levels in Blooms Taxonomy which are applying, analysing, evaluating and creating. This transformation of assessment system is to stress on application of knowledge as well as to develop learners' critical and creative thinking skills.

William (2017) found out that teachers' role in SBA as part of public examinations, teaching and learning go hand in hand.

Teachers measure the effectiveness of their instructions on the refine of their objectives, rethink their teaching strategies select the most appropriate instructional materials and plan their next unit of work. The SBA allows observation to be made on a wide sample of learner behaviour in a more setting than would occur in a significantly externally assessed paper. In subjects with high practical elements, the teacher is in the best position to observe not only the learners manipulative skills, but also their general work habit. Cowan (2005) in his study he argued that a student is the engine which drives learners learning. It focuses on the opportunities to develop learners' ability to evaluate them, to make judgement about their own performance and improve upon it. It makes use of authentic assessment methods and offers tips of opportunities for learners to develop their skills through formative assessment using summative assessment sparingly.

Loretta (2016) found that three specific but critical aspects of SBA practices were examined. These included the practice of SBA techniques, teachers' opinions and competencies required for effective implementation of SBA. The teachers' main role is to teach with some of formative evaluation techniques performed. Theresa and Spanella (2015) studied on the effects of SBA in schools. The study reported that SBA is a key component of learning because it helps learners learn. When learners are able to see how they are doing it in class, they are able to determine whether or not they understand course materials. The assessment also helps to motivate learners, if learners know they are doing it poorly, they may begin work harder. According to Daisy (2014), assessment for learning is a teaching approach that generates feedback to learners that can be used to improve their performance from a teacher's perspective, this could be as simple as observing class discussions asking questions and reviewing learners' work progress. It is often immediately and inform changes teachers can make it more effective. Both the teacher and the learner can use the feedback to improve learning. The feedback includes information on how learners are learning their progress nature of their understanding and any difficulties they are having.

Sitayehu (2016) did a study on the practice of the continuous assessments in primary school in Ethiopia. The study indicated that the assessments influence the academic performance of pupils in class. Basoma (2019) also conducted a study on the influence of continuous assessment on the academic performance in primary schools in Uganda. The study revealed that continuous assessments have a positive influence on the academic performance of the primary school pupils in Uganda. It reported that continuous assessments keeps pupils busy with academic activities and in the process they do not forget easily what they learnt. The study was conducted in primary schools, hence there is need to conduct it in secondary schools as well. Joshua (2017) did a study on how continuous assessments help improve teaching and learning in Nigeria. They study found out that enables the teacher to identify the best methods of teaching having identified the weaknesses in learners. The continuous assessments act as a yard stick to keep both the teachers and learners within what they are to teach and learn.

Ephrem (2019) conducted the same study in Addis Ababa on the assessment practices in the centre for regional and local departments. Selina (2019) also conducted a study in Tanzania on the rationale of continuous assessment for the development of competencies in the secondary schools in Tanzanian secondary

schools. The studies reported that the assessments are important to measure if the learners have developed the expected competencies in line with the national policy and goals of education in Tanzania. The findings were not generalised to the Zambian situation, hence need to carry out another study in the Zambian context to find out the roles schools based assessments have on the academic performance of learners. Jerome (2013) conducted a study on the exploration of the value of integrated findings in a multiphase mixed evaluation of continuous assessments in Trinidad. Jerome found out that the mixed evaluations had challenges in its implementation. It needed requirements to be in place the successful implementation of the mixed evaluation. Getinet (2016) also conducted a study on the assessment of the implementation of continuous. The study revealed that the implementation of the continuous assessments in schools as an important part of the education system, however, it had some challenges which prevented it to be well administered in schools like materials and conducive environment in which the assessments could take place.

Ale (2015) studied on the teacher’ perceptions and implementation of the continuous assessments practices in secondary schools in Nigeria. The study reported that teachers had positive perceptions because they knew the benefits of the assessments to learners and themselves. Another study was conducted by Jerome (2015) on the promise and reality of formative assessment practice in continuous assessment scheme in Tobago. The study showed that if the assessments were well implemented they could ensure that they

help the teacher and the learner. Halimah (2016) also conducted a study on the effectiveness in teaching methodology on the school based assessment implementation. The study was confined on the practical assessments of the learners, it did not include the assessments of other learners from the academic subjects.

Kapembwa (2010) did a study in Zambia on the implementation of SBA in Zambia. The study reported that large classes were the major challenge in SBA implementation. The work load became higher as they were required to mark and keep the records of the progress of all learners. It was observed that despite the intensive in-service training and the guidelines encouraging teachers to practise CA a good number of teachers in pilot schools continued to practice continuous testing by administering assessments or test at the end of the first month and end of the second month. Furthermore, Kapembwa (2014) conducted another study on the school based assessment in Zambian on the primary literacy program. The study concentrated on primary schools only.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a quantitative research approach. Thus data was gathered by the use questionnaires. The sample size for the study was 309 respondents. The data was analysed using SPSS software version 20 to generate descriptive statistics in the form of frequency tables and percentage distribution in order to give clear presentation and interpretation of the research results.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Roles of the school based assessment on learner performance

Table 1: Roles of the school based assessment

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Skills and concept retention	55	17.8
Prepare learners for exams	30	9.7
Help identify learners’ weaknesses	45	14.6
Teachers evaluate learner’ understanding	35	11.3
wide coverage of reading	38	12.3
Expose learners to variety of questions	45	14.6
Ensure qualitative scores	35	11.3
Help diagnose learners weaknesses	26	8.4
<i>Total</i>	<i>309</i>	<i>100</i>

(Source: Field Work, 2023) N=309

The study showed that the school based assessments play important roles on learner academic performance. Out of 309, 55 representing 17.8 % of the respondents reported that the assessments keep learners engaged in skills and concept retention, 30 out of 309 representing 9.7 % revealed that the school based assessments prepare learners for the E.C.Z examinations, 45 out of 309 representing 14.5 of the respondents indicated that the assessments help teachers to identify learners’ weaknesses, 35 out

of 309 that represents 11.3 % of the respondents reported that the assessments help teachers evaluate the learners’ understanding, 38 out of 309 representing 12.3 % of the respondents revealed that the assessments enables to have a wide coverage of reading, 45 out of 309 representing 14.6 said that the assessment expose learners to a variety of questions, 35 out of 309 representing 11.3 % of the respondents indicated that the school based assessments enables the learners to score qualitative and not quantitative scores and 26

out of 309 representing 8.4 % said that the assessments help to diagnose learners' weaknesses.

Teachers are able to evaluate progress of their learners by answering questions such as: How is the student doing, what teaching methods or approaches are most effective and what changes or modifications to a lesson are needed to help the student perform to exception. School local or classroom assessment of student learning and results analysis can be a powerful agent for change in schools by informing policy makers about the learning outcome of the nation's students, helping teachers understand how to improve classroom instructions, and influencing societies as they think about education quality and learning goals (Liebermann & Clarke, 2012). Effective classroom assessments practices by teachers have been shown to yield gains on a half to a full standard deviation on external standardized achievement tests, with the largest gains for low achievers. Assessment can contribute to an effective education system by providing systemic information on levels of student's achievement and related factors: supporting educators and students with real-time information on improve teaching and learning; and offering a means to hold stakeholders accountable for results. A 1990 assessment in Uruguay triggered improved assistance for teachers, schools and poor students. A national assessment exercise in Sri Lanka in 2003 was the basis for the allocation of increased public resources to poor schools. Low performance on the 2009 PISA exercise in the United States spurred intense scrutiny of U.S. education policies and practices.

Lack of specific training, teachers rely heavily on the assessments offered by the publisher of their textbooks or instructional materials. When no suitable assessments are available, teachers construct their own in a haphazard fashion, with questions and essay prompts similar to the ones that their teachers used. They treat assessments as evaluation devices to administer when instructional activities are completed and to use primarily for assigning students' grades. To use assessments to improve instructions and student learning, teachers need to change their approach to assessments in three important ways: Make assessments useful for students, teachers and follow assessments with corrective instruction, and then give second chance to

demonstrate success (Guskey, 1997). Using assessments as sources of information coupled with following assessments with corrective instructions. And giving students a second chance are steps in a process that all teachers use naturally when they tutor individual students. Asking students to demonstrate their understanding of the subject matter is crucial to the learning process. It is essential to evaluate whether the educational goals and standards of the lessons are being met (George, 2008).

Assessment is an integral part of the instruction, as it determines whether or not the goals of education are being met. Assessment affects decisions about grades, placement, advancement, instructional needs, curriculum, and, in some cases. The Framework for conducting of assessments and result analysis was observed not to be provided. A self-assessment was also seen not to have a motive but instead must benefit the whole organization. Then the impact and roles it has on administrators has not been stated hence there was need to conduct this research in order to have a conclusive argumentation. Thus far discussion has focused on the technical aspects of classroom assessment. However, it is important to recognize that classroom assessments and results analysis have short-term and long-term consequences for students, thus requiring that teachers have an ethical responsibility to make decisions that are the most valid and reliable as possible. The administration of the school based assessments help to prepare learners for their final examinations. It encourages them to work extra hard and adequately prepare themselves for examinations. The school based assessments helps teachers to find out the knowledge and understanding on the covered topics. It prepares learners not to forget easily what they have learnt. These assessments help us identify our weaknesses and change in order to improve our performance. The assessments enable teachers to realise their weaknesses and change their strategies of teaching. If the administration of these assessments is well handled, it can help improve teachers' methodologies for the benefit of the learners. The administration of these school based assessments is critical in the process of teaching and learning. They help teachers to identify the strength and weaknesses of the learners. This enables teachers to diagnose learners' weaknesses.

Effects of the school based assessments on learners' performance

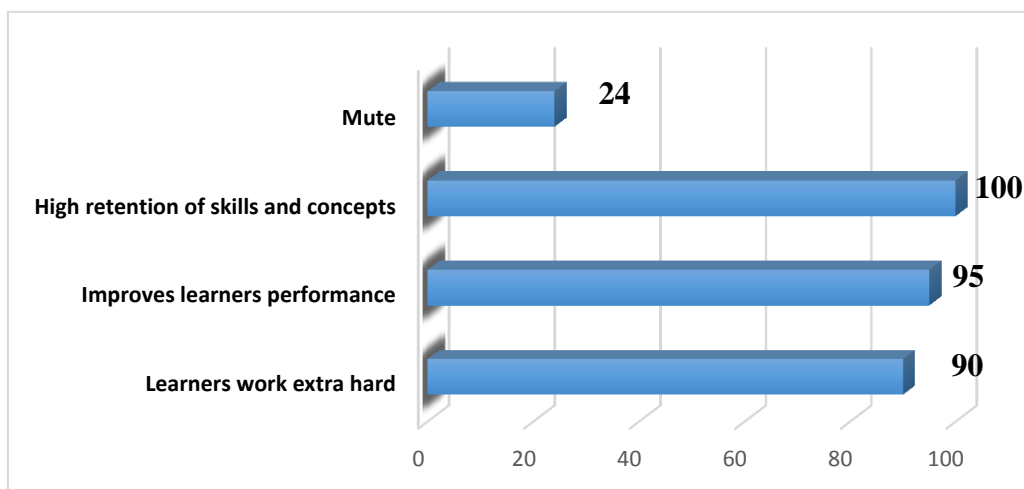


Figure 1: Effects of the school based assessments N=309

(Source: Field Work, 2023)

The study reports that the assessments makes learners become serious with academic activities. They help learners to have retention of knowledge or information and skills. These assessments enable to improve the qualitative academic performance and not the quantitative performance. This can be attributed by when learners ever kept making them read and study widely. They help to reinforce learning that makes learning become permanent; this discourages forgetting as we are constantly kept busy with school activities. These assessments motivate us because when we get high or good marks, we try to study extra hard so that we maintain our good performance and that we do not disappoint our teachers and parents at home. The assessments make learners become serious with academic activities. They help learners to have retention of knowledge or information and skills. These assessments enable to improve the qualitative academic performance and not the quantitative performance. This can be attributed by when learners ever kept making them read and study widely. School assessment and results analysis on learner performance is vital to teaching and learning process as it provides the necessary feedback about the outcome of educational goals and objectives. The school assessment and results analysis provides objective evidences necessary in the decision making process in education. As pointed out by Bassavanthappa (2009), good measurement resulting in accurate data is the foundation of sound decision making about educational endeavour.

Factors to consider in the administration of the school based assessments

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age of learners	35	11.3
Grade of learners	20	6.5
Abilities of learners	35	11.3
Level of understanding	25	8.1
Strength /weaknesses of learners	40	12.9
School resources	28	9.1
Readiness of learners	14	4.5
Time	18	5.8
Work covered	62	20.1
Environment/Classroom	32	10.4
Total	309	100

Source: Field Work, 2023 N=309

It is important to consider the work that the teacher and learners have covered when preparing the assessment questions. This enables teachers to find out if learners understood the covered or not for them to provide the rightful remedy for learners with some weaknesses. The needs of the learners are cardinal to put into consideration during the time of preparing the assessment questions. The teachers should be mindful of those learners who needed extra attention, therefore assessment question should be include to find out if those slow learners improved after being diagnosed.

The resources available in the school should be put into consideration. These include stationaries, tools and equipment needed for the effective administration of the school based assessment. The environment in which the assessments take place is a very important factor that should be considered when planning to assess the learners. The type of testing determines the environment in which the testing of learners should take place. While various researchers (McMillan, 2003; Hamidi, 2010; Alkharusi, 2007) argue that there is a variety of essential assessment concepts, principles, techniques, tools, strategies and procedures that teachers need to understand and know about, there still continues to be relatively little emphasis on challenges or factors which should be considered when conducting school local assessment and result analysis.

The teacher beliefs, teacher training, class size and teacher experience in actual classroom teaching influence teacher assessment practices. Additionally, these scholars believe that teacher understanding, beliefs, opinions and perceptions are closely related to their assessment practices. These are teachers’ beliefs about the educational advantages of classroom local assessment and about the pedagogical benefits of implementing local classroom assessment. Furthermore, these studies emphasize teacher training in classroom management as a crucial element that may affect teacher assessment practices. Similarly, Brown (2002) highlights local classroom assessment as one of the most crucial teacher professional development needs. Consequently, understanding teachers’ ideas, views, perceptions and beliefs about assessment as well as the challenges associated with classroom assessment practices is absolutely essential in planning and implementing appropriate teacher professional development. Teachers work in an intricate profession in which they are compelled to alter or preserve their evolving practice in relation to a wide range of factors.

CONCLUSION

The study showed that the assessments engage learners in skills and concept retention, prepares learners for final ECZ examinations, help to identify learners’ weaknesses. The administration of these assessments promote high retention rate of

skills and concepts, improves learners' performance and in turn enables learners work extra hard. The study shows that there are various factors that have to be put into consideration before the implementation of the school based assessments and these includes age of learners, level of understanding, strength and weaknesses, readiness of learners, work covered, school resources and environment in which the assessments have to be conducted.

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