



## School-Based Assessment: Prospects, Challenges and the Way Forward

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### ABSTRACT

Academic activities in any school setting comprise varieties of theoretical and practical works. For quality and accountability purposes, academic activities in the school system i.e. students' level of comprehension, their rate of assimilation and teachers' efficiency need to be assessed. Such assessment within the school system is known as School Based Assessment (SBA). SBA enables teachers to assess students' knowledge level, aptitude and skills acquisition in the three taxonomy of learning (cognitive, affective and psychomotor). The thrust of this paper compiled literature on the concept and importance of School-Based Assessment, types of School-Based Assessment, differences between School-Based Assessment and External examination, prospects of School-Based Assessment, challenges of School-Based Assessment and the way forward.

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### INTRODUCTION

The school is a social system made up of different individuals i.e., teaching, administrative and support staff and also the students who interact, inter-relate and work together with the common aim of achieving pre-determined educational goals and objectives. For the achievement of these goals to be realistic, an assessment must be done on all educational activities occurring within the school system. This makes assessment a vital component of the school system because it aids in ascertaining the level of success of the instructional delivery processes thereby providing diagnostic information on learners' needs, strengths and weaknesses. The essence of assessment according to Shaquar (2012) is to find out what the students know (knowledge), what they can do (ability), how well they can do it (proficiency), how the task is being carried out (process); and students' feeling about their work (motivation). Aduloju, Adikwu and Agi (2016) maintained that Assessment in the school system can be focused on individual learners, the learning community, the institution or the education system as a whole. Assessment is grouped under two major

categories i.e., School Based Assessment (SBA) and Externally-Based Assessment (EBA). School-Based Assessment is the type of assessment carried out and supervised by subject teachers in the schools. The instruments for school Based Assessments are usually designed by the subject teachers. On the contrary, Externally-Based Assessment is conducted by public examination bodies like the West African Examination Council (WAEC), National Examination Council (NECO), Joint Matriculation Examination Board (JAMB) and National Board for Technical Examination (NABTEB).

### THE CONCEPT OF ASSESSMENT

Assessment means appraising the quality of a programme through the use of varieties of information. It is a method of analyzing the worth of a programme, an event or someone's performance based on laid-down standards. In the school system, the teachers' effectiveness can be assessed and the student's academic achievement can be assessed as well. The focus of this paper is on the assessment of students' learning outcomes. Assessment,



therefore, is a process of determining whether pre-determined learning objectives have been achieved. It is a process of gathering and analyzing quantitative and qualitative information about students' performance. It connotes the process in which students' level of knowledge and skills acquisition in the three domains of learning i.e. cognitive, affective and psychomotor are appraised. Such an appraisal can be through daily observation of individual students' performance, weekly tests, practical work, and students' response to questioning during the instructional delivery process, end-of-term examination, and collection of information from the students through the use of instruments like - Questionnaires or Rating scales and any other method that will enable the teacher to get feedback from the learners. Assessment is a tool through which students' learning outcomes can be measured after exposure to a series of instructional delivery processes. Classroom assessment is an instrument for change. It assists learners to bridge the gap between their current performance and the targeted performance.

Within the sphere of education, different definitions have been postulated by several researchers about the concept of assessment. Lann and Miller (2005) posited that assessment refers to a variety of procedures employed in obtaining information about students' performance. Assessment is a systematic collection, review and use of information about educational programmes undertaken to improve students' learning and development. Based on the views of Shaquar (2012), assessment is a systematic way of gathering and analyzing information to inform and improve students' learning in line with goal-oriented expectations. Choong (2013) observed that the use of empirical assessment reveals a higher motivation and goal attainment among undergraduate students and that learning outcomes are enhanced when learners can connect the relevance of the learning with assessment activities. As further stated by Choong (2013), assessment is the process of gathering, interpreting, recording and using information about pupils' responses to educational tasks. It is a series of activities that assist students to learn. It is also a set of tools

that enable instructors to determine learners' level of knowledge acquisition and also be able to gauge their progress. Fuentes, Andalecio and Dadivas (2015) submitted that assessment is an act of gathering information daily to be aware of students' learning needs and thereby proffer necessary solutions. Saculo (2015) viewed assessment as a process whereby data on students' performance and achievements are gathered, analyzed, evaluated and interpreted for the betterment of learning outcomes and the school system at large. Aduloju, Adikwu, and Agi (2016) noted that educational assessment is a process of documenting based on measurable terms; knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs of learners.

Tookien (2018) postulated that assessments are indices that help teachers to determine what to teach, how to teach and the procedures to effectively evaluate the impact of what has been taught. Assessment, therefore, aids in gathering, processing, synthesizing and interpreting information about students' performance. Classroom assessment assists teachers to obtain information relative to different course objectives. Assessment is a viable instrument in the school system because it enables teachers to identify students' areas of strengths and weaknesses. It also aids in unravelling students' level of knowledge acquisition and comprehension. It provides insight into students' level of self-efficacy, and strategies on how students can identify their weaknesses and strengths thus making them self-directed learners. Assessment in the school system also serves as a means of ensuring quality assurance in the system. The educational assessment provides information to teachers on ways to modify their instructional strategies to be at par with international best practices to improve students' learning outcomes. Useful information is made available to stakeholders and policymakers on educational policies and implementation strategies. It enables educators through the use of varieties of tools and methodologies to measure, evaluate and document students' readiness for academic activities, their learning progress, acquired skills, and identification and proffering of solutions to students' educational needs and challenges. It



also provides information to parents on their wards' performance.

### THE CONCEPT OF SCHOOL BASED-ASSESSMENT

School-based assessment (SBA) is interwoven in the teaching-learning process. SBA emanates from the real classroom situation. It is a process of appraising learning activities within the school system with the active participation of learners and teachers. Its focus is more on the acquisition of learning skills rather than emphasis on grades or scores. SBA is a systematic and periodic collection of information about individual learners' academic performance within the school system to ascertain their level of comprehension, assimilation and retention. SBA provides work-out modalities to teachers to assist learners in their areas of difficulty thereby improving their learning. School-Based Assessment is a systematic way of appraising learners' performance at regular intervals in the three domains of leaning-cognitive, affective and psychomotor through the use of diverse assessment instruments such as tests, assignments, interviews, questionnaires, daily observations, quizzes, presentations by students, daily or weekly experiments in the classroom, craft-work, project works; and other psychomotor activities like dancing, drama, acting in the case of entertainment related courses or subjects. . It is a form of students' assessment organized and administered periodically on specified time interval in the school system. It focuses more on the improvement of learning processes against giving a premium to learning outcomes. It is an inquiry-based assessment within the school system. Furthermore, Pooks (2012) asserted that SBA is designed to assess learners' achievement in areas that cannot be easily assessed in public examinations.

The tools for SBA are mostly designed by subject teachers. Jamal, Rahman, Sujak, Maniam, Obeng, Chingi, and Bathumalai (2014) adduced SBA as a process whereby teachers monitor and record students' learning progress, evaluate their performance and provide timely

feedback to them. According to these scholars, SBA provides information to a larger extent on students' performance and actual learning. It also assists in decision-making on education related matters. According to Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) (2012), SBA is a type of assessment administered in schools as part of the teaching and learning process whereby the students are being assessed by their subject teachers, possibly to determine the quantum of learning that is taking place or has taken place. SBA is an assessment embedded in the instructional delivery process within the borders of the educational philosophy of "assessment for learning" (Updates on SBA, 2012).

SBA helps in the improvement of the validity of the assessment. It is impossible to assess all learning outcomes with only written examinations. Practical activities in the laboratories /workshops, research projects, craft-works, etc, required the length of time for completion and such can effectively be assessed through SBA. Also, psycho-motor activities and skills in the affective domain of learning can be effectively assessed via SBA as well because they require intense and critical observation for effective assessment. SBA also increases the reliability of assessment as it enables the use of multiple instruments for assessment purposes. This provides reliable shreds of evidence of students' abilities rather than over-reliance on external examinations carried out once yearly. SBA enables instructors to rate students' performance based on their capabilities from the beginning stage through the processing stage to the final stage in the case of craft-related courses. It eliminates the possibility of rating students' performance based on presented finished products that might not be their product. Thus, School Based Assessment furnishes teachers with ideas of learners' immediate and future needs; and also aids in the planning and working out of modalities to meet such needs. The component of SBA is illustrated in the diagram below;

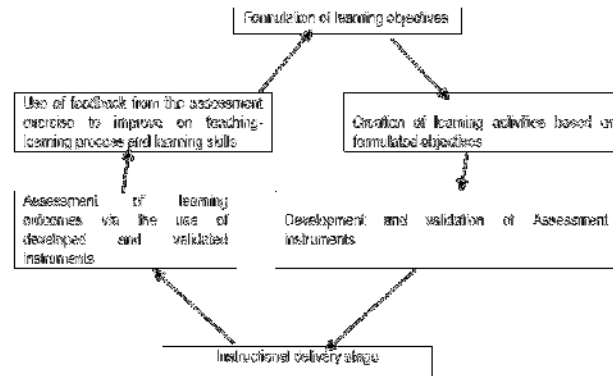


Figure 1: Components of Assessment.

**Formulation of learning objectives:** It involves the creation of learning outcomes through the description of the teachers' intents or what is expected of the learners based on cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning after their exposure to sets of instructions. It also entails the learners' applicability, proficiency and usability of the acquired skills after graduation.

**Creation of learning activities based on formulated objectives:** It entails the creation of learning activities based on stated learning objectives that enable the achievement of intended learning outcomes to become feasible. It also involves students' exposure to a series of activities, programmes, exercises and experiences within and outside their course of study geared towards the realization of the intended learning outcomes.

**Development and validation of Assessment instruments:** It involves the designing, development and validation of the instruments necessary for the assessment of intended learning outcomes. The validity process requires subjecting the instruments to a series of scrutiny to attest to its ability in terms of content coverage.

**Instructional delivery stage:** Involves different teaching methodologies and pedagogical skills employed in the teaching-learning process for the achievement of intended learning objectives/outcomes

**Assessment of learning outcomes:** Involves the use of varieties of instruments that have been validated i.e. tests, questionnaires, assignments, quizzes, practical works, etc, to assess the extent of the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

**Use of feedback to improve on teaching-learning process and learning skills:** The use of feedback from the assessment process as diagnostic measures to improve instructional delivery and individual students' performance.

#### Types of School-Based Assessment

Different types of assessment within the school system have been proscribed by different authors. Examples of such are as follows:

**Diagnostic Assessment:** Diagnostic assessment is used for the identification of pupils' persistent or recurring learning difficulties that are challenging to resolve through standard corrective measures or prescriptive principles of formative evaluation (Trasatti, 2016). Great Schools Partnership (2014) maintained that the basic intent of the diagnostic assessment is to match students with appropriate learning experiences that address their distinct and peculiar learning needs.

**Placement Assessment:** It is a form of pre-assessment administered before students are exposed to any form of instruction. It aids in establishing a baseline against what educators



used to measure learning progress over a specified period. It helps in determining learners' readiness for an academic programme or new grade level (Great Schools Partnership, 2014).

**Formative Assessment:** Formative assessment forms an integral part of the instructional delivery stage because it is interwoven into the teaching-learning process. Aduloju, Adikwu, and Agi, (2016) are of the view that it is a form of in-process assessment of students' learning that is administered multiple times during a unit, course, or academic programme. It focuses on learning progress during the instructional delivery process. Its major purpose is to provide continuous feedback to the learners and teachers about the teaching and learning process. Such feedbacks give clue on ways to modify instructional approaches, teaching materials and academic support accordingly. Formative assessment usually takes a variety of forms like quizzes, assignments, informal questioning techniques; and in-class discussions with students (Great Schools Partnership, 2014). Formative assessment is said to be an assessment for learning because its feedback is used by the teacher to modify instructional delivery styles and approaches.

**Summative Assessment:** Summative assessment is mostly done at the end of a programme or the conclusion of a specific instructional period i.e. through the use of tests, assignments, end-of-term examinations or projects at the end of a unit, course, semester, programme or school year. The central focus of summative assessment is mainly on students' achievement (Trasatti, 2016). Summative assessments are typically scored and graded and such scores or grades are used to determine or ascertain the level at which students can learn what they were expected to learn during the defined instructional period (Great Schools Partnership, 2014). Information on summative assessment provides data for selection and promotion of learning (Khan, 2019). Summative assessment is called an assessment of learning because its outcome is used to evaluate and place value or worth on the achievements of the programme after its completion.

**Authentic Assessment:** It is a pattern of collecting information about learners' progress and the social environment in the classroom. It is a process-oriented means of evaluating students' communicative competence, cognitive abilities and affective learning with the use of reflective learning forms of assessment through monitoring of students to ensure that learning occurs after daily instructions (Trasatti, 2016). It involves keeping students abreast with learning goals and objectives to achieve desirable outcomes. Shaquor (2012) is of the view that authentic assessment aim at evaluating students' abilities in real-world contexts. It assesses students' applicability of their skills to authentic tasks and projects. The author further added that in authentic assessment, students; do science experiments, conduct social-science research, write stories and reports, read and interpret literature, and solve mathematics problems that have real-world applications.

#### ***Difference between School-Based Assessment and External Examination***

Though there have been issues with the reliability and standard of SBA when compared with External examinations that is set, marked and scored by external assessors. School-Based Assessment has several advantages over External examination. Some of the advantages as stated in HKEEA (2012) are paraphrased and summarized below:

**Scope:** SBA has a wider range that allows for diversity and varieties in terms of types of assessment, the tasks involved and the assessors. While External examinations have a narrow range of assessments thus making it difficult to diversify assessment opportunities. The resultant effect is usually one exam per year.

**Authenticity:** Assessments under SBA are most likely to be realistic because assessment materials and conditions simulate students' demonstration of their natural capabilities. Whereas the environment/conditions of External examinations create friction thus making the students to be tensed up. These constrained students' ability to exhibit their innate talents, capabilities as well as acquired skills.



**Validity:** SBA creates an opportunity for the improvement of the validity of the assessment instruments because factors that are somehow difficult to include in the public or external examination are included and assessed. The scenario of public or external examination makes it challenging to improve the validity of the assessment instrument because of its limited scope of assessment. SBA enables the assessment instruments to be vetted to attest to its coverage of the purported items. It is somehow difficult to intensely validate the instruments of Externally Based Examination in comparison to SBA.

**Reliability:** SBA enables the improvement of the reliability of assessment through multiple assessment procedures. It also allows the assessors ample opportunities for a review of the instrument's ability to measure what it was designed to measure over a different period. In the external examination, it is difficult to improve the reliability of the instrument because the assessors' judgement can be influenced by varieties of factors like task difficulty, fatigue, interest, etc. Lack of ample opportunities for assessment can also affect assessors' reflection and review.

**Fairness:** Fairness in SBA is achieved through strict adherence to commonly-agreed guidelines, processes, outcomes and standards. Whereas in External examination, it is achievable through equality. i.e. giving the same task to everyone at the same time.

**Feedback:** In SBA, constructive feedback received immediately after assessment aids in the improvement of learning skills. Whereas in the external examination, feedback is given after the course or programme and it is mostly used for grading purposes.

**Benefit on the instructional delivery process:** In SBA, assessment is done concurrently with the teaching and learning process. This encourages consistent learning among learners, it also provides useful data for the evaluation of the teaching-learning process. In the external examination, assessment is summative and

therefore gives no room for evaluation of the teaching-learning process and possible improvement of learning skills because it is done at the completion stage of a programme.

**Teacher and student empowerment:** SBA fosters collaboration between teachers and students because they are part of the assessment process. It also affords the teachers, ample opportunities to share expertise within and across schools. During external examinations, teachers play insignificant roles in the assessment process because the assessment process is carried out by external assessors. This deprives them of the opportunity to share their expertise across the board.

**Professional development:** Varieties of assessment involved in SBA assist teachers to build their assessment skills which are transferable to the relevant area of the curriculum. External examination denies teachers the opportunity of improving their teaching skills as the scenario does not allow constructive feedback for such improvement.

#### **Prospects of School-Based Assessment**

The use of diverse assessment tools assists educators in the identification and evaluation of learning ability among learners. Learning disabilities such as autism, dyslexia, non-verbal learning disabilities, etc. can be diagnosed and solutions proffered through the use of a wide range of assessments. Learners' eligibility for specialized educational services can also be determined through the use of varieties of assessment instruments. However, the following highlighted points are also Prospects of SBA in the school system:

- a) SBA serves as a platform for instructional adjustments and improvement.
- b) The diagnostic information from feedback helps in enhancing students' learning achievements.
- c) Knowledge or skills acquired by the learners can easily be appraised through SBA.



- d) SBA makes it easy to identify learners' strengths and weaknesses thus enhancing their need assessment
- e) SBA guides teachers on the strategic skills needed to improve teaching and learning
- f) It provides a benchmark for students' promotion
- g) Periodic assessment of learners' performance is achievable using Bloom's taxonomy of learning (cognitive, affective and psychomotor).
- h) Through SBA students get acquainted with assessment practices in other climes
- i) It builds self-confidence in students thus suppressing anxiety over external examinations
- j) Constraints to effective pedagogical skills are easily diagnosed through SBA
- k) SBA motivates teachers to be creative and innovative
- l) Cooperative learning is fostered among students
- m) It encourages learners-centeredness' in lesson delivery
- n) SBA serves as a quality control mechanism in the school system
- o) It builds problem-solving skills in learners
- i) Negligence of individual learners' differences while developing the assessment instruments.
- j) Poor assessment methodologies
- k) Non-exposure of teachers to seminars, workshops and conferences on current assessment policies and practices as obtainable in other climes.
- l) Non-computerization of SBA which engenders examination malpractices due to pen and paper documentation of SBA results.
- m) Poor reward system
- n) The proliferation of the teaching profession by graduates from other professions

#### ***The way forward***

To combat the challenges of SBA in our school system, the following measures should be adopted:

- a) SBA should be done concurrently with the teaching-learning process and not at the end of the course or programme.
- b) All assessment instruments should have high content validity
- c) Students learning needs should be diagnosed before embarking on any assessment practice in the school
- d) Individual learners' abilities and differences should be taken into consideration when designing any assessment instrument
- e) The assessment environment should be devoid of unhealthy competition that can trigger jealousy among the learners
- f) Teachers should be encouraged to be creative in their assessment strategies and procedures
- g) Assessment practices should involve the use of varieties of assessment tools
- h) Teachers should be enlightened on current assessment practices and policies through training and re-training programmes like conferences, workshops and seminars as these will keep them abreast on modern practices in other climes

#### ***Challenges of School-Based Assessment***

The success of SBA like any worthwhile venture is constrained by certain factors. Such factors are outlined as follows:

- a) Diversity in types of school
- b) Teachers' individuality
- c) Poor validation of Assessment instruments
- d) Laziness on the part of the teacher
- e) Non-monitoring of classroom activities and teachers' records by the School Management
- f) Excessive work-loads for the teachers
- g) Poor knowledge of the composition of proper assessment by some teachers
- h) Non-uniformity and disparity in the assessment procedures, policies and practices.



- i) Assessment policies, strategies for implementation and methods of feedback should be properly developed to meet the current trend
- j) Teachers should ensure that any assessment exercise covers learners' skills in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning
- k) Computer-based assessment should be encouraged through the training of teachers and students on ICT usage
- l) ICT facilities should be provided in public schools to reduce paper-based assessment practice
- m) Database should be created by the school management for assessment purposes to eliminate falsification of records through pen and paper documentation of assessment results
- n) Teachers should be properly rewarded as this will serve as a motivational force
- o) Teachers should be assigned manageable work-load so as not to sap their strength and interest.
- p) There should be proper monitoring of assessment practices by the school management to ensure quality assurance in the system

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