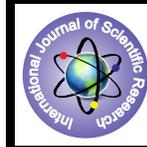


Deconstructing Factors Affecting Assessment and Intervention Issues in Regular and Special Education Programmes in Nigeria



Education

KEYWORDS : Special education, cultural consonance, assessment OF, assessment FOR, Rubrics, Potfolios, multi-dimensional evaluation, disability

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ABSTRACT

The assessment of learners for various purposes over the years has been a wholesome task considering their inter and intra individual differences among learners, the adequacy of the instrument and the competence of the assessor. Each assessment instrument considered tends to be characterized by certain strengths and weaknesses a situation that recommends the use of combination of all forms of assessment and adequate training of the educators on knowledge of learners and the use of assessment tools. This paper, therefore suggest various ways of assessment for which both the normal and disable pupils will benefit. It suggest a shift from assessment OF learning to assessment FOR learning which will include the use of self assessment, peer assessment, collaborative assessment and the use of rubrics and portfolios. Recommendations were made such as the use of multi dimensional evaluation technique.

Introduction

Contemporary student populations are becoming increasingly academically diverse (Guild, 2001 and Hall, 2002). The inclusion of pupils with disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse children, children with imposing emotional difficulties and a noteworthy number of gifted children reflect this growing diversity (Mulroy and Eddinger, 2003 and Tomlinson, 2004). Learning within the regular classroom is further influenced by the child's gender, experiences, aptitude, interest, and particular teaching approaches. Nigeria is rich in diverse cultures, languages and diverse educational and socio - cultural backgrounds and these reflect the characteristics of learners found in the various schools in Nigeria.

Based on these differences: cultural, socio-economic background, disabilities, students in schools often encounter multi-dimensional problems of misidentification, misassessment, misplacement and misinstruction/misintervention (Eskay,2009) It was further observed that conditions like poverty and homelessness can put many diverse learners at even greater disadvantage and thereby reduce the probability of their having good educational outcomes. Artiles (2003) observed that the result can be disengagement, incorrect referrals to special education, misunderstanding as having disability and eventual dropout. These attributes affect their learning of science subjects, which hinders them from contributing to technological advancement which repositions Nigeria to the top 20 nations in the year 2020.

Test is a method of assessment and often used by the classroom teacher to determine academic achievement. Assessment is defined as the process of getting information to monitor progress and make educational decisions (Overton, 2003). Assessment is targeted at determining whether a youngster has a disability, whether special education is needed and what type of service (Smith, 2007). Diagnostic, formative and summative evaluations are necessary to determine effectiveness of students and programmes. Diagnostic tests are given before programmes are initiated, formative tests are given during the operation of programmes, and summative tests are given after programme operations (Eskay, 2009).

However, past and recent researches have shown that some professionals responsible for the education of students with disabilities lack competence in test selection, scoring an interpretation (Tsldyke and Thurlow 1983, and Smith 2007). In Nigeria, reports show that teacher education adopts the traditional model of selecting courses which meet only graduation requirement and lack manipulative skills and the ability to solve problems (Ajibola, 2008; Okoli and Onwuachi, 2009; Nweke, 2010 and Onyia, 2010). According to Louis and Doolag, 1991) limited knowledge and experience can lead to the development of prej-

udice and non-accepting attitudes and a natural discrimination against learners who are different. There is need for a change in the university or college of education based competent of the initial and in-service teacher education programme which would require a significant alternative in the nature of practicum experience. Onyia (2010) further suggested that teacher education in Nigeria should redesign their curriculum to focus on developing relevant skills for their presence and in -service candidates rather than focusing on the traditional model of selecting counsels that meet graduation requirement and ensure competence based on meeting institutional graduation center. Darling Hammond (1997:64) suggested that if "teacher are to prepare an ever more diverse groups of students for much more challenging work..., they will need substantially more knowledge and radically different skills than most now have and most schools or education now develop"

Assessment and education should not present an inaccurate picture of the students by focusing more on the disability or weaknesses rather than on what the student has learned. Teachers and other educational personnel have a professional responsibility to be accountable for each decision about assessment (Smith, 2007). However, past research has shown that educators responsible for the education of students with disabilities lacked competence in test selection, scoring and interpretations (Tsldyke & Thurlow, 1983, Rotatori and Obi, 1999 and Fischer, Frey and Thousand, 2003). Though this could be attributed to the fact that most universities do not have the equipments needed for the practical aspects of some studies, not that the educators could not master the techniques. They further highlighted that teachers tend to make idiosyncratic judgment on students school and life successes and failures based on their disability and also when they come from different cultural, educational and socio-economic backgrounds. This also calls for the update of teacher's knowledge on the trend of events in the field and procurement of science equipment specifically designed for them.

Nature of school children in Nigeria

In general and special education programmes, school children are consistently at risk of misidentification, misassessment, misclassification, misplacement and misinstruction because they behave, look, speak and learn differently (Eskay, 2001 & 2009). Harry (1992) about a decade ago, found that many diverse school children are constantly in trouble, their behavior pattern offensive to teachers because of cross cultural consonance. Cross cultural consonance is a mismatch of home and school cultures. Much of behavior is based in culture, so children from non-dominant cultures are more likely to be at variance with the culture of the school (Cartledge and Loe, 2001). Because of culturally accepted and expected behaviors and norms of conduct, being culturally diverse can put a student at

risk of being identified as having disability (Baca and Crevantes, 2004).

Moreover, Lee and Burkam (2002) noted that poor children's achievement is not at par with others when they begin elementary school. Poor children are exposed to poorest schools, a compounding factor in their low achievement. In addition, schools where poor students attend also have the greatest percentage of least prepared, inexperienced and uncertified teachers (Ingersol, 2002). All these differences can lead to inter and intra individual differences.

Research has proved the argument that individuals do not learn in the same way (Fischer & Rose, 2001). While educators understand that not all learners are the same, and that their needs are diverse, few teachers accommodate these differences in their classrooms (Gable, Hendrickson, Tonelson and Van Acker, 2000 and Guild, 2001). General and special educators tend to forget that the information that applies to one student in one setting may not apply to him/her in another setting and even when such information is correct, it cannot be generalized to suit all learners (Eskay, 2001). The researcher further noted that what works for one teacher/professional may not work for another teacher/professional.

In spite of the above pedagogical facts, educators are persistent in using one size – fits all technique to identify, assess, place and instruct all learners ignoring their heterogeneous characteristics. Uniformity, rather than attending to diversity dominates the culture of many contemporary classrooms (Gable et al 2000 and Cuuld, 2001). Many professionals conclude that the special education identification process is flawed and needs a major overhaul (Macmillan and Siperstein, 2002). Smith (2007) noted that current methods tend to over identified culturally and linguistically diverse students as having disabilities and to under identify them as being gifted and talented. In order words, directly or indirectly, educators fail to respond to inter-individual differences of these learners forcing the processes of identification, assessment, classification, placement and instruction to become loaded with inappropriate assumptions, negative stereotypes and illusory generalizations. This can further be linked to lack of enabling environment, which forces the educators to make do with what they have – regarding scientific and technological instruments and manpower development.

Relying on traditional methods have consistently created labels and categories for all learners and focus on exposing and remedying deficits and setting up several students for a pattern of failure (Levine, 2003). These misinterpretations by educators might be internalized by the students resulting in negative self-fulfilling behaviours (Eskay, 2009). Eskay further noted that pupils have rough times in the classrooms, schools and homes where their devaluation has led to self – defeating behaviors. According to Eskay, some parents give up on them, they fail to get along with classmates and teachers consistently attempt to get rid of them.

Sequel to these, there is utmost need to provide support mechanisms and divergent assessment and intervention techniques that work with these learners. In support of this, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) mandates that tests, assessment, procedures and evaluation material to be used must not be discriminatory or bias. This is highly critical considering that the common basis for all learners is a need for acceptance, nurturing and respect, attending to their differences, assist each child experience a degree of triumph and encourage them to be all that they can be as individuals (Fisher et al 2001; Mulroy and Eddinger 2003, and Stronge, 2004).

Assessment and intervention issues in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, research proves that after many years of improving on education, too many teachers still feel ill –prepared to accept responsibility associated with assessment and entire education of these children (Abang, 2005). With demographic changes and predicted shifts in powers and paradigms, general and special educators must confront issues of assessment and intervention

as they explore innovative way to maximize the academic potential of all learners.

Also Nigerian educational system is characterized with one shot assessment which concentrates on cognitive domain (Anyiam and Onwe, 2001). This type of assessment is called assessment OF learning and it does not display the holistic achievement of the learner and of which the disabled are disadvantaged. It has become apparent that educators need to re-look at assessment techniques, instructional practices and changing curriculum to suit diverse learners. Creating opportunities for all learners, by enriching the curriculum through multiple techniques and assessment develops learners and bring out their strengths (Gardner, 1999 and Green 1999). Assessment can be viewed as a multifaceted procedure of gathering information about a person in order to determine his/her need and therefore make professional decisions about the programme. It includes many formal and informal methods of evaluating progress and behavior. Even if they know that already, the environment may not permit them. The most recent assessment is called assessment FOR learning. This method emphasizes on student involvement in assessment of their learning. It can take the form of self assessment or peer assessment. The method helps learners to manage and modify their own learning process. It involves the teacher developing a RUBRIC which specifies the expectations or criteria for the assessment. That is it lists the activities the learner must do in order to score and what should be scored. It also gives a total score and the associated grade. Some other science educationists suggest the use of PORTFOLIOS in which the learners compile their work and participate in the assessment of their work as they determine what should be included within the portfolios. This calls for restructuring Nigerian educational system in such a way that assessment should be active and on-going process which will involve self assessment and collaborative assessment between the teacher and the learners. This will act as a catalyst for a revolution learning cycle.

The assessment tools mostly used in Nigeria schools are traditional and normed referenced forms which are based on single assessment of achievement and standardized test often used for placement and for employment (Eskay, 2009) Non-referenced assessment is the method that compares a student with the age or grade –level expectancies of a norm group. Though, it is the degree or amount of deviance from the expected norm could be an important factor in determining whether a student meets the requirements of eligibility necessary to receive special education services, the test items may not be adequately represent materials taught in a specific curriculum (Shapiro, 1996). Whatever assessment tools used, it is important that all assessment be reliable, valid and feasible in a school setting (Walker, Ramsey and Greshman, 2004). It is recommended by Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) that instruments selected must be validated, persons administering the test be adequately trained and that more than one simple instrument be used to determine eligibility (Overton, 2003). In other words, no single instrument could be used alone to determine eligibility.

The use of standardized tests of intelligence as used in many external exams has been criticized for years among professionals, and by parents (Smith, 2007). Tests of intelligence alone or even in combination with classroom norm –reference assessment do not reliably predict an individual's abilities, instead they discriminate against culturally and linguistically diverse students, and they do not lead to educationally useable results (Kennedy, 2001; Artiles et al, 2002; National Research Council 2002). Moreover, a restricted concept of aptitude that it reflects only students' abilities to achieve academically may be one reason why disproportionate numbers of students from culturally linguistically diverse groups continues to be unidentified when they need special education to be misidentified as needing special education and to be underrepresented in education of the gifted. Assessment of adaptive skills is typically done through systematic observation, interviews, questionnaire, rating scale, checklist, anecdotal records, sociometric techniques, test, project etc.. Though used minimally in Nigeria, measures of adap-

tive skills areas are used to determine whether the individual actually performs the everyday skills expected of an individual at that age in a typical environment. Experts noted that since parents and teachers are the source of information and may be biased in their assessments, practitioners express concern that the accuracy of these evaluation methods (Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2002) Assessment bias affects learners and assessment quality. According to Reynolds, Lowe, and Saenz (1998) assessment bias include inappropriate content, inappropriate standardization samples, examiner and language, and inequitable social consequences. Garhart and Garhart (1990) pointed out that test selection has ignored societal changes and changes in children's needs. Overton (2003) noted that additional problems in biased assessment include over interpretation of test results and accurate decision making by multidisciplinary team. Problems of interpretations have continued to haunt test results, and information from test score and other assessment methods must be carefully considered.

In view of the above, Individual with Disabilities Education Act 2004 requires that non-discriminatory or bias testing be established. According to IDEA (2004) tests, assessment, procedures and evaluation materials used to determine eligibility for special education must:

- Not be discriminatory on a racial or cultural basis.
- Be administered in the language or form most likely to provide accurate information on the child's abilities.
- Be in accordance with the original purpose of the measure to ensure reliability and validity.
- Include a variety of assessment
- Be administered by trained and knowledgeable personnel.

In a way of overcoming discriminating tests, Smith (2007) opined that multiple assessments be used. Balanced assessment may include some or all of the following measures; parents/staff/ student interviews, students history, checklists and developmental scales, progress monitoring, that uses direct and frequent measurements of students actual performance, such as oral reading rate, percentage of correct answers to mathematics problems, and number of homework assignments produced directly and turned in on time (Donovan and Cross 2002 Reschily, 2002 and Smith 2007). According to Hosp and Hosp (2003), it focuses every ones attention on instructional targets and the students' performance. Smith further noted that curriculum based measurement helps students see that they are responsible for their learning and resulting performance. Also science practical activities that require the students to use various sense organs during assessment should be used.

Performance based diagnostic procedures, such as authentic and portfolio assessments have particular merits for students of risk for under representation in special education. And yet, another solution may be to incorporate flexible and sensitive identification system that change depending on the individual situation, culture, economic status and region (Cuccaro, 1996; Yzquierdo and Blalock, 2004). The identification process should include input from multiple sources, such as parents and community leaders and service clubs (Patton & Baytops 995; Rogers. Dulan 1998). Even among individuals with disabilities, there should be multi-dimensional evaluation (Barkley and Edward; Giordon & Barley; Weyandt 2001) Vygotsky presented a dynamic assessment of disability. According to researcher, the structure of disability is too complex to be studied by simply summing up symptoms (Vygotsky).

Vygotsky further stated that the personality of children with disabilities is not determined by their disability, but rather by their social environment and its dialectical interaction with the child. Vygotsky therefore, cautions professionals to be certain that the disability was not in the "imagination of the investigator. Educators are reminded that children with disabilities be viewed in light of their developmental processes in their various environment (Vygotsky 1993 and Gindis 1999) in order words, the way in which a student adapts to his/her environment including culture and school has a profound impact on the students ability to have a successful school experience.

Teachers are required to know their students, their background and their cultural links (MacGillivray and Rueda, 2001). Knowing students well will allow teachers to figure out their strengths, thereby helping them to move forward therefore, the educators must keep the individual child's cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds in the forefront during the evaluation process. In another dimension, Barnett, Daly, Jones and Lentz (2004) opined that teachers need to try different validated teaching approaches to determine whether faculty instruction is the sources of the learner's problem. Moreover, research supports the view that curricular should be designed to engage students. It should have the ability to connect to their lives and positively influence their level of motivation (Coleman, 2001; Guild 2001; Hall 2002 and MacBride 2004).

To further overcome discriminatory testing problem, Smith (2007) suggested broadening the narrow view of intelligence reflected in standardized tests. Applying Howard Gardner's (1983) multiple intelligence to the identification process and assessment, as a whole may well help to reduce the under presentation of diverse students in gifted education programme. His theory of multiple intelligence is a departure from the view of intelligence as a single unit and he, therefore proposed eight intelligences. In other words, any assessment techniques that is heavily reliant on one of the intelligence leads to assessment bias.

To enable teachers overcome these challenges adequate preparation is needed. This is highly critical considering the fact, too, that the role of general and special education teachers in the identification process are evolving and expanding. In order words, the change in the teachers' responsibility in contemporary classroom necessitates a paradigm shift in teacher preparation. Smith (2007) recommended that teacher preparation programme should prepare teachers who are culturally competent by the knowledge of the background, heritage and traditions of their students and adjusting their instruction and make accommodations accordingly. Culturally competent teachers create learning environments that are culturally responsive, where the curriculum includes multiple perspectives and examples (Kozleski, Sobel and Taylor, 2003). In order words, teachers must view all learners as capable learners and their unique differences valued. Eskay & Oboegbulam(2013) strongly noted that to help learners in the contemporary time to succeed, the general and special educators must challenge their presumptions and expect their students to be individuals with divergent capabilities and intelligences. Being considerate and flexible will go a long way in building individual learners.

To be able to impact positive change in the teacher education preparation, Eskay (2009) suggested that courses in teacher preparation programme must begin to infuse these:

- Demographic changes
- Concept of intra and inter individual differences
- Non - discrimination assessment and instruction
- Ethics in psychological educational assessment
- And collaboration, consultation programme in general and special education programmes.

Research proves that there is need for a more holistic approach to address the need of the ever changing nature of learners and multicultural society (Karr and Wright, 1995). Moreover, since general and special education practitioners develop different standards for interpreting what they see, efforts must be made through team work to find out all about the learners background, and learning and testing environment.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

- 1.The use of one single shot assessment should be discouraged. Multi-dimensional evaluation should be used to give the disabilities more opportunities to use many sense organs.
2. Nigerian Government should make provision for regular re-training of teachers in this field to meet global trends.

3. Adequate admistering instruments should be made available.
4. The professionals should be in charge, for effectiveness and accuracy.
5. There should be collaboration between Government and private sector where necessary.
6. Assessment For learning which will involve the use of self assessment, peer assessment, collaborative assessment and the use of Rubrics should be adopted in Nigeria schools.

Conclusion

The Nigerian schools are filled with heterogeneous learners of diverse abilities differences in culture, socio-economic and educational backgrounds. The assessment and intervention techniques used in assessing abilities for identification, placement and instrument/intervention must consider the individuality differences among the learners. Teachers must be fully prepared to work with other professionals in selecting items, administering instruments, scoring and interpreting assessment scores in order to maximize potentials of all learners irrespective of differences. In abilities.

The use of a variety of assessment is encouraged and participation of several professionals in decision making process is required. Using many and varied assessment materials help professional establish a more holistic new of all students and ultimately avoid category and label which have adverse effect on individual learners.

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