

Assessment Strategies for Effective Teaching and Learning: A Case for Zimbabwean Secondary Schools

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Abstract:-This paper focuses on the strategies used by teachers to assess pupils in Zimbabwean secondary schools. Library research was adopted to find out what strategies teachers use in assessing their pupils. Assessment strategies are geared to promote effective teaching and learning. So, the methods centre on examination and frequent testing and evaluation. This continuous assessment is done throughout the year for effective teaching and learning to take place. The research found out that, in Zimbabwe, teachers use marks, extension and remedial record books for pupils. These records help the teachers to continually assess pupils' progress in mastering concepts in different subject areas on a daily basis. Continuous assessment comes in through the use of revision tests at the end of each chapter and pupils are also examined during and at the end of every term in order to assess their progress. At the end of the year, 'O' and 'A' level classes are given examinations based on vigorously maintained standards. An examination requirement that will demonstrate competence on the part of the pupil and the passing of these exams will show that effective teaching and learning took place in the classroom. So, continuous assessment gives pupils the right practice for achieving excellence in examinations. The study concludes that if assessment strategies are given due attention in the teaching and learning process, they promote quality education. Therefore, the study recommends that teachers and learners be seriously involved in the assessment process to promote excellence in teaching and learning.

Key Words: - Assessment strategies; effective teaching and learning

I. INTRODUCTION

Classroom assessment is conducted in order to enhance effective teaching and learning (Gronlund, 2003). Assessment enables teachers to look at areas that students lack mastery and where difficulties are experienced. Different methods of assessing students' progress in learning and difficulties encountered are employed by teachers in their classrooms (Popham, 2008). Assessment of students can be in the form of extension record books, remedial books and record of marks. These records help teachers to evaluate the progress of their students as well as evaluating their own teaching methods. Black and William (1998) assert that improvement of learning occurs when teachers use classroom assessment information to establish knowledge, skills and attitudes possessed by their students and incorporate that information in planning for lessons.

Overall, classroom assessment can be viewed as a totality of all the processes and procedures used to gather useful information about the progress in teaching and learning which facilitates effective learning and teaching. Assessment is an essential process in the learning and teaching environment. It shows the teacher whether course's learning objectives have been achieved. A learning objective is what students should be able to do by the time a lesson is completed. So, it is important to continually assess pupils almost on a daily basis. The classroom practitioner pays attention to slow, average and fast learners, through the use of remedial, extension and individual record books. In these books, the teacher records each activity that is done by every student. Keeping focus on students and learning, as assessments are designed as the first step toward high-quality assessments.

Creating high classroom assessments is one of the most important responsibilities for a teacher. Excellent teaching requires that teachers keep reliable and valid information about their students' performance. This high quality information helps teachers provide students with feedback that helps them to increase their knowledge and skills (Tuckman, 2011). Thus the teacher's decision is determining the segment of instruction; a lesson, a unit, a group of units to be covered by the assessment.

Below is a brief discussion of the two types of assessments that were considered in this paper.

II. TYPES OF ASSESSMENT

Deciding the type of assessment in the classroom is an important aspect in assessing students. This paper focuses on formative and summative assessment because these assessments are common in the Zimbabwean secondary schools.

2.1 Formative assessment

Formative assessment is generally carried out throughout a course or project. Formative assessment is used to aid learning. In the classroom, formative assessment is when a teacher provides feedback on a student's work and is not necessarily used for grading purposes. These can take the form of diagnostic, standardized tests, quizzes, oral questions, or draft work. They are carried out concurrently with

instructions. The formative assessments aim to see if the students understand the instruction before doing a summative assessment.

2.2 Summative assessment

Summative assessment is generally carried out at the end of a course or project. In an educational setting, these are typically used to assign students a course grade. Summative assessments are evaluative. They are made to summarize what the students have learned, to determine whether they understand the subject matter well. This type of assessment is typically graded, for example, pass or fail and can take the form of tests, examinations or projects. These assessments are often used to determine whether a student has passed or failed a class. A criticism of summative assessments is that they are reductive, and learners discover how well they have acquired knowledge too late for it to be of use, however, they remain important for the classroom practitioner.

III. RECORD BOOKS

In assessing students, teachers use record books in which they follow up on the students' progress during the teaching/learning process. The students are put in categories and the teacher keeps valid information on each student's progress. This paper focuses on three documents among others, which the teacher uses in assessing his/her students.

3.1 Extension record book

This record is used to follow up success or achievements in learning noted by the teacher. It shows pupils who need extra and more challenging work in given subject areas. An extension activity is an activity that extends the learning of the lesson. Extension activities can be done in small groups or by a single student. These extension activities are levelled to fit the student. For gifted students these are challenging. Extension tasks are useful strategies to deal with mixed ability classes, as they can be given to early finishers or set as extra, more demanding work for higher level learners.

The extension record book states the names of the pupils given extra work; the work given and the evaluation made. If well administered, extension work also serves to maintain discipline by keeping the fast and gifted learners busy after completing the written work initially given to them. Extension work occupies the fast and gifted learners because if they are not given more work to do, they can distract the teacher's and other students' attention. In a mixed ability class, the teacher has the responsibility to pay attention to the average and slow learners. If the fast learners are not given more and challenging work, this might cause chaos in the classroom.

The extension record book is used for continuous assessment by the classroom practitioner. More students can be added on the list if the teacher finds out from his/her formative assessment students who need extension work. During formative assessment, the teacher might also discover that some students no longer need extension work but instead,

need remediation. Then it becomes the mandate of the teacher to record such students in the remedial record book. So, the extension record book does not necessarily have to keep permanent names of students who need extension work. Students may be affected by different factors during the learning process and the teacher should be aware of all these in order to help his/her students. The teacher's alertness to students' progress becomes crucial in his/her teaching. If the teacher is not alert in assessing his/her students, he/she might end up putting students in the wrong categories and this might have adverse effects on the students. This implies that the teacher's assessment should be objective.

3.2 Remedial record book

Remediation in the classroom is done more carefully to assist the learner. Many teachers may regard remediation as a matter of fulfilling the needs. The approach to remedial cycle is teaching, testing and teaching. Remediation is taken regularly for a few pupils or the whole group can be remediated if they do not understand concepts introduced. There should be different approaches to the solutions given to pupils since causes of not grasping the concepts may differ. When assessing pupils for remediation, they should not be labelled as being 'useless or helpless' the teacher should find ways and means of assisting the pupils concerned so that they may grasp the concepts slowly. If the pupils do not grasp the concepts, then they should appear in the remedial record book and strategies should be changed now and then. Sometimes because of continuous failing, pupils may lose interest or they may not understand. It is wise to ask a resource person to help and never get rid of such pupils completely. In remediation do not rush, lose hope or patience. When judgements are made the evaluation should be self evaluatory and suggestions on the solutions to remediation given and failed. Remediation should be a continuous process and children who could have grasped the concepts should be removed from the remedial group and join the whole group. This remedial group should not be treated as the group of poor performers. They should be treated like the rest of the class and do not give them special favours. It is necessary to consider doing remedial lessons when both the teacher and learners are free or where there is time during the lessons. The exercise in the form of written work should not be too challenging and at times less work to be given if the pupils are to grasp the concepts quickly. Never allow yourself to leave remediation incomplete. Always be satisfied that the pupils have understood. Get expert advice on teaching techniques for students of all ages who require remediation in the classroom.

The word "remedial," by both print and web definition, means "to rectify, improve or remedy something." And so it should be in the remedial teaching arena. Whether its mathematics, reading, or spelling, defining the problem is as important as defining the fix! Assessment is the first step in working through a student's struggles, and there are several ways to initiate this process. For example, if a student shows signs of learning problems, especially in reading, a professional

cognitive skills evaluation should be the next step. This kind of assessment utilizes testing methods to identify specific areas of concern; anything from vision and auditory processing, memory, logic, reasoning and attention are among the cognitive skills measured.

From kindergarten to college, labelling a student as "remedial" has in the past had a negative connotation. Academic professionals are working harder in today's learning environment to see that students receive an opportunity to achieve and excel rather than be labeled "slow."

Quizzing students more often is another commonly used method in a well-balanced remedial teaching program. Taking the extra time to check each individual's progress gives the teacher an opportunity to regroup if necessary. It can also take the overall test pressure off students who tend to "freeze" when tested on larger amounts of material. Remediation is not done once; the teacher does the exercise again.

3.3 Individual progress record

Every teacher compiles and maintains an updated individual progress record for each of the pupils in the class. This record also keeps track of marks and grades attained in set targets attained by pupils in different learning domains. It shows the academic achievements and progress made by the pupils. Entries of marks obtained in tests, revision exercises and selected activities can be made weekly, fortnightly, monthly or termly. According to Oguninyi (1994), the record of marks should be based on the pupils' performance upon completing a concept, unit or topic. If the teacher sets good test items it will help him/her identify problem areas that pupils experience so that he/she can attend to them effectively.

IV. WHY KEEPING RECORDS?

Record keeping involves the organization and management of data such as marks, grades and other relevant details that help to assess and evaluate pupils and the teaching and learning process. Records are communication devices that Aggarwaal (1992) sees as being about compilation of different judgments, held from time to time during the course of study of a pupil. In these records, the teacher should record work from the original source and also to make sure that information recorded does not make the students overconfident. In the records, the teachers record students' progress after marking exercises. With these records in place, the teacher will avail the records for parents and stakeholders.

This means that records in the classroom situation are tools that are used to understand pupils in order to facilitate better planning and learning experiences.

V. WHATGOOD RECORDS ENTAIL

- ❖ The records should be valid, which means information must be from original sources and should not be distorted.
- ❖ Correct students' information should be recorded because it culminates into effective teaching and reporting.

Gronlund (1985) believes that the prime purpose of record keeping is to improve learning and instruction and to help to monitor the progress of individual learners. They provide information to the teacher and pupils as well as other stakeholders. Records show that teachers have taken statutory responsibility/ accountability such as delivering the national curriculum and monitoring learners' progress.

VI. CONCLUSION

The paper has tackled on important aspects of assessment in secondary schools. Assessing helps the teacher to identify pupils who are talented and those who are less talented. This helps the teacher to plan on who needs remediation and as well as extension work. The record of marks then shows the teacher which trend to follow in his/her lesson delivery. A teacher who does not assess his/her pupils will never know the educational needs of the pupils. In most cases, such teachers are not effective classroom practitioners. Therefore, it is imperative for secondary school teachers to assess their pupils. Assessment in secondary schools should be taken seriously and should be taken as a process and not an event.

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