

Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ) as Assessment Tool in Primary Schools: Perceived Influence on Students Writing Skills in Secondary Schools in Yaounde VI.

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Abstract: This study examines the influence of excess used MCQ as an assessment or test tool in senior primary schools on their writing competences in early secondary schools. The problem of this study emanates from the observed fall in writing skills among early primary school pupils in Yaounde V. Majority of the students who register in Form One do not know how to write well. The piloted and validated qualitative data analyses tool (interview guide) were used to collect data from 18 participants being 10 primary school class 5 and 6 teachers and 8 secondary school English teachers. The data was examined and the majority of the opinions sampled were considered and it indicated that: Junior secondary school students have unadorned writing challenges due to excess use of MCQ as assessment tools. They concede that it does not give the learner the ability to practice their own writing skills, thus, they turn to neglect it because it's not much tested in the exams. We therefore recommend to the teachers that; they should employ a heterogeneous testing method in pupil's exams.

Key Words: MCQ, Assessment tool, perceived influence, writing skills.

I. INTRODUCTION

In a school system, the teaching- learning process ends with an assessment. Assessment is a systematic procedure for measuring pupils' progress or level of achievement against defined criteria to make a judgment about them. The goal of assessment in school is usually to support learning and to establish the competence of individual students in a particular lesson (Olayemi 2013). Assessment helps the person being assessed identify and respond to his own learning needs. According to Kabosso (2012), assessment in primary schools helps learners to meet certain standards. Moreover, the teacher uses the assessment data to identify strengths and weaknesses in student performance and to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Equally, assessment helps to assist student learning, to assess the effectiveness of a particular instructional strategy, to assess and improve the effectiveness of curriculum, to assess and improve teaching effectiveness and to provide data that assist in decision making, (Swearingen, 2002). There are several types of assessment among which we have; diagnostic assessment, formative assessment, summative assessment, impassive Assessment, norm-referenced assessment, and Criterion-Referenced Assessment (Vallikat, 2021). These different assessment strategies employ diverse

tools to its realization in a classroom. During the formative assessment, most teachers in Cameroon primary schools employ the multiple choices questioning method which is commonly known as the MCQ tool for assessment.

Assessment in primary schools in Cameroon takes three forms (oral, written, practical). Information can be gathered about learner's progress through: observation checklists; learner's self-assessment; daily practical assignments; samples of learner's work; learner's willingness to participate and contribute in projects/conferencing; oral and written quizzes; portfolios; willingness to be involved in class and school activities. Assessment of learning is recommended to be done six times a year, implying twice a term. This is in line with the sequential assessment policy previously in use in schools in Cameroon. The CBA assessment practices range from performance assessment, comprehensive assessment, self-assessment to diagnostic assessment, and formative as well as summative assessment with emphasis on diagnostic and formative assessments. A grading system was introduced in the academic year 2019/2020 wherein upon assessment; the students' performances are graded in four principal categories in context of CBA thus;

- 0-10 is labelled CNA (Competence not acquired)
- 11 – 14 is labelled CBA (Competence being acquired)
- 15- 17 is labelled CA (Competences acquired)
- 18 – 20 is labelled A⁺ indicating the learner's expertise in the said competence(s) evaluated.

Formative assessment is one of the key factors of CBA. This assessment takes the form of testing strategies put in place by the teacher to get feedback during a lesson in order to ensure that learners are actually learning. Besides, remedial lessons play a primordial role in the CBA assessment policy geared at taking slow learners to the same level like those that are smarter. This grading system seems to be violated by the assessment practices as most assessment tools and process may be invalid and without objectivity in most cases.

Before its inclusion, the MCQ was tested in some selected schools in Cameroon for three academic years (from 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008). During this period, the GCE board and other educational stakeholders like

pedagogic inspectors schooled the GCE markers, staff and the students on the basic steps and conditions involved. It was introduced in the ordinary level GCE in the academic year 2009-2010 and progressively to GCE A-levels. It became the teachers' most used assessment methods for all educational levels in Cameroon. Most teachers who use MC questioning tool especially in the basic education, opine that it is easier to mark and test learner's competences within a stipulated time frames using this instrument than the others.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The MCQ is an assessment tool where in learners are given exams in a way that test the whole work done. According to Hematti and Ghaderi (2014), Multiple-Choice (MC) question formats include a stem, or prompt, and alternative responses. The stem is, in fact, the question. The alternatives that are not correct are called distractors. There are different types of MC examinations. The most projecting MC test uses MC questions with one stem and some choices; one of these selections is correct, the other ones are incorrect alternatives, called distractors (Bradbard, Parker, & Stone, 2004). Several other MC formats were designed to measure more complex thinking skills. The amalgamation of more than one correct answer is a good way to reduce the chances of guessing a question correctly (Bush, 1999). Hughes (2003) lists problems associated with MCQ. Testing the recognition knowledge, guessing, limitation in testing different components of a language, difficulty in preparing the successful items, harmful backwash, and cheating are among these problems. Moreover, the cognitive processing involved in determining an answer in this format bears little similarity to the way we process texts for information in real-life, and it can harm the theory-based validity of the test method (Weir, 2005). However, due to some advantages comprising high marker reliability, ease of scoring and objective scoring, MCQ is still a main instrument in testing and assessment.

Writing skills among early secondary school students in Yaounde V

Writing skills are such an important part of a student's education. Writing is a way for students to express and explain themselves adequately, and it incorporates a wide range of skills from grammar and punctuation to clarity and creativity, (Martin, 2021). Writing is an important form of communication in day-to-day life, but it is especially important in junior secondary schools. Students can find it thought-provoking to find ideas to include in their writing and its culture has its own style for organizing academic writing. Flower and Hayes (2011, p.28) describe that writing is a cognitive practice that involves four interactive components: task, environment, the writer's long-term memory, and the composing processes themselves. The task environment consists of writing topic, the audience, the degree of the urgency of the task, and the text produced so far.

The writer's long-term memory retains definitions of the topic, the identity of the audience, and possible writing plan. The writing processes include planning, translating, and

reviewing. Planning involves generating ideas, goals, and procedures. Translating involves expressing ideas and goals in verbal forms, and reviewing includes evaluating and revising. Fulwiler (2002, p.16) describes writing as a complex activity, variable and multifaceted. Also, Kane (2000, p.17) states that writing is a complex activity too, when we think about a topic we are already beginning to select words and construct sentences or in other words to draft. According to Miles Myersin (2009, p.3) one purpose of writing is making of text and one way to learn how to make anything is to have a model, either for duplication or for triggering one's own ideas.

Furthermore, Taylor (2009, p.96) states that the usual function of an introduction in academic writing is to tell the reader what issue is being raised and what justifies the writer in raising it. In other word, writing is part of media to give information that happened to the reader. Different writing communities followed by different punctuation and design rule in communications such as letter, reports, and publicity. These are frequently on-transferable from one community or language to another. Such differences are easily seen in the different punctuation convention for the quotation of direct speech which different language use, or the way in which commas are used instead of much full stops certain languages, while comma 'over use' is frowned on by many writers and editors of English.

Writing Process

Richard and Renandya (2010, p.315) state that writing process as approval activity may be broadly seen as comprising four main stages: planning, drafting, revising, and editing. Before starting to write a paragraph there are some steps: pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing those steps will help to make a better writing.

- Pre-writing: Oshima and Hogue (2007, p.16) state that pre-writing is the way to get ideas. In this step, the learner chooses a topic and collect ideas to explain the topic.
- Drafting: Richards and Renandya (2010, p.317) state that once sufficient ideas are gathered at planning stage, the first attempt at writing that is drafting may proceed quickly. At drafting stage, the writer is focused on the fluency of writing and is not preoccupied with grammatical accuracy or the neatness of the draft.
- Revising: Richards and Renandya (2010, p.317), when the students revise, they review their texts on the basic of the text feedback given in the responding stage.
- Editing: Richards and Renandya (2010, p.318) state the students in tidying up their text as they prepare the final draft for evaluation by the teacher. They edit their own peer's work for grammar, spelling, punctuation, diction, sentence structure, and accuracy of supportive textual material such as quotation.
- Publishing: The point of publishing is having someone read the writer's work. In teaching writing to the

students, the process of publishing can be done through group discussion, school newspapers, websites, outside school, or portfolio. In addition to the above five stages of writing, there is a last step that will be passed authors; assessing writing. The most important thing that can be learned about assessment is to get the students involved as fully as possible. When the students lead in assessing their own abilities, learning dramatically increases.

In writing there are three some characteristic of a good paragraph, such as: topic sentence, supporting sentence, and concluding sentence. These sentences should develop the main idea.

Topic Sentence- A well-organized paragraph has topic sentence that aims to supports or develops a single idea. Moreover, Zemach and Islam (2005, p. 14) state that a good topic sentence should include one clear topic or an opinion or idea of the topic. Topic sentence has impartial function that is substitutes or supports an essay's thesis statement, unifies the content of a paragraph and directs the order of the sentences and advices the reader of the subject to be discussed and how the paragraph subject will discuss it. Moreover, a topic sentence contains controlling ideas which limit the scope of the discussion to ideas that are manageable in a paragraph.

Supporting sentence - The sentences that follow expand upon the topic, using controlling ideas to limit the discussion. The main idea is supported by:

- a) Evidence in the form of facts, statistics, theoretical probabilities, reputable, educated opinions,
- b). Illustrations in the form of examples and extended examples,
- c). Argumentation based on the evidence presented. Furthermore, Zemach and Islam (2005, p. 58) states that ideas and sentence need to be ordered logically. It can be done by arranging sentence that are parts of the same ideas go together. Sentence can go in chronological order; moreover, one way to organize writer's supporting sentence is to decide which ideas are most important. Writer's often put the most important ideas last in a paragraph, so the strongest sentences are the last ones the readers see.

Concluding Sentence - Concluding sentence is a sentence at the end of the paragraph which summarizes the information that has been presented (Walters, 2000, p. 1). The conclusion is the writer's last chance to make their part clear. The concluding paragraph consist of;

- a) A summary of the main points, or a restatement of writer explanation in different word,
- b) Writer's final comment on the subject based on the information they have provided.

According to Umair (2014), some essential facts which make writing complex are unity and coherence. Both of them are important for the reader for they will make it easier to

understand the contents of paragraph itself. According to Oshima and Houge (2007, p.67) unity is an important element to make a good paragraph. A paragraph has unity whether the entire supporting sentence discuss only one idea where from beginning until the end, each sentence is directly related to the topic. Moreover, Oshima and Houge (2007, p.76) argue that a coherence paragraph flow smoothly from the beginning to the end. The readers can follow the ideas easily because one sentence leads naturally to the next one.

Problem statement

This adapted testing method used in Cameroon primary schools is not convenient for learners to continue education. Many form one students have serious writing issues dues to the neglect of writing skills in most primary school testing. The teacher's clingy on MCQ testing method plunged learners into customize stuffing of lessons in order to cover a larger material and arm themselves to guest the right answers. Most learners believe that it's all about guest work, thus Weimar (2018) says with lucky guesses students get credit for correct answers. It looks like they know something they don't know. Moreover, wrong answer options expose students to misinformation, which can influence successive thinking about the content writing. This is especially true if students carefully consider the options and select an incorrect one after having persuaded themselves that it is right (Weimar, 2018). Others have even refused to read in preparation for exam as they believe that they could tick any answer option and luck may smile on them. In primary schools in Yaounde V, the prevalence of MCQ testing method continually neglected the effective testing of other competencies like academic writing or composition. In most of these primary schools, learners have turned to forget about creative writing because they simply need to tick the best answer option, thus, many learners' writing ability has been affected.

Research objective

To examine the influence of teacher's usage of MCQ in primary schools on learner's writing skills in junior secondary school in Yaounde V.

Research questions

1. How does MCQ as assessment tool in primary school's influence learner's writing skills in junior secondary schools in Yaounde V?
2. What strategies in your opinion can be use improve learner with writing difficulties in colleges?

III. METHODOLOGY

Research design

This qualitative study employs the survey research design.

Population

The population of this study includes all primary and secondary school teachers, all primary pupils and students in Yaounde V.

Target population

The study targets class 5 and 6 pupils and their teachers and forms one and two students and English teachers.

Sampling technique and sample size

The study employs the purposive sampling techniques to select participants (Teachers, pupils and students). With the help of the Yaro Yamene formula, a sample size of 30 participants was acquired for the study.

Instruments for data collection

The interview tool was used to collect data from junior secondary school students and teacher and students and senior primary pupil and teachers in Yaounde V.

Data analysis

Interviews were analyzed with the use of theme framework technique as described by Srivastava, and Thomson, (2009).

Presentation of findings

1. *In your opinion, how does MCQ as assessment tool in primary school's influence learner's writing skills in junior secondary schools in Yaounde V?*

Teacher A: As a teacher I employ multiple evaluation methods to text my learners. MCQ happens to be among the latest ones which I use frequently. I must say it is appropriate for assessing students' mastery of details and specific knowledge. I use it to most effectively to measure both simple knowledge and complex concepts. But in my analysis, I think the fact that pupils just have to tick the most appropriate answer could limit them from constructing complex sentences. That could be known if I were to teach them as they progress to college.

Teacher B: the MCQ is quite a relaxed but complex evaluation tool to use. That is why is actually use for objective test. However, in as much as it tests objectively, there is a little challenge. Pupils do not practice how to write compositions that entails long writing. Surely that will affect their writing skills when they get to college.

Teacher D: MCQ is one of the latest learners' testing tools which was introduced in Cameroon some years back. This strategy is quite reliable as it enables the teachers to test every detail of the lesson and also makes learners to read the whole lessons or the whole book when preparing for the examination. But I think that those teachers who apply solely the MCQs during exams are not promoting writing skills among learners. Most learners simply do guest work and could still pass. So there is no show of efforts in writing or constructing from letters to words, phrases and to full sentences. Meaning that when the primary school children progress they will not have a mastery of writing ability.

2. *In your opinion, how does the over use of MCQ testing style effects the learners in the future, (that is in the earlier college, form 1 and 2)*

Teacher A: well, it is noticeable that when the pupil is trained on lucky or selection by choice, it can promote laziness among students at some point. Most of our pupils and students have termed the MCQ 'tumbu tumbu' and they know that when you read or not it does not make any greater difference. So obviously, they learners stay away from work, or construction of their own personal ideas using their own words.

Teacher B: writing is a continuous process that begins from the base to the senior classes and become more challenging as learner's progress. The academic ladder demands that all the writing skills be practiced and tested for understanding in order to promote the learners. With the MCQ evaluation style, which neglects writing and focuses on ticking and cycling the most appropriate answer makes it difficult for the students to learn how to write any lengthy sentence. Once they get prompted to secondary schools, they will obviously have challenges writing long sentences as answers even the construction of basic sentences to build up a composition.

Teacher C: It has an effect on the pupil when they become students. looking at the examination setting for form one and two, some scripts ask learners to write a short essay. Learners who have not been use to writing may have some difficulties to do so especially when they are asked to write based on their own ideas.

Teacher D: every now and then, we hear of college teachers complaining of less qualified pupil graduating from primary and entering the secondary schools. From all indications, the perpetual use of MCQ is not left out among the different causes. Apart from the MCQ, other causes like common promotion and even the need to show the most performant schools that has motivated teachers to participate in the malpractices during examinations. So I believe that this makes up one of the reasons for poor performances in schools

3. *What strategies in your opinion can be used to improve learner with writing difficulties in colleges?*

Teacher A: according to me, the first thing we can consider is the teaching and assessment methods used in primary schools. If the primary school teachers are not effective, the pupils too will be left with too much to be desired. Once the quality of primary school teachers does not yield the right results, it means their product too will not be of prime quality. Moreover, there is a need to exploit heterogeneous evaluation or test methods in order to enable learners develop diverse mindset and activate other hidden skills that are need in daily life.

Teacher B: every competence acquired in schools has a bases. Writing competence is a very useful competence in daily life. so it very important that the primary school teachers should set a strong base for the students. Again, the quality of their secondary school teacher, mostly the English teacher can remedy the situation by recycling the students in some writing exercises. By giving more work that will activate writing skills.

Teacher C: the secondary schools teaching methods can be of help. The way the teachers teach can be more of writing for the first term. And in the course of the year, the learner pick-up and

become balance in school. the teacher can also use different motivation or reinforcement methods in class to direct learner's interest in writing. The learners are young and dynamic and can learn any skills at any level.

IV. CONCLUSION

The process of teaching learning has always been a chain from the basic schools to the higher institutions. The teaching learning –process, the curriculum and any other process in the educational system is designed in accordance with the learners' ages. This implies that if at a certain age, something interrupts or the process if disrupted, it will lead to a delay or challenge in the future except recovered in one way or the other. In the Cameroon educational system, the academic ladder is structure such that the pupils leave primary school with specific competences that will enable to continue in secondary school without major challenges. However, it is seen that the abrupt introduction of MCQ as testing method which all the teachers now use in class evaluation in primary schools has comparatively reduced learners (students) writing skills. The students developed considerable writing challenges because the whole question paper will be tick and circle. They are not giving the possibility to express themselves in writing. The MCQ is not a bad testing method per say, but with the Cameroon reality, the learners easily adapt to wrong practices thus, they no longer read and prepare to show their writing capacity. They rather count on luck and grace to get the right answer during an exam.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the learners writing skills are negatively affected by the use of MCQ at all levels, without giving a chance to practice other skills. The teachers in their interview responses opine that the teaching-learning process in a chain and once there is a neglect or disruption the system the learners experience challenges

along the way. This situation has typical of primary and early secondary schools in Yaounde V and this could only be remedied by the secondary school teachers' ability to teach specific skills, the learners' interest to activate their writing skills. The role of the parents cannot be undermined in the student's academic life. Parents with sufficient means can hire an expert for writing to school their children at home. Others can provide writing materials and encourage their children; use reinforcement strategies to enable them work and improve upon their writing competences.

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