



Years Of Experience And Professional Qualification As Determinants Of Teachers' Attitude Towards Assessment For Learning In Rivers State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the attitude of teachers in secondary school towards assessment for learning in Rivers State as determined by certain demographic characteristics such as years of experience and professional qualification. The study was guided by two research questions and two corresponding null hypotheses. The study used the ex-post facto research design, with a sample of 498 teachers drawn through multistage sampling technique from all the teachers in Rivers State. The researcher-designed instrument was used for data collection which was adequately assessed for validity and reliability, the reliability yielded a coefficient of 0.621 using split half. The data for the study was analyzed using mean and standard deviation for the research questions, while independent sample t-test and ANOVA, as well as post-hoc multiple comparison test were used for testing the hypotheses where necessary. The result from the study showed that years of experience and professional qualification significantly determine their attitude towards assessment for learning. On the basis of the result, it was recommended that in-service training be provided for all teachers so that they can appreciate and implement assessment for learning in their classroom instruction.

Keywords: assessment for learning, attitude, years of experience, professional qualification.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of assessment of students' educational achievement has received increased attention among stakeholders in the educational sector, such as researchers, parents, teachers and educational administrators. This attention has highlighted assessment as integral to the process of teaching and learning. This is based on recent awareness and understanding of the relationship of learning theories, new teaching methodologies, knowledge and skills that are necessary for the 21st century (Birenbaum, 2003). Helping students develop these competencies and become life-long learners' demands that educators integrate into the teaching and learning process assessment practices that are that are unconventional at the school and classroom level. In order to do this, the concept of assessment need to be established.

According to Stefanakis cited in Amakiri and Orluwene (2016), the root word of assessment which is "assess" is derive from the Latin word "assidence" which means to "sit beside". Going by the

etymological meaning then “assessment” literally means to “sit beside the learners.” Continuing in the root definition of the term, According to the Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (2002), assessment comes from the root word “assess” which means to judge, decide or determine the importance, size, or value of something. This definition carries the idea that assessment involve observing or collecting information on events, objects or human behavior in order to determine the quality of the event, object or person.

From an educational approach, Awutoa-Efebo (1999) conceptualized educational assessment as the process of giving value to the learning achieved at the conclusion of a course or learning experience, to better understand and direct students’ competencies in the subject thought. From this same perspective, Ukwujie (2007) posits that assessment is the process of documenting, usually in measurable terms, knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, practices or generally what behavior a learner does or does not have, acquire or develop before, before, during and after the end of instruction, or a course of study, or a period of learning experiences. This definition shows that unlike the general view of assessment as being done only at the end of a programme to determine knowledge level, assessment can be done before, during or after a programme and can involve other skills and competencies.

Similarly, Lambert and Lines (2004:4) defined assessment as the process of gathering, interpreting, recording and using information about students’ responses to educational task and procedures. Blank and William in Al-Shehri (2008) sees assessment as the process by which a tool is used to gather information that can be used to adapt and modify the teaching approach and learning techniques in order to assist students learn maximally. Taking a similar perspective, Cole (2010) stated that assessment is the attempt by teachers, parents and other educational actors to determine what students know and what they still need to know using not just test and quizzes, but other measures such as summarizing, diagramming, comparing and demonstrating. This definition highlights importance of assessment as involving the discrepancy between students’ knowledge and the knowledge they lack using various approaches.

Summarizing the definitions above, Salvia and Ysseldyka (2004:4) defined assessment as the general procedure involved in the collection of students’ data on educational-related performance with the purpose of making decisions about individual students and groups, as well as providing assistance to them based on the performance. While data collection is often used synonymously assessment, Palomba and Banta (1991) opined that not all data collection process in education is assessment. Providing a clearer definition of assessment, they defined it as the systematic collection, review and use of information about educational programs for the purpose of improving on students learning and development. Contributing in this direction, Erwin cited in Biggs (2011) stated that assessment is the process of defining, selecting, designing, collecting, analysing, interpreting and using information to increase students learning and development. Furthermore, Allen (2004) concluded that assessment involves the use of empirical data on students’ learning to refine programmes and improve students learning.

From these definitions, assessment is defined and used in this study as the process by which information about students’ knowledge, skills, ability, belief, aptitude, attitude, performance, competencies and opinions are gathered, analysed, interpreted and utilized in order to assist students benefit optimally from a programme of instruction as well as continue, adapt or terminate the programme. Embedded in this definition is the assumption that assessment is not and should not be limited to the knowledge and cognitive competencies of the students, but rather should involve other competencies such as affective and psychomotor. Also, this definition recognizes that assessment is not done haphazardly, but involves a systematic and structured process which ought to be followed religiously for the purpose of helping students optimally, not to be defeated. Finally, the definition takes into cognizance the fact that assessment is not an end in itself, but rather serves the purpose of improving students learning, as well as restructuring the learning programme or terminating it, if need be, in order to improve the efficiency of the programme. So every form of assessment, has as its ultimate goal the enhancement or improvement of students learning through helping students directly or structuring the programme of instruction to meet that need.

This broad-based definition of assessment implies that there are various types of assessments. Assessment in education has been classified from various perspective depending on the criteria being used at a particular point time. One classification of assessment has been in the domain of educational objectives being assessed. In this regard, three basic methods are obtainable which includes cognitive, affective and psychomotor assessment. In cognitive assessment, an individual's skills competence in cognitive related task such as intelligence, achievement in memory and recall is assessed. For affective assessment, a person's personality, emotional dispositions, beliefs and attitude is assessed. While in psychomotor assessment, students ability to coordinate body part to produce specific result is assessed (Awai, 2017). However, in the most educational systems in the world, most classification of assessment is done on the basis of purpose to the outcome it will be used. From this perspective, three broad classifications of assessment has been done namely: Assessment as Learning (AAL), Assessment of Learning (AOL) and Assessment for Learning (AFL). Before discussing, on these various classifications of assessment, it should be noted some times these forms of assessments overlap. Also different terms have been used in operationalizing these forms of assessment. However effort would be made in terms that have been used interchangeably with these classifications.

Assessment as Learning refers to the use of ongoing self-assessment by students in order to monitor their personal learning progress. In this format, assessment is "characterized by students reflecting on their own learning and making adjustments so that they can achieve deeper understanding" of learning goals and objectives (Western and Northern Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Education, [WNCP], 2006:41). The Victorian Government (2017) states that assessment as learning occurs when students reflect and monitor their progress to inform their future learning goals either through formal, peer or self-feedback. A knowledge of assessment for learning is essential in this age where students have access to most information through digital platforms such as the internet. This is important because teachers in this present age are no longer "knowledge-bearers" but "knowledge-guides." Teachers do not need only to guide students through the process of knowledge acquisition, but also through the process of understanding their own cognitive processes so that students learn to monitor their own learning and make needed adjustment.

Assessment of learning is also known as summative assessment and evaluative assessment. According to Earl (2003) assessment of learning provide a rubric that is used primarily to compare students and report progress. In the opinion of WNCP (2006), assessment of learning refers to strategies designed to confirm what students know, demonstrate whether or not they have met curriculum outcomes or the goals of their individualized programs, or to certify proficiency and make decisions about students' future programs or placements. For Cole (2010), assessment of learning reveals to the measures or strategies used to provide a yardstick of students' learning once instruction is complete.

Assessment for learning has also been called formative assessment, classroom assessment and descriptive assessment (Stiggins, Arter, Chappius & Chappius, 2006; Reeves, 2001) Assessment for learning is the latest paradigm in assessment culture. This change in assessment culture is necessitated by various factors which have been adequately documented by Brown (2004). According to the author, in many countries of the world today, the student population is becoming diverse with increasing number of part-time students, adult students and students coming from non-traditional backgrounds. A diverse population of learners necessitates a change in practice in post-compulsory education, with less focus on didactic tutor-led approaches and more concentration on the learning outcomes that students can hope to achieve.

With this shift, there have been a plethora of definitions of what AFL means. According to Cole (2010), AFL aims at providing initial feedback to the students, teachers, and other adults to result in changes in instruction, motivation, or behavior in order to impact students' learning and growth. This form of assessment involves teachers providing descriptive rather than evaluative feedback to students and communicating students' result to others who may be able to assist them. According to Shute (2008) AFL involves providing educative feedback designed to provide immediate, relevant and useful information to the students which are non-evaluative but supportive, timely and specific to support modification of thinking, or behavior to improve learning.

Similarly, the WNCP (2006) conceives AFL as an investigative strategy used by teachers to find out as much as they can about what their students know and can do, and what confusions, preconceptions or gaps they might have which limits their learning. Black and Williams in William (2011) defines AFL as all those activities undertaken by teachers and students that provide information that is used as evidence to actually adapt the teaching process to meet students need. Similarly, Cowie and Bell (1999:32) defined AFL as the “process used by teachers and students to recognize and respond to students learning in order to enhance that learning, during the learning”. To Shepard et al (2005:275) AFL is the assessment carried out during the instructional process for the purpose of improving teaching or learning.”

Instead of providing a direct definition of AFL, Broadfoat, Daugherty, Gardner, Gipps, Harlen, James and Stobart (1999:7) provided seven precepts that summarizes the characteristics of AFL which includes (i) it is embedded in a view of teaching and learning of which it is an essential part; (ii) it involves sharing learning goals with pupils; (iii) it aims to help pupils to know and to recognise the standards they are aiming for; (iv) it involves pupils in self-assessment; (v) it provides feedback which leads to pupils recognising their next steps and how to take them; (vi) it is underpinned by confidence that every student can improve; (vii) it involves both teacher and pupils reviewing and reflecting on assessment data. Furthermore, the basic elements of AFL as presented by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2011) include establishment of a classroom culture that encourages interaction and the use of assessment tools, establishment of learning goals, and tracking of individual student progress toward those goals, use of varied instruction methods to meet diverse student needs, use of varied approaches to assessing student understanding, feedback on student performance and adaptation of instruction to meet identified needs, active involvement of students in the learning process.

The roles of teachers in all forms of assessments cannot be overemphasized. However, their significance in the context of assessment for learning has been considered by various stakeholders including WNCP (2006) which includes aligning instruction with the targeted outcomes, identifying particular learning needs of students or groups, selecting and adapting materials and resources, creating differentiated teaching strategies and learning opportunities for helping individual students move forward in their learning, providing immediate feedback and direction to students.

Acknowledging the role of teachers in the process of assessment further bring to the fore the need to investigate their attitude towards assessment for learning, which is the new paradigm in the educational system. A fundamental fact is that no two individuals are exactly the same. It can even be argued that one of the guiding principles of all educational and psychological investigations is the study of differences, either within individuals, between individuals, within groups or between groups. This study of differences cut across the life-span from conception through childhood, to adolescence and adulthood. These differences is pervasive, in that while some individuals share common traits in one aspect, they appear different in other areas. The areas these differences show themselves includes personality, demographic, affective or intellectual.

Teachers as humans share some similarity and differences in some aspect. In this respect, Orluwene and Ajala (2017) argued that teachers’ effectiveness is to carry out their roles as characterized by a complex set of qualities which include their disposition, array of planning, organizational, instructional and assessment skills other than their professional preparation. These difference manifest themselves in such areas like educational qualification, years of experience, gender, professional qualifications and location of school where they teach. It is possible that these differences in characteristics exert some influence in their personal orientations and professional practices including their attitude towards assessment generally and assessment for learning in more specific terms. However, the current study is limited to the investigation of teachers’ years of experience and professional qualification determines their attitude towards assessment for learning.

An attitude can be defined as a positive or negative evaluation of people, objects, event, activities, ideas, or just about anything in your environment (Zimbardo 1999). In the opinion of Kpolovie, Joe and Okoto (2014), the word attitude implies the sum total of an individual’s positive and negative predisposition or mental state of preparation for action or in response to a social object. Attitude is rooted in one’s beliefs,

and it influences the individual's behavior towards a social object. It is therefore on this basis that the present study seeks to investigate the extent to which teachers' attitude towards assessment for learning in Rivers State based on their years of teaching experience and professional qualification.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered to guide this study:

1. To what extent do years of teaching experience determines teachers' attitude towards assessment *for learning*?
2. To what extent does professional qualification (education based and non-education based) determine teachers' attitude towards assessment *for learning*?

Hypothesis

The following null hypotheses were tested to guide this study at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the attitude of teachers towards assessment *for learning* on the basis of their years of teaching experience.
2. There is no significant difference in the attitude of teachers towards assessment *for learning* on the basis of their professional qualification.

METHODS

The design adopted for this study is the ex post facto research design. A sample of 498 teachers drawn from the population of 4413 male and 4039 female teachers in Rivers State, Nigeria was used for the study. The multi-stage sampling technique was used by involving cluster, non-proportionate stratified and convenient sampling technique. Cluster sampling was used in dividing the state into 3 senatorial zones, thereafter two local governments (LGAs) from each senatorial zone were randomly drawn from the total number of LGA's by applying non-proportionate stratified sampling. Non-proportionate stratified sampling technique was used because the senatorial zones do not have an equal number of LGAs. The researcher drew the proportion of male and female teachers in each of the selected LGA's gotten from cluster sampling. Finally, convenience sampling technique was used to administer the instruments on any available teacher who meets the criteria of the present study.

Instrument for Data Collection: The instrument that was used for the collection of data in the present study is tagged/titled Teachers' Attitude towards Assessment for Learning Scale (TATAFLS). The instrument is divided into two major sections. The first section contains spaces for respondents to indicate their demographic characteristics such as years of experience and professional qualification. Section B of the instrument is a 20-item questionnaire constructed in a four Likert scale of Strongly Agreed SA, Agreed A, Disagreed D and Strongly Disagreed SD. The instrument is composed of 12 positively keyed items and eight negatively keyed items. The validity of the instrument was done by experts in Educational Psychology, University of Port Harcourt. Reliability of the instrument using the split-half method yielded a coefficient of 0.721. The direct delivery method was used for data collection. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while ANOVA was used to test the hypotheses.

RESULTS

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of years of experience on teachers' attitude towards assessment for learning

Years of Experience	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1-5 Years	302	63.25	6.64
6-10 Years	102	62.98	7.02
10 and Above	94	58.60	7.145
Total	498	62.32	7.04

According to the analysis presented in Table 1, the reported mean attitude of teachers with 1-5 years of experience (n = 302) was 63.25 (SD = 6.64) towards assessment for learning. For those with 6-10 years of teaching experience (n = 102), the result showed that they had a mean score of 62.98 (SD = 7.02), while for those with over 10 years teaching experience, their mean scores was 58.60 (SD = 7.15). A cursory look at the mean values of teachers showed that there is a corresponding decrease in the attitude of teachers towards assessment for learning as their years of experience increase. The result showed that those with least years of experience had the highest mean towards assessment for learning, while those with the higher years of experience had the least mean towards assessment for learning.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the attitude of teachers towards assessment for learning on the basis of their years of teaching experience.

From the mean values reported by teachers towards assessment for learning based on their years of experience, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to ascertain if any significant difference exist. The result obtained is displayed in table 4.5 below

Table 2: Summary of one-way ANOVA on the influence of years of experience on teachers' attitude towards assessment for learning

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1605.412	2	802.706	17.24	.000
Within Groups	23044.758	495	46.555		
Total	24650.170	497			

The result of the ANOVA conducted as shown in table 2 revealed that an F-value of 17.242 was gotten when the mean values of the three groups of students were subjected for significant difference. This value was obtained at 2 and 495 degrees of freedom, which in turn yielded a p-value 0.0005 which was lesser than the chosen alpha of 0.05. Since the p-value obtained from the analysis was lesser than the chosen alpha of 0.05, it therefore implies years of teaching experience is a significant determinant of teachers' attitude towards assessment for learning.

Since a significant difference in the attitude of teachers towards assessment for learning was obtained on the basis of years of experience in the three groups of teachers, a multiple comparison post-hoc test using LSD was conducted, with the result displayed in table 3

Table 4.6: Post Hoc multiple comparison test using LSD on the influence of Years of experience on attitude towards AFL

Compared groups	Absolute mean diff	P-value
1-5 and 6-10	0.27	0.734
1-5 and Above 10	4.64	0.000
6-10 and Above 10	4.38	0.000

The result of the post hoc test using LSD showed that the mean difference between teachers with 1-5 and 6-10 years of teaching experience was 0.27 with a p-value of 0.734 that was greater than 0.05. For those with 1-5 and above 10 years teaching experience, the mean difference was 4.64 with a p-value of 0.000 which was lesser than 0.05. Finally, the analysis yielded a mean difference of 4.38 and a p-value of 0.000, which was lesser than 0.05 for between those with 6-10 and above 10 years teaching experience. The results displayed showed that while no significant difference exist between group one (1-5 and 6-10), there was a significant difference between group two (1-5 and Above 10) and group three (6-10 and Above 10).

Table 4: Mean, standard deviation and independent sample t-test of teachers’ attitude towards AFL based on professional qualification

Professional Qualification	N	Mean	SD	Df	t	P	Decision
Education Based	370	64.07	5.46	496	10.39	0.000	Reject H_0
Non Education Based	128	57.26	8.52				$p < 0.05$

From the result analysed as shown in table 4, it can be seen that teachers who identified with having an educational related background had a mean value of 64.07 (SD = 7.07), while those who stated they had non-education background reported a mean value of 57.26 (SD = 7.04). From the mean values obtained, it can be seen that those who had education based professional qualification reported a higher mean score on the attitude towards assessment for learning than those without education based background. When these values were tested using independent sample t-test, the result showed that a t-value of 10.39 was obtained at 496 degrees of freedom with a corresponding p-value of 0.000 which was lesser than the chosen alpha. Since the p-value was lesser than 0.05, it therefore indicates that teachers with education background had a significantly higher attitude towards assessment for learning than those without education background. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

DISCUSSION

The result of the analysis showed that teachers with lesser years of teaching experience had higher mean values in attitude towards assessment, while those with the highest level of teaching experience reported the least attitude towards using assessment for learning. This result when tested with ANOVA revealed that there is a statistical significant influence of years of experience on the attitude of teachers towards assessment for learning. Analysis with post hoc test revealed that in group one ((1-5 and 6-10), there was no significant difference, but there was a significant difference in group two (1-5 and Above 10) and in group three (6-10 and Above 10).

The result that teachers with more years of experience had significantly lower value in attitude towards assessment for learning was not surprising but expected. This result may have been possible due to the fact that older teachers may have been more familiar with traditional forms of continuous assessment, which does not integrate feedback from assessment into the instruction process. Conversely, younger teachers are likely more disposed towards assessment for learning since recent trend have changed to using assessment in the process of instruction for students. Another reason why this reason may have been possible can be attributed to the fact that newly experienced teachers may be more involved in classroom assessment, while older teachers may be more involved in external examinations which are synonymous with summative assessment or assessment of learning.

The result from this study is similar to that obtained by Yan and Cheng (2015) who found out that among primary school teachers in Beijing, China, years of teaching experience was a significant determinant in the attitude of teachers towards formative assessment. While this study is related in that it was concerned with teachers attitude towards formative assessment which is also called assessment for learning, it differed to the extent that the sample was primary school teachers while the sample used for the present study is secondary school teachers. Similarly, Orluwene and Igwe (2016) found out that years of experience has a significant influence on the competence of teachers in school-based assessment in Rivers State. While this study and the one cited shared some similarity in that both studies were concerned about assessment as perceived by teachers in Rivers State, the present study differ from it in that while Orluwene and Igwe studies were on teachers competencies in school-based assessment, the present study is focusing on teachers’ attitude towards assessment for learning.

The result of the analysis when tested with independent t-test, showed that there is a significant difference in the attitude of teachers towards assessment for learning. This conclusion was reached because those

teachers who had an educational based training had a significantly higher mean on attitude towards assessment for learning than those who had no professional qualification in an education related field. The outcome of this result was not surprising because those teachers who had educational training must have been exposed to the importance of terms like continuous assessment and formative evaluation, which are closely related to the assessment for learning. More so, according to the current educational policy, assessment for learning is a critical aspect of the nation educational policy. Therefore those who went through educational training programmes are likely to appreciate the role of assessment for learning on teachers' efficacy and students learning.

Eguzouwa (2016) found a statistical significant difference in the competency of secondary school teachers in continuous assessment between educationally trained and untrained teachers, which is similar to the result obtained in the present study. The result from this study is dissimilar to that obtained by Young and Jackmann (2013) who found out that among teachers in Granadian lower secondary schools, there was no significant different in the perception of trained and untrained teachers in the frequency to which they used formative assessment strategies in classroom. The difference in the result obtained may be attributed to the fact that Young and Jackmann (2013) used teachers from primary schools, while in the present study only teachers in secondary schools were used for the study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Teachers who have been on the job for a considerable length of time should be helped to understand the importance and procedures of assessment for learning, as against their previous practice of using only continuous assessment for assessment of learning. This can be done by pairing them with teachers who are relatively new in the job as they were shown to have a more positive attitude towards the AFL.
2. Teachers who did not have an educational training should be specifically identified and sponsored for training programmes to enable them come to terms with the importance of assessment for learning. This is likely to improve their attitude towards assessment for learning as well as their implementation of it in the classroom.

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