

Teachers' Application of Ethics of Classroom Assessment in Secondary Schools in Enugu State

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Abstract

Assessment is an important component of the teaching and learning and learning process. This study surveyed the extent of teachers' application of the ethics of classroom assessment in senior secondary schools in Enugu State. The study employed descriptive survey research design. The population comprised of 4,190 senior secondary school teachers in the 2017/2018 academic session. Sample size of 419 teachers (105 males and 314 females) was used for the study. The instrument for data collection was a 26-item questionnaire titled "Teachers' Application of Ethics of Classroom Assessment" (TAECA). The reliability coefficient of 0.81 was obtained for the instrument using Cronbach Alpha method. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer all the research questions while t-test was used to test the formulated hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that teachers' application of ethics of classroom assessment during testing is to a high extent; grading of students' work and training students on test taking skills is to a low extent. It was recommended among others that teachers should be aware that ethical practices in classroom assessment will lead to better decisions about students. The findings of the study have implications for teachers and all stakeholders in education that should ensure the application of the ethical practices in the discharge of their duties.

Key words: Ethical Practices, Assessment, Classroom Assessment.

Introduction

Teachers usually would want to find out whether students have learned what they were supposed to learn or what they feel about what they are learning and the learning activities or how they perceive the classroom environment. This is normally done mostly through the administration of tests, questionnaires, quizzes, etc. These assessment instruments contain items which the students are required to react to. Good assessments provide the necessary feedback required in order to maximize the outcome of educational efforts. Assessments are vital components of teachers' efforts to improve education (Barton, 2002). Assessment, therefore, must focus on helping teachers to improve the quality of their classroom assessment and align their assessment with valued learning goals. Nworgu (2015) defined assessment as a systematic process of gathering data from a variety of sources in order to understand, describe and improve learning. It can be seen as a tool that informs the teacher to comprehend what students know and what they need to know. It provides objective evidence necessary in the decision making process in education. Nworgu further stated that decisions or judgements are made based not only on one single measurement or source of data but on multiple measurement or sources of data.

Assessment includes both summative and formative assessment. Amadekar (2014) stated that while one of these is not more important than the other, caution should be exercised so that one is not compelled to obliterate the other. Summative assessment evaluates students' learning at the end of an instructional programme (Lile, 2014). Formative assessment is conducted with the aim of enhancing both teaching and learning (Stiggins & Chappius, 2005). It involves both a teaching approach and a set of techniques. The approach is that the more you know about what and how students are learning,

the better you can plan learning activities to structure your teaching. The techniques are mostly simple, anonymous and in-class activities that give both the teacher and the students' useful feedback on the teaching learning process. Assessment of learner's learning provides objective evidence necessary in the decision-making process in education. Alausa (2004) pointed out that there is little doubt among educational practitioners about the special value of assessment as a basic condition for effective learning. Also, Guskey (2003) stated that when teachers' classroom assessments become an integral part of the instructional process and a central ingredient in their efforts to help students learn, the benefits of classroom assessment for both students and teachers will be boundless.

Classroom assessment acquaints the teacher with the knowledge of what and how students are learning and the best way to plan and structure learning activities to bring out the best in the students. It is aimed at course improvement and assignment of grades for other purposes in education. Formative assessment is used not just by the teachers but by both teachers and students (Nworgu, 2015). It takes place during instruction and provides assessment-based feedback to teachers and students. Results obtained from assessment is used for decision making and these decisions have long term consequences. This is why Onuorah (2018) stated that an emerging issue in the matrix of access to education is the question of quality. The form of assessment adopted by any educational system is the pivot on which the success of her educational system development revolves for no nation that toys with it survives. For this reason, teachers must take classroom assessment seriously. They must therefore, follow the ethics of assessment to ensure fairness and quality in the outcome of classroom assessment.

Ethics is a moral principle or a set of moral values held by an individual or group and it governs good human conduct. Ethics according to Alutu and Aluede (2005) is a laid down guidelines, principles, codes of conduct, rules and regulations guiding behavior of a group or an organization. Nweze (2009) defined ethics as being decent, fair, good, honest, just, moral, noble, principled, righteous, upright and virtuous in the management of examinations. Ethical practices in assessment is one of the serious issues facing the teacher in the classroom. McMurty (2001) noted that academic dishonesty is on the rise. Anderson (2008) posited that ethical matters pertain to the fact that information about the individual students is collected and because teaching is partly a moral enterprise, ethics pertain to virtually every aspect of classroom life. The following ethical standards pertain to formal assessments in the classroom.

First, the teacher should obtain information that is highly valid, reliable and objective before making important decisions that affect students' performance on assessment task that are clearly linked with important learning objectives. Second, recognize the limitations inherent in making decisions based on information obtained from assessments and despite all efforts to secure the most valid, reliable and objective information, errors occur and mistakes are made. Multiple sources of information generally provide a more defensible basis for making important decisions about students. This is because corroboration, consistency and concern are the three Cs that are extremely useful in good decision making. Third, do not use information obtained from an assessment to demean or ridicule students. Fourth, teachers should not disclose information about students unless disclosure serves a compelling professional purpose or is required by law. This is because students have the right of privacy which protects students and their parents from having their personal and academic records made public without their consent (Anderson 2008, 15).

If teachers strictly adhere to the ethics as outlined above, the quality of information with regards to the validity, reliability and objectivity of information obtained from assessment will not be questioned. These are the characteristics of assessment instruments which make them eligible to be used in collecting accurate data. Good assessment resulting in accurate measurement is the foundation of sound decision making (Adaramaja, 2005). When developing assessment tools, validity is crucial. In

general, validity refers to how well a test or assessment actually measures what it intends to measure. Nworgu (2015) wrote that validity of a test refers to the extent to which a test measures what it is supposed to measure, while Anderson (2008) defines validity as the extent to which the information obtained from an assessment instrument or method enables you to accomplish the purpose for which the information was collected. Reliability of an instrument asks whether the instrument measures consistently what it is supposed to measure. Nworgu (2015) defined reliability as the degree of consistency with which the instrument measures whatever it measures. Anderson (2008) defined reliability as the consistency of information obtained from one or more assessments. Anderson also defined objectivity in the field of tests and measurement to mean that the scores assigned by different people to students responses to items included on a quiz, test, homework assignment and so on are identical or, at very least, highly similar. This means maintaining a unit within an allowable range of error, no matter which instrument, intended to measure the variable of interest, is used and no matter who or what relevant person or thing is measured. There are many assessment instruments that teachers use in collecting information. Popham (2008) noted that in order to gather information about teaching and learning, teachers use a variety of assessment instruments such as written tests, performance assessment, observation and portfolio assessment among others. Olt (2003) worked on ethics of distance education and stated that the 'age-old' concern of academic dishonesty is a persuasive issue that all instructors must face and can be significantly reduced if instructors are proactive and vigilant. Green, Johnson and Kim (2006) in their research on ethics in classroom assessment practices: Issues and attitudes noted that a more consistent sense of ethical assessment practices among teachers, as well as the general public, is needed. Nweze (2009) stated that since examination malpractice has eaten deep into the fabrics of our society, some measures should be taken to normalize the system.

The issue of gender in research is inconclusive. Lanyon and Hubball (2008) noted that on the basis of emerging evidence and practical classroom experiences, it appears that gender among other issues like age, ethnicity, etc. must be considered in the accuracy of learning- centered assessments. Mohiuddin (2015) noted that gender differences exist in educational assessment competence, knowledge and practices. Female teachers were found to have, on average, a higher level of knowledge and self-perceived competence in educational assessment than male teachers. Teachers therefore need to apply moral principle of assessment in this work to ensure fair, good, honest, just and upright assessment of learning outcome.

Problem Statement

Assessment of learning is an important component of the teaching and learning process. It is geared towards improvement of quality of classroom learning, certify proficiency and make decisions about students' future programs or placements. Results obtained from assessment is used for decision making and these decisions have long term consequences. Therefore, good assessment brings about quality education. Classroom teachers are responsible for classroom assessment. Therefore, how fair, good, upright, or honest is the quality of decision made on students by the classroom teachers? If teachers apply the ethics of the classroom assessment by being fair, good, upright and honest in taking decisions about students' achievement, the quality of the outcome of assessment will be high, otherwise, poor quality decisions will always be made on students. The Problem, therefore, is to determine the extent of application of ethics of classroom assessment by teachers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine teachers' application of the ethics of classroom assessment in senior secondary schools in Enugu State. Specifically, the study seeks to determine the extent of teachers' application of the ethics of classroom assessment during teaching/testing, grading of students work, training of students on test taking skills and protection of students' right of testing.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the extent of teachers' application of the ethics of classroom assessment during testing?
2. To what extent do teachers apply the ethics of classroom assessment during grading of students work?
3. To what extent do teachers apply the ethics of classroom assessment in training students on test taking skills?

Hypothesis

The hypothesis below was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance;

1. There is no significant difference in the mean response of male and female teachers on all the ethics of classroom assessment.

Method

The study employed a descriptive survey research design to find out the extent of ethical practices on assessment by classroom teachers in senior secondary schools in Enugu State. The population comprised of all the 4190 teachers in public senior secondary schools in Enugu State in 2017/2018 academic session(Statistics Unit: Post Primary School Management Board (PPSMB), Enugu State, 2018). The sample size of 419 teachers (105 males and 314 females) was used for the study using multistage sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a 26-item questionnaire titled "Teachers' Application of Ethics of Classroom Assessment" (TAECA).The instrument was face validated by test experts while a reliability estimate of 0.81 was obtained using Cronbach alpha method. Mean and standard deviation were used in answering the research questions while the formulated hypothesis was tested using t-test statistic at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question One

What is the extent of teachers' application of the ethics of classroom assessment during testing?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of respondents on the extent of teachers' application of the ethics of classroom assessment during testing

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Use some surprise items on content areas that were not taught during testing /quiz.	3.17	.72	HE
2	Reveal to students the content of a test / assessment instrument to enable their students achieve better than others.	3.53	.83	VHE
3	Administer quiz / test during break period.	2.00	.79	LE
4	Assess students by using only essay questions.	2.71	.92	HE
5	Assess students by using only structured response format.	1.65	.98	LE
6	Assess students' knowledge by using many types of assessment instruments like multiple-choice, essays, projects, quizzes among others.	2.14	.89	LE
7	Administer tests / quizzes to students outside the prescribed number in the term.	2.58	.77	HE
Cluster Mean		2.54	.27	HE

Key: Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE)

Result in Table 1 revealed the extent of teachers' application of the ethics of classroom assessment during testing. The cluster mean value of 2.54 were within the real limit of 2.50-3.49; indicating that the extent of teachers' application of the ethics of classroom assessment during testing

is to a high extent. The standard deviation of the 7 items ranged from 0.72–0.98; indicating that the respondents were homogenous in their responses

Research Question Two

To what extent do teachers apply the ethics of classroom assessment during grading of students work?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of respondents on the extent to which teachers apply the ethics of classroom assessment during grading of students work

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Remark
8	Grade students' performance on assessment tasks that are clearly linked with important learning objectives covered in the term.	2.60	.80	HE
9	Do not mark students' scripts after a test but assign scores arbitrarily.	1.83	.95	LE
10	Lower scores for students for late submission of assignments.	1.91	.95	LE
11	Consider students physical effort when assigning grades on test/ quizzes.	1.91	.92	LE
12	Consider students former achievement on subject content before assigning grades on the current work.	1.94	1.01	LE
13	Score students zero for not going on an errand.	1.52	.72	LE
14	Change students' grades in order to favour them.	2.53	.84	HE
15	Offer extra mark for some classes and leave the other classes.	1.81	.81	LE
16	Award more marks to students peer ratings than teacher ratings.	1.81	.86	LE
Cluster Mean		1.99	.27	LE

Key: Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE)

Result in Table 2 revealed the extent to which teachers apply the ethics of classroom assessment during grading of students work. The cluster mean value of 1.99 was within the real limit of 1.50-2.49; indicating that the extent to which teachers apply the ethics of classroom assessment during grading of students work is to a low extent. The standard deviation of the 9 items ranged from 0.80–1.01; indicating that the respondents were homogenous in their responses.

Research Question Three

To what extent do teachers apply the ethics of classroom assessment in training students on test taking skills?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation of respondents on the extent to which teachers apply the ethics of classroom assessment in training students on test taking skills

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Remark
17	Announce assessments in time.	2.33	1.21	LE
18	Inform students of the purpose, structure, format and content of assessment procedure.	1.43	0.60	LE
19	Remind Students to pay careful attention to the directions and follow instructions / directions during assessment.	2.55	1.04	HE
20	Tell students to pace themselves so that they complete the entire assessment.	3.00	0.98	HE
21	For essay questions, tell students to plan and organize their essays before writing them.	2.31	0.94	LE
22	Inform students how the task will be graded when they assign it.	1.75	0.97	LE
Cluster Mean		2.23	0.47	LE

Key: Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE)

Result in Table 3 revealed the extent to which teachers apply the ethics of classroom assessment in training students on test taking skills. The cluster mean value of 2.23 was within the real limit of 1.50-2.49; indicating that the extent to which teachers applies the ethics of classroom assessment in training students on test taking skills is to a low extent. The standard deviation of the 6 items ranged from 0.60–1.21; indicating that the respondents were homogenous in their responses.

Hypothesis

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female teachers on all the ethics of classroom assessment.

Table 5: t-test analysis of significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female teachers on all the ethics of classroom assessment

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-value	P-value
Male	105	2.22	.17	417	.343	.732
Female	314	2.21	.16			

Result in Table 5 shows the t-test for independent samples assuming equal variance. The results from the test shows $t(417) = .342, P > 0.05$. Hence, the null hypothesis of no significant difference is retained since the P-value (.732) is greater than 0.05 level of significance. The researcher therefore, concludes that, there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female teachers on ethics of classroom assessment.

Discussion

Findings from research question one revealed that the extent of teachers' application of the ethics of classroom assessment during teaching and testing is to a high extent. The standard deviation indicated homogeneous responses among the respondents. The responses show that some classroom teachers use some surprise items from content areas that were not taught during the period covered by the testing, reveal to students the content of a test instrument to help them achieve better than other students in the same stream, assess students by using only essay questions and administer tests/quizzes outside the prescribed number in the term. These are serious unethical principles which teachers engage in during assessment. However, the teachers engage in some ethical issues which include that many of them do not administer tests/quizzes during break period but allow students to exercise themselves during the break period. They also use many assessment techniques like multiple-choice items, essays, projects, etc. Anderson (2009) noted that multiple sources of information generally provide a more

defensible basis for making important decisions about students. Green, Johnson, Kim and Pope (2006) point to the fact that assessment is an educational realm without professional consensus since many teachers engage in many unethical principles.

On the application of ethics of assessment during grading, the only unethical practice teachers engage in, changing students' grades to a high extent in order to favor some of their students. The extent to which teachers apply the ethics of assessment in grading of students is to a low extent. This can affect the validity, reliability, and dependability of the outcome of assessment. This brings to question on the validity, reliability and dependability of the information that is used in making important decisions that affect students. This does not agree with Anderson (2008) that assessment should be valid, reliable and objective.

On the extent of application of classroom assessment on training students on test taking skills, teachers do not engage in ethical principles involved except for reminding them to pay careful attention to the directions and follow instructions/directions during assessment and /to pace themselves so that they complete the entire assessment. The standard deviation shows homogenous responses. It is ethical that teachers should announce assessments in time, inform them of the purpose, structure and format of assessment, to plan their essays before writing and how the skill will be graded. Anderson (2008) stated that students should be made aware of the assessment, when it will take place, the purpose and the format.

On the teacher's protection of students' right, the extent to which teachers protect the rights of students to testing is to a low extent. The ethics of protection of students' rights to testing is not adhered to with teachers not obtaining consent from students' parents/guardians before disclosing students' records to a third party having the least mean. The standard deviation of the respondents was homogenous in their responses. This shows that the rights of many students to testing are not protected and students' records are not kept confidential. Nweze (2009) stated that teachers should keep all examination records and knowledge at their disposal with absolute secrecy. The null hypothesis of no significant difference was retained. The researcher therefore concluded that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female teachers on ethics of classroom assessment. The findings however, disagree with the findings of Mohiuddin (2015) who reported that gender differences exist in educational assessment, competence, knowledge and practices.

Conclusions and Implications

Assessment is an important component of teaching and learning and is geared towards improvement of quality of classroom learning. Therefore, a more consistent sense of ethical assessment practices among teachers is needed. Teachers should be proactive and vigilant and strive to make assessment meaningful so that valid, reliable and objective measures are obtained for making accurate decisions about students. This research has implications for classroom teachers and decision makers in education who should be aware of unethical practices inherent in assessment in schools. They should ensure that teachers apply the ethical practices to ensure high quality of outcome of assessment.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study;

1. Teachers through seminars and workshops should be aware that ethical practices in classroom assessment will lead to better decisions about students.
2. Classroom teachers should be monitored to ensure application of ethical practices in the classroom.
3. Administrators and stakeholders in education should ensure that teachers go on in-service training to update their knowledge on assessment.

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