

INVESTIGATION OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF CONTEMPORARY AND TRADITIONAL ASSESSMENT APPROACHES IN ONE OF THE PROMINENT SCHOOLS IN FIJI

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ABSTRACT:

The contemporary assessment approach is the best method of measuring students' performance. It is also used to explore how effective the teachers have delivered the curriculum in their subject areas. This study investigates the characteristics of the contemporary assessment approach and traditional assessment approach. It will decide which approach is best for the students of the 21st-century learning and teaching process. This was done by analysing four characteristics of the traditional and contemporary approach assessment (Linda, 2018). The data was collected from one of the prominent primary and secondary schools in Labasa employing reflective writing. The reflective writing contained five open-ended questions, which was then analysed qualitatively. The results indicated that all the teachers opted for a contemporary approach to assessment. The contemporary approach of assessment is constructed from comprehensive research, unlike the traditional approach, which is of poor quality.

Keywords: Contemporary Assessment, Traditional Assessment, Educational Assessments, Evaluations, Measurements

INTRODUCTION:

Educational assessment plays a pivotal role in determining how well the curriculum has been implemented. The authors Lamprianou and Athanasou (2009) defined assessment as

"the process of collecting and organising information from purposeful activities (e.g., tests on performance or learning) with a view to drawing inferences about teaching and learning, as well as about persons, often making comparisons against established criteria" (p. 3). It helps the learning minds and people have meaningful learning, which encourages them to learn more and better. It is used to enhance and improve the nature of learning. The educational assessment also gives significant feedback on advancement and encourages individuals to understand their qualities and weaknesses without being judgemental. They are also highlighted by Jabbarifar (2009) that classroom assessment and evaluation are heavily focused on qualitative judgements used to improve students' knowledge and learning. Assessment and evaluation also provide essential information to teachers on how to improve their teaching techniques.

Two types of assessment approaches are being followed in the country: the traditional approach and the contemporary approach. The traditional approach has been followed in the old decade, and the contemporary approach is the type of assessment done at present. Both the approach has its disadvantages and advantages when followed. Linda (2018) summarised traditional approach is planned and implemented without considering the learning goals, whereas the contemporary approach is carefully aligned with the goals. Linda claimed the traditional approach is assessed on memorised knowledge, where the contemporary approach focussed on cognitive

and performance skills. She highlighted that the contemporary approach of assessment is constructed from comprehensive research, unlike the traditional approach of poor quality. The traditional approach was used to grade the students; however, the contemporary approach guides the students and improves the learning and teaching process.

This small scale research will focus on investigating the characteristic of traditional and contemporary approach assessment. The investigation will be based on ideas from one of the same primary and secondary schools in the rural part of Fiji. The research objective is to decide which assessment approach is best for the learning and teaching process in the country's schools. This will be achieved by investigating and comparing the advantages and disadvantages of the traditional and contemporary approach assessment (Linda, 2018).

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Assessment:

Assessment in education phenomena refers to comprehensive approaches or programmes that the Ministry of Education uses to assess, gauge, and chronicle schools' learning and teaching process. In other words, it is dealing with assessing and chronicling the knowledge that students have learnt in a certain time. As Dettmer and Hanna (2004) highlighted, the process of obtaining data is known as assessment. More specifically, assessment refers to the methods through which instructors collect data on their teaching and their students' learning. Assessments in education play a critical path in grading the students' academic performance. Ioannou-Georgiou (2013) also defined educational assessment as "a general term which includes all methods used to gather information about children's knowledge, ability, understanding, attitudes, and motivation" (p. 4). There are two types of assessments commonly

used around the globe, which consist of traditional and contemporary approaches.

Traditional Approach:

According to Quansah (2018), the term "traditional approach to assessment" refers to traditional techniques of testing that often create written documents, such as quizzes or examinations. One example is the standardised test, which consists of reviews given to teachers to assess how much they have learned. This type of test has true and false, essay type questions, multiple-choice and short answers type questions. Traditional assessment approaches are also classified as incorporates evaluation instruments, for the most part concentrating on students' accomplishments, which emphasises cognitive development. According to (Caloukana & Kauokco, 2010) traditional assessment approach "only considers the behaviours in the cognitive area, the alternative approach observes the developments in affective and psychomotor behaviours" (p. 4153). Therefore, this approach does not encourage learners to make up their thinking abilities in more critical and complex problems; hence, this assessment approach only measures memorised knowledge. Thus, in the broadest sense traditional approach of assessment, teachers have limited time and opportunity to study and create effective assessment tools. They are used to evaluate and grade individual pupils, making judgments regarding curricular adjustments due to unsatisfactory characteristics. (Suskie, 2010)

Contemporary Approach:

The contemporary assessment approach is viewed as one of the integral and collaborative learnings and teaching practices. Suskie (2010) highlighted that students learn better when their college experience is intentionally planned as a cohesive, integrated learning activity in which courses and out-of-

class experiences build on and reinforce one another. It is the execution of learning exercises that draw upon students' encounters, both through the classroom and helping them perceive that they are creating explicit abilities that they see to be noteworthy for the world outside of school from their perspective. The two forms of contemporary assessments used in our education system are summative and formative assessments. "Usually conducted in the last few weeks of term to see how well students have learned what they were supposed to have learned" is defined as summative assessment by (Surgenor 2010, p. 1). The outcomes from this assessment are used to decide if a student has satisfied the learning results and may accomplish some accreditation. This causes tension since the evaluations got in the summative assessment, are conclusive and can influence their prospects. (Biggs & Tang, 2007).

In contrast, Bloom (1997) claimed that Formative assessment uses systematic evaluation in the curriculum development, teaching, and learning processes to improve any of these three processes. Given that formative evaluation occurs throughout the formation stage, every effort should be made to use it to enhance the process. Formative assessment is done during the implementation of the curriculum so that changes can be made to improve the learning and teaching process. Review creates and develops underpins student's metacognitive aptitudes. This sort of examination is critical in assisting children to become well-rounded citizens. Students learn how to analyse data, link it to previous knowledge, and apply it to new learning as they participate in companion and self-evaluation. (Sutton, 2001).

Context of Study:

Local research on many forms of education, such as assessment and evaluation

issues, is limited in the small island developing states. (Sanga, 2012). Although some contributions have been made in the article by Linda (2018) on the contemporary and traditional assessment approach, it has not focused on the country's education system. Therefore, no research has been conducted on how teachers feel about the contemporary and traditional assessment approaches in rural schools in Fiji.

The findings of this small scale would help teachers understand which type of assessment approach is best for that school. They can re-look in the school assessment plan to develop a more comprehensive and effective assessment plan to help attain the Ministry of Educations vision and mission. In addition, the finding from the research will help the school heads evaluate the school's assessment approaches and choose the best approach that will help improve the schools' results and guide and improve the learning and teaching process in the school. According to Waqabaca (2018), in Fiji, Examinations and Assessment Units provide particular tasks and are generally meant to assess certain aspects of learning. Assessments are also used to identify academic shortcomings and strengths so that educators may create routes for growth, which can take many different shapes and require sophisticated tactics and techniques. Therefore, this research will also help the Ministry of Education assess how well their examinations and assessment objectives are achieved.

RESEARCH METHODS:

Participant:

There were 30 participants in this small scale research project. These participants were the teachers of one of the prominent primary and secondary schools in Labasa. These included 20 secondary teachers and ten primary teachers from the same school. Of the 10 primary teachers, 7 were females while 3 were

males, in which one was the head teacher of that school. Primary school teachers shared an average teaching experience of 8 years. The head teacher had the most experience years of teaching of 18 years, from 7 years being the school's head teacher. Of the 20 secondary teachers, 13 were male teachers while 7 were female's teachers. The average years of teaching experience for the secondary teachers were 10 years, the highest being the school's principal of 21 years of teaching experience and 8 years being the principal of the school. The Majority of the primary school teachers have taught in all levels of primary education from year 1 to year 8. The secondary school teachers were a mixture of science, arts, Maths and English subject teachers and they have all taught all the levels of their subjects from year 9 to year 13.

Instrument:

To collect the data, participants of the small scale research project were asked to write reflective writing on traditional and contemporary approach assessment characteristics. While giving the reflective writing, the teachers were told to use their teaching experience to enhance their reflective writing. The names and personal detail were not taken from the teachers. Only biographical data such as number of years of teaching, number of schools taught, number of years of leadership roles and numbers of years taught a year, and the subject area taught were asked from these teachers. Since teachers were busy with the learning and teaching process in schools, they were given one week to complete the reflective writing of a minimum of two pages. A guideline of questions was given to the teachers to complete the reflective writing, and they are as follows:

1. In your understanding, explain the traditional and contemporary approaches to assessment.

2. In your understanding which assessment do you prefer to be planned and implemented without considering learning goals, or it should be aligned with the learning goals
3. In your views, should the assessment for students be focused on memorised concepts, or it should be from the performance skills and test the students thinking abilities.
4. In your understanding, do you believe that assessment should be developed from the research, or it should be just picked from other places?
5. From your teaching experience, assessments should be used to grade the students, or they should be used to guide and help in improving the learning process.

All the participants completed the task, and nearly all the scripts were of two pages. The scripts were analysed under the subtopics and the themes. Then the results were discussed under the subtopics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

From the reflective writing, the findings were based on each question. The reflecting writing was dived under primary teachers and secondary teachers. Once each script was read, it was numbered starting from one to number 30. This ID is also being represented beside the quotations that were used in this discussion section.

Traditional and Contemporary Assessment Approach:

All the participants were able to differentiate between the traditional and contemporary approaches to assessment. The traditional assessment approach was the assessment approach that was being followed in the old decade, whereas the contemporary approach is the assessment approach that has been followed. Majority of the participant explained the traditional assessment approach as using true and false, matching questions, and

multiple questions as assessment tools. According to Mueller (2016), Students are generally given many options (e.g., a, b, c, or d; true or false; these correspond with those) and asked to pick the correct answer in conventional examinations. In summary, from part one, it was pleasing to note that all the participants understand the difference between traditional and contemporary assessments. The question that comes to mind is whether these teachers know which assessment approaches are good for the students in their school or which assessment approach is best in the learning and teaching process in this 21st century of education. To analyse, the teachers need to understand that the best assessment is aligned with the learning goals, which will be discussed next.

Assessment Aligned with the Learning Goals & Objectives:

From this part of the reflective writing, all the teacher's similar answers and agreed that the exams given to students must be aligned with the learning objectives of that particular subject strand. Many teachers justified why they preferred assessment should be in line with the intended learning outcomes. One of the teachers said, "Assessments should reveal how well students have learned what we want them to learn while instruction ensures that they learn it. For this to occur, assessments, learning objectives, and instructional strategies need to be closely aligned so that they reinforce one another" (Reflection 22). The child's purpose in that particular strand will be fulfilled when assessments are gained with the learning goals. Every strand in each subject area has a purpose, and students must be familiar with that. This can only be known if the child is being assessed in that particular learning objective. Also highlighted by Schwartz (2018), it is critical to ensure that any examinations or assignments correspond to the course's learning goals when

developing assessments. Assessments should be based on the course material, and students should believe the material to be relevant and fair. Therefore, when teachers design the assessment, it is vital to see that the assessment components match the learning and teaching activities used in normal classroom teaching. In summary, all the participants understood that the assessment that should be given to students should be in line with the intended learning aims and objectives as it is in the contemporary approach of assessment.

The Assessment Focused on Thinking and Performance Skills:

Once the collected data was analysed, it was noted that all the teachers wanted their students to be assessed, focusing on their thinking abilities. This means that the questions in the exams should be developed so that students have to think and then answer the question. One of the teachers from secondary education said that in the old day's children use to memorise the concepts in biology from the textbook and write the same answer in the exam paper. This only test the student's memorised knowledge of that concept. To progress and understand the concept, the child needs first to understand the concept in their understanding (Reflection 25). This participant explains that students need to be tested on what they understand on a particular concept, neither just writing what they have memorised before the exam. As Naeim (2014) defines, Performance-based assessment is an assessment method that aims to quantify student learning by how effectively the learner performs on a practical, real-world assignment. Unlike many traditional exams, such as multiple-choice questions, scoring is very consistent and easy; rating becomes a big problem in performance-based assessment since individuals deal with real-world performances rather than simple assessments of factual knowledge (Shohanny,

1995). In summary, all the teachers understand and agree that the assessment given to students should test their cognitive level of thinking, not just the memorised knowledge as it was there in the traditional assessment approach.

Assessment Developed from Research Work:

Moving on to the fourth part of the reflective writing, teachers were asked to justify how assessments that are developed from research work are the excellent quality of assessment. About 80% of participants said that the assessment developed from the research work is good because anything done from research is always good to work. These teachers said that anything done from research work are evaluated and consulted for better effective implementation. Likewise, in the contemporary assessment approach, the assessments are developed from research work, which will help implement the assessment and achieve the intended learning outcomes of the assessment. At the same time, the other 20 % said that doing research work when developing assessments will make the teachers share their ideas, making a very good assessment plan. In the traditional assessment approach, the assessment was of poor quality, and the reason was that teachers had very few learning opportunities to design an effective assessment plan. This was because there was no research done while developing the assessment plan.

The Assessment is Used to Improve the Teaching and Learning Process:

The last part of the reflective writing was to justify whether assessments should be used to grade the students or to guide and help improve the learning process. It was pleasing to note that all the teachers wrote that the assessments should be developed so that they should support the teacher's guide them and improve the teaching and learning process. One of the teachers said that the assessment

developed plays a pivotal role in improving and guiding the learning and teaching process. She said that once the assessment is done, the teacher performance is made from the head of the school through percentage pass in each subject. This tells that which subject needs more guidance and support to excel in the results. To achieve this, extra classes are taken in the subjects with a low percentage pass rate; hence, the result is improved (Reflection 15).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION:

The data collected reflects that all the teachers who participated in this small scale research were quite familiar with the traditional and contemporary assessment approach. All the teachers who participated in the small scale research agreed that the best assessment approach is contemporary. This assessment approach is being carefully aligned with the learning goals. When teachers design the assessment, it is vital to see that the assessment components match the learning and teaching activities used in normal classroom teaching. The contemporary approach of assessment is construed from comprehensive research, unlike the traditional approach of poor quality. The traditional approach was used to grade the students, but the contemporary approach guides the students and improves the learning and teaching process. The findings agree with Jabbarifar (2009) as contemporary assessment measures the improvement over time, motivates the students to study, and evaluates the teaching methods. Therefore, it is imperative to be very careful in selecting the type of assessment approach to use while developing the assessment plan for the school. There are also a few limitations of this research as this research is just focused on one of the prominent schools in the rural part of the country with only 30 participants. The education system at this part of the District could be a little bit different from other parts of

the country because of the availability of resources in implementing the curriculum. Finally, I recommend that many teachers understand what a contemporary assessment is and know that it is the best assessment approach. However, how to develop this assessment is a different question. Teachers are not familiar with developing the assessment tools that the formative and summative evaluation aspects can be looked at in the next part of this research project.

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