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Improving teachers' classroom assessment practices: perceptions of teachers in the Ellembelle District of Ghana

Abstract


This study looks at how teachers can improve their in-class assessment practice in the Ellembelle District in Ghana, and aims to identify the challenges confronted by teachers in classroom assessments, as well as ways to improve the classroom assessments themselves. A quantitative research method was adopted using a simple random sampling technique. The study was conducted among 207 professional teachers using a mailed questionnaire (primary data), which was analysed using statistical tools. The study found that teachers face many challenges in their classroom assessments, and thus proposed performance-based assessments, rubrics, peer assessment, portfolio assessment and self-assessment as strategies for improving classroom assessments. It is recommended that the Ghana Education Service ensure a decrease in strength in classrooms in the district, incorporate peer assessment, and conduct in-service training, self-assessment, and performance evaluation to improve effective classroom assessments.


Keywords: teachers' challenges, students' performance self-assessment, peer assessment, performance assessment, rubrics


Introduction

In order to make decisions regarding the promotion, selection and directions of students, classroom assessments guide the whole procedure of gathering knowledge, whether through testing or observation performances. Teachers do their own evaluations and communicate the results to students, parents, and the broader public. According to research (Amua-Sekyi, 2016; Shogbesan & Faleye, 2016), assessments are a useful tool for enhancing students' learning in the classroom, offering opportunities for in-class practice, and creating a solid foundation for self-evaluation (Walker, 2012). In particular, teachers are required to use the assessments to help with the identification, remediation, and ongoing evaluation of learners (Areekkuzhiyil, 2021; Black & Wiliam, 2018). Classroom evaluations are always beneficial, because they provide a quicker gauge of students' growth and accomplishment, guide and enhance instructions, and identify gaps in students' subject-matter knowledge (Topping, 2017). They offer day-to-day assistance with teaching and learning, which is the cornerstone and foundation for achieving excellence in education and school improvement (Shogbesan & Faleye, 2016). They also assist teachers in identifying the areas of their lessons that need improvement, thus motivating them to do so (Topping et al., 2016).

Teachers are obliged to use effective and efficient assessment methods in the classroom, enabling students to demonstrate that they have acquired the necessary life-skills knowledge and abilities, which would improve the ways that schools educate and teach. Teachers' classroom practices and their knowledge of classroom assessments are both crucial for improving classroom assessments (Kingston & Nash, 2011;

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Walker, 2012). Ultimately, it is crucial to address the difficulties encountered by teachers and ways to overcome those difficulties. The assessment methods that instructors use are influenced by the philosophy that drives them.

Research questions

The research questions are:

1. What challenges are faced by teachers in using classroom assessments?
2. How can classroom assessments be improved?

Ogan-Bekiroglu (2009) investigated the attitudes toward and skills used in educational assessments of 46 Turkish instructors who had completed an educational assessment course, using a parallel mixed-methodology approach. The findings showed that despite having constructivist beliefs and a high level of competency in educational assessments, the teachers nevertheless encountered some challenges with their assessment procedures. Class size and parental support were among the issues mentioned, which were also mentioned by Saxon and Morante (2014). These difficulties could make learning challenging in the classroom.

Sethusha (2012) looked into the issues impacting teachers' methods for assessing students in the classroom, and how these issues affected efficient teaching and learning. The study employed qualitative, instrumental case study methodology, using semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analyses. Interviews and observations were conducted with teachers from four different schools in Northwest Province, United Kingdom. The difficulties encountered by instructors in carrying out classroom assessments were determined using the information gathered through observations and interviews, as well as from documents used by teachers to carry out assessments. Document analysis was then used to confirm the information acquired through interviews and observation, and textual material was analysed using content analysis. The instructors' stories differed in accordance with their backgrounds and teaching experiences within the various contexts of their specific school environments. Major issues identified by this study were the interpretation of policies, overcrowding, support, parental involvement, moderation mechanisms (internal and external), evaluation planning, implementation, and communication, as well as a shortage in resources. To address these challenges, teachers primarily turned to their own personal experiences, cluster meetings, and their colleagues.

How classroom assessments could be improved

According to Hoogeveen and van Gelderen (2013), self-assessments are among the key factors in classroom assessments, promoting student accountability and involvement. By doing their own assessments,

students feel more accountable for their learning and are more engaged in the entire teaching and learning process in the classroom.

Self-evaluation enables students to consider their part in and contribute to the group process (Etsey & Gyamfi, 2017), while metacognition – the process through which pupils examine their cognitive processes is a crucial component of self-assessments. Students consider what they want to accomplish with the lessons, and therefore challenge concepts. The focus on the improvement of students' judgment skills in self-assessments is another benefit of using them in classroom assessments (Ateh, 2015; Li et al., 2016). According to Li et al. (2016) and agreed by Etsey and Gyamfi (2017), students should be taught and trained in judgmental abilities in order to do successful self-assessments, meaning that with self-assessments students develop skills of making fair judgements.

The portfolio's advantages as a tool for assessments include its simplicity of integration into classroom instructions. Work that is assigned and finished over the year is stored in the portfolio (Price et al., 2011; Erzoah, Gyamfi, Yeboah & Langee, 2022). Additional exams or writing tasks are not required, because they can be taught and assessed, and the student portfolio, according to Ponnampereuma (2014), is an assessment that is consistent with instructions. Every high-quality portfolio includes students in some capacity, and students who are asked to gather, select, and reflect on what they wish to include in their portfolio may find the selection process to be quite informative and meaningful (Ponnampereuma, 2014).

Since students are frequently requested to analyse previous assignments and projects, as well as evaluate the merits and limitations of both their procedures and their final outputs, portfolios encourage self-reflection and awareness among students (Ponnampereuma, 2014). In their study, Hussain et al. (2019) stressed the value of portfolios in fostering students' growth as autonomous learners. When properly incorporated, portfolios can encourage collaboration between students and their teacher, as well as between students and their peers (Topping, 2018). Performance-based assessments, which have been around for a while now and have several benefits over traditional multiple-choice tests, are widely employed across the globe. In reality, according to Wiggins and McTighe (2005), authentic assessments are intended to do more than just test. They should demonstrate to students (and teachers) what it looks like to practice a subject and what sort of performance difficulties are truly valued most highly in a certain industry or career. In contrast to standardised examinations, which only provide the 'what' of a student's performance, PBAs can reveal 'how' and 'why' a student may be struggling.

Performance-based assessments (PBAs) are therefore able to assist teachers in determining how their pupils learn most effectively (Falk et al., 2007). PBAs,

when used as formative evaluations, offer quicker feedback than extensive standardised assessments. Standardised examinations can yield results after several months, but PBAs enables teachers to make significant changes while still instructing their existing students (Yulia, 2018). PBAs also permit assessment differentiation so that all students, especially those in special education and ELL classes, have a chance to show their understanding (Yulia, 2018).

Research indicates that performance-based assessment procedures can affect other teaching strategies in the classroom in addition to having an impact on student results. Performance-based assessments can alter particular classroom behaviours and procedures, even though changing basic teaching paradigms can be difficult. Peer assessment may be utilised for a range of outputs, including written work, oral presentations, projects, or other expert behaviours (Li et al., 2016).

Peer assessments are viewed as more than just a grading technique, because participating in the process advances the skills and knowledge of both the assessor and the pupils (Li et al., 2010; Topping, 2018). PBAs also enable assessment differentiation so that all students, especially those in special education and ELL pupils, have a chance to show their understanding (Yulia, 2018).

Research indicates that performance-based assessment procedures can affect other teaching strategies in the classroom in addition to having an impact on student results. Performance-based evaluation can alter particular classroom behaviours and procedures, even though changing broad teaching paradigms can be difficult (Li et al., 2016). Peer evaluations may be utilised for a range of outputs, including written work, oral presentations, projects, or other expert behaviours. Since participating in the process advances the skills and knowledge of both the assessor and the students, peer evaluation is seen as more than just a grading technique (Li et al., 2016; Li et al., 2010; Topping, 2018).

The main objective of peer assessments is to give students feedback (Hovardas et al., 2014; Hsia et al., 2016). Since students will always have more time available than instructors, this method may be especially useful in schools with a high student-to-teacher ratio. The research indicates that peer assessments can enhance learning, even when a single student's response might not be as detailed or in-depth as a teacher's feedback (Harrison et al., 2015; Topping, 2017).

Methodology

A quantitative research method was adopted, with a simple random sampling technique deployed in this study. The study was carried out among 207 professional teachers in the Ellebelle District, Ghana, who have worked for at least two years (102 males and 105 females). A questionnaire was used to collect primary data using 4-point Likert scale. The data was

collected through a mailed questionnaire and was analysed using statistical tools such as Mean, Standard Deviation and Cronbach's Alpha. The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of the questionnaire was 0.79, which was acceptable.

Results

The major objective of this study was to learn more about the difficulties teachers encounter when implementing classroom assessments, and how to make improvements. Teachers were asked to rate their agreement or disagreement with statements regarding the difficulties encountered using classroom assessments, and ways to improve their practices using a 4-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree). The mean and standard deviation were analysed, and the scale had a total value of 10 (4 + 3 + 2 + 1). As a result, each of the four responses, out of a possible four, had a mean score of 2.5, the result being the sum of 10 divided by the four answers. The centre point on the four-point scale was likewise 2.5, and the minimum difference between 1 and 2.5, which equals 1.5, was divided by 2 to yield 0.75. As a result, the median cut-off values for the variables on the questionnaire were 3.25 – 4.00 for strong agreement, 3.24 – 2.50 for agreement, 2.49 – 1.75 for disagreement, and 1.74 – 1 for strong disagreement. A mean of 2.50 or higher suggests agreement among respondents, whereas a mean of 2.49 or lower shows disagreement. By adding up all of the responses to each item from each respondent and dividing by the total number of respondents who responded to that particular question, the mean of the items was estimated.

Research question 1

What are the challenges faced by teachers using classroom assessments?

The results of the challenges faced by teachers using classroom assessments are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 shows the challenges faced by teachers using classroom assessments, and the results revealed that the teachers disagreed to face the stated challenges in their use of classroom assessments ($M = 2.40$; $SD = 0.812$). The mean was found to be less than the cut-off mean of 2.5. However, the teachers agreed that they faced 6 out of the 22 stated challenges (their means were greater than the cut-off mean of 2.5). The results of the challenges teachers faced in classroom assessments are presented in Table 2. The means of these statements were greater than the cut-off mean.

Table 2 shows that the challenges faced by teachers in classroom assessments are inadequate resources and materials, large class size, inability to write items for higher cognitive levels, an extensive curriculum, and difficulty in grading essay questions and developing rubrics.

Improving teachers' classroom assessment practices ...

Table 1

Challenges faced by teachers in classroom assessments

| Statements | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|-----|------|----------------|
| Inadequate attention and resources in developing the classroom assessment process | 207 | 3.10 | 0.852 |
| Large class size makes is a challenge for me | 207 | 2.88 | 0.846 |
| It is difficult for me to write items for a higher cognitive level | 207 | 2.75 | 0.780 |
| It is difficult for me to calculate the central tendency | 207 | 2.43 | 0.746 |
| It is difficult for me to assess individual class participation | 207 | 2.11 | 0.799 |
| It is difficult for me to assess problem-solving skills | 207 | 2.22 | 0.804 |
| Extensive curriculum requirements pose problems in my classroom assessment | 207 | 2.86 | 0.761 |
| It is difficult for me to use assessment results for decisions | 207 | 2.11 | 0.858 |
| It is difficult for me to determine why students make mistakes | 207 | 2.25 | 0.809 |
| It is difficult for me to use assessment results to plan my teaching | 207 | 2.04 | 0.844 |
| It is difficult for me to communicate classroom assessment results | 207 | 2.14 | 0.773 |
| It is difficult for me to assess specific course objectives | 207 | 2.16 | 0.750 |
| It is difficult for me to develop systematic grading procedures | 207 | 2.24 | 0.817 |
| It is difficult for me to ensure tests cover the material taught | 206 | 2.12 | 0.859 |

Source: authors' own work.

Table 2

Teachers' predominant challenges faced in classroom assessments.

| Statements | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|-----|------|----------------|
| Inadequate attention and resources in developing the classroom assessment process | 207 | 3.10 | 0.852 |
| Large class size makes is a challenge for me | 207 | 2.88 | 0.846 |
| It is difficult for me to write items for a higher cognitive level | 207 | 2.75 | 0.780 |
| Extensive curriculum requirements pose problems in my classroom assessment | 207 | 2.86 | 0.761 |
| It is difficult for me to consistently grade essay questions | 207 | 2.99 | 0.731 |
| It is difficult for me to develop rubrics (marking keys) | 207 | 2.97 | 0.862 |

Source: authors' own work.

Research question 2

How can classroom assessments be improved?

Table 3 shows that teachers ($M = 3.11$; $SD = 0.556$) strongly agreed that using performance-based assessments would help reduce some challenges that they face in classroom assessments, and thus improve assessments in the classroom. It was observed from the

teachers' point of view that using rubrics or marking schemes ($M = 2.80$; $SD = 0.664$) can help alleviate some of the challenges teachers face in classroom assessments. It was found that teachers believe that using peer assessments ($M = 2.80$; $SD = 0.709$) would be effective in dealing with challenges faced in classroom assessments. Also, teachers ($M = 2.85$; $SD = 0.725$) agreed that using portfolio assessments

Table 3

Perceived solution for teachers in classroom assessments

| Statements | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|-------------------------------------|-----|------|----------------|
| Using performance-based assessments | 207 | 3.11 | 0.556 |
| Using rubrics | 207 | 2.80 | 0.664 |
| Using peer assessments | 207 | 2.80 | 0.709 |
| Using portfolio assessments | 207 | 2.85 | 0.725 |
| Using self-assessments | 207 | 3.12 | 0.658 |

Source: authors' own work.

is another way to overcome challenges in classroom assessments. Moreover, teachers perceived the use of self-assessments ($M = 3.12$; $SD = 0.658$) as a way of dealing with challenges in classroom assessments. The predominant solution expressed by the teachers (with the highest mean of 3.12) was the use of self-assessments that could be enhanced through training or further studies.

Discussions

The study question aimed to learn more about the difficulties teachers in the Ellembelle District encountered when implementing classroom assessments. The findings indicated that teachers in Ellembelle had difficulties with classroom evaluation. Large class sizes, limited resources, and certain restrictions on knowledge and skill assessments are difficulties they experienced. These results are consistent with the findings of several scholars, including Alkharusi et al., (2011), Ogan-Bekiroglu (2009), Sethusha (2012), and Susuwele-Banda (2005), who found that demographics, teacher beliefs, teacher training, class size, and teacher experience in actual classroom teaching may all have an impact on how teachers assess students. The largest challenges to classroom assessments, according to Metin (2013) and Hussain et al. (2019), are large class sizes, demanding curricula, and a lack of resources for establishing the classroom assessment process. The results provide more support for Ramsuran's research, which was cited by Chand (2017). Ramsuran revealed that teachers' high workloads for satisfying policy criteria are a major barrier to their ability to effectively apply assessment policies. According to the report, marking took up a reasonable amount of time, ranging from 18% to 36% of the total teaching time available, while portfolio creation and mark entry took up a significant amount of time.

Additionally, the findings, which indicate that teachers experienced some challenges concerning their evaluation techniques, are not all that dissimilar from those of Ogan-Bekiroglu (2009). Class size, parental support, teacher expertise and attitudes regarding educational assessment were among the challenges mentioned. Metin (2013) discovered that teachers required adequate knowledge, skills, and abilities regarding rubrics.

Ways to improve classroom assessment practices

The goal of the research question was to collect input from participants on possible solutions for overcoming the difficulties associated with using classroom assessments. The results back up Wiggins and McTighe (2005), who claimed that authentic assessments are actually intended to do more than just test. They should demonstrate to students (and teachers) what practicing a subject looks like and the sorts of performance difficulties that are

valued most highly in a certain industry or career. The findings of Falk et al. (2007) discovered that performance-based assessments (PBAs), when used in conjunction with a well-designed measurement tool like a scoring rubric, can reveal 'how' and 'why' a student may be having difficulty. Performance-based assessments (PBAs) can therefore genuinely assist teachers in determining how their students learn most effectively.

Falk et al. (2007) pointed out that PBAs, when used as a formative evaluation, also offer more immediate feedback than extensive standardised assessments. Standardised examinations can yield results after several months, but PBAs enable teachers to make significant changes while continuously instructing their existing students. This study also supports Ogan-Bekiroglu's (2009) assertion that in order to address the difficulties with classroom assessments, educational system reforms should take into account instructors' knowledge of and attitudes toward educational evaluation. In research to address comparable issues, Sethusha (2012) discovered that teachers depended on cluster meetings, their peers, and primarily their own experiences to resolve these issues. It could be seen that all the suggested solutions were about in-service training and teacher development, which were to cause an increase in knowledge and skills related to classroom assessments. This is probably due to the fact that the researchers believe that the increase in knowledge and skills in assessments has the potential of helping teachers to overcome other challenges, such as resources and class size.

Conclusion

Despite the knowledge and use of classroom assessments, teachers still battle with challenges such as large class size, extensive curriculum requirements and difficulty in writing items to measure higher order cognitive levels, which limit how far teachers can go with classroom assessments. The use of self and peer assessments, as well as portfolio and performance-based assessments, could help reduce the challenge for both male and female teachers. It is recommended that teachers in the Ellembelle District involve peer assessments, self-assessments and performance assessments in their practices to improve classroom assessments.

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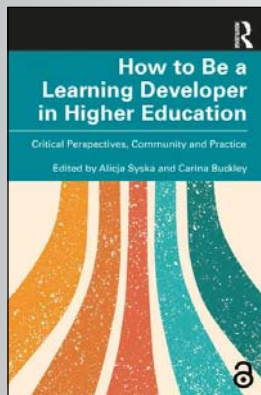
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WE RECOMMEND



Alicja Syska, Carina Buckley (Eds.)

How to Be a Learning Developer in Higher Education. Critical Perspectives, Community and Practice

Filled with practical guidance for those working in and interested in the emergent field of Learning Development, this must-read book encapsulates what it means to be a Learning Developer and how to thrive in this role.

With carefully constructed contributions which explore different aspects of the role, this edited collection is comprehensive in its approach. Alongside practical advice, it is underpinned by theoretical and epistemological insights to provide a bridge between theory and practice.

Organised into five key parts, it is arranged in a way that reflects the journey that practitioners take into and through Learning Development, from their initiation into the field, through professional development, to becoming an established expert. It covers key topics such as:

- the basic principles of working in Learning Development
- the theoretical and practical foundations of the field
- how to engage more critically with the role
- how to become an active contributor to the field through research and publication
- the as-yet unrealised possibilities of Learning Development

Capturing a diverse array of voices, experiences, and perspectives, this book is an essential guide for both new and established practitioners concerned with student Learning and Development.

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