Enhancing Academic Excellence In Social Studies Through Authentic Assessment
And Portfolio Assessment

B. A. Adeyemi
Institute of Education,
Obafemi Awolowo University,
Ile – Ife, Osun State, Nigeria.
E-MAIL badeyemi@oanife.edu.ng or Adeyemibabs2003@yahoo.com

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship that existed among the two modes of assessment (Authentic assessment and Portfolio assessment) employed, based on the performance and the attitude of the students towards the two modes of assessment. The study was a survey design. The sample of the study consisted of four hundred and eighty (480) students that were purposefully selected from two secondary schools in Ife Central Local Government Area of Osun State, Nigeria. The sample was selected using purposeful random sampling among Junior Secondary School Students (JSS 2). The instruments used for data collection included: Social Studies Achievement Test, Instructional guide on Authentic Assessment and Instructional guide on Portfolio Assessment. Four research hypotheses were generated in the course of the study. The t-test and f-test statistical methods were used for data analysis. Results indicated that significant relationship existed between Achievement in Authentic Assessment and Achievement in Portfolio Assessment., whereas, no significant difference existed between Attitude towards Authentic Assessment and Attitude towards Portfolio Assessment. Also the results indicated difference in Achievement and Attitude towards Authentic Assessment. Likewise, difference existed in Achievement and Attitude towards Portfolio Assessment. Among others, it was recommended that more studies on the mode of assessment are needed in Nigeria so that efforts at improving educational system could be goal oriented, especially in this dispensation of educational reform.

Introduction

Teaching is part of the educational process and its main task is to develop, in individuals, such skills, competence and intellectual capacities, which will enable them to live effectively within the complex, dynamic and growing society. Teaching aims at increasing the effectiveness of the learners. It aids learning, which results into a change in the behaviour of an individual if exposed to some kind of experiences. The main purpose of classroom instruction is to enable the learners to demonstrate positive changes in knowledge, thinking and reasoning, character development and industry. The desired changes in learning activities can be realized only through effective teaching and learning. Observation of the desired cognitive, affective and psychomotor changes in learners’ behaviour involves the process of evaluation, which has become an essential part of the teaching and learning process.

The impossibility of separating teaching from assessment can be observed wherever teaching occurs. As the teacher speaks to the class, or to an individual pupil, he/she is at the same time judging how well they are doing, how they could do better, and how she could organize the work to assist them. Much of this assessment was instantaneous and
spontaneous. The teacher did very little formal assessing beyond occasional grading in an impressionistic way; filing in a report card at the end of each year by showing progress in the basic skills and a grade for overall attainment, and collecting examples of good work to pass on to the next teacher. Yet her work was full of decisions based on rapid assessments, and over the years it has been continually re-designed as she judged this approach to be better than the former. Jackson and Belford (1965), observing American elementary school teachers, concluded that they were continually assessing, and as a consequence were changing teaching styles and curriculum after close attention to the faces of the children. The joy of teaching was evident through the delightful expressions shown in the children’s countenance. Such attitude provided the feedback required for instantaneous re-planning.

In recent years, assessment practices in education have been subjected to critical review. Just as views about the nature of learning and educational practice have led to reappraisal of teaching and learning in schools, so there has been a need for an examination of how these are assessed. Gipps and Murphy (1994) have highlighted this increasing importance of assessment. They say: ‘…not only is there more assessment in schools, but it is also of more significance for pupils and the educational system as a whole.’ Assessment may be defined as “any method used to better understand the current knowledge that a student possesses.” This implies that assessment can be as simple as a teacher’s subjective judgment based on a single observation of student performance, or as complex as a five-hour standardized test. The idea of current knowledge implies that what a student knows is always changing and that we can make judgment about student achievement through comparisons over a period of time. Assessment may affect decisions about grades, advancement, placement, instructional needs, and curriculum.

Assessment is often seen as serving three purposes for the teacher: measuring attainment, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and indicating progress or deterioration. However, assessment is also one way by which injustice can be avoided in education. If identifiable groups persistently attain a low level of intelligence or achievement and eventually leave school without being employed, while other similarly identifiable groups aspire higher in their education and get promising jobs, then any technique that promises the early identification of strengths and weaknesses also offer the chance of doing something early enough in school careers to provide beneficial effect of improving the overall performance of the students. Of great concern to the investigator have been several classroom teaching observed as a part of monitoring team in some private secondary schools over the past decade which reveal a grossly inadequate application of various mode of assessment in schools.

There is a provision for continuous assessment of pupil’s performance, and as such, teachers do not have a structure in place, which would expose them to other modes of assessment such as practical, oral, projects and assignments. The norm-referenced summative tests and examinations are deeply engraven in the minds of primary school teachers as the only proper means of testing and assessment. The commonest practice, and one that has gained a central place in teachers’ repertoire of assessment techniques, is that of rigorous and regular marking of pupils’ exercise books. Mathematics exercises, written compositions, notes in health, social studies and elementary science are all subjected to regular checks by classroom teachers, who show any corrections or changes by inserting these in red before putting their initials to close the inspection. In most cases, pupils are required to make necessary corrections before the exercise book are submitted for marking the next assignment or exercises. The assessment act is mandatory, and is enforced administratively.
Most of the teachers used peer-marking for correcting set exercises during the lessons and those given as homework. The correct answers either came from the teacher, the textbook or were worked out collectively on the blackboard, but the marking procedure was always the same – neighbours exchanging and marking each other’s work. Such marking events invariably ended with a public show of success-rate when pupils raised their hands or stood up as the teacher announced the level of performance. To this end, educators have become increasingly convinced that rich, descriptive information about the process and products of learning cannot be gathered by conventional teaching and testing methods. With the rise of instructional and assessment practices that are holistic, student centered, performance based, process oriented, integrated and multidimensional, has come the subsequent decline of discrete, isolated, skill-based teacher-directed curricula.

To document these new expressions of teaching and learning, authentic and portfolio assessments have emerged as the vehicle by which students and teachers are organized, managed and analysed life inside and out of school. Unlike traditional measures, which tend to evaluate students’ possession of knowledge, authentic and portfolio assessment judges students’ ability to apply knowledge. The study therefore examined how social studies as a course of study could help in enhancing academic excellence through authentic and portfolio assessment.

Authentic Assessment as a Means of Assessment

It is difficult to discuss assessment without using traditional assessment approaches as a frame of reference. Throughout the authentic assessment literature, there is a rather clear bias against traditional assessment approaches, which typically rely heavily on multiple-choice test items. This perception tends to be reinforced by the fact that nearly every state now mandates standardized testing (Henderson and Karr-Kidwell 1998), which relies heavily on such closed response test items. These tests are influencing educational practices because, in some instances, results are being used as indicators of teacher job performance and are subsequently affecting teachers’ salaries. Another argument against traditional assessment practices is that there is an excessive emphasis on paper-and-pencil testing, which encourages the memorization of information.

Authentic assessment aims to evaluate students’ ability in “real-world” contexts. In other words, students learn how to apply their skills to authentic tasks and projects. Authentic assessment does not encourage rote learning and passive test-taking. Instead, it focuses on students’ analytical skills; ability to integrate what they learn; creativity; ability to work collaboratively; and written and oral expression skills. It values the learning process as much as the finished product. Claims about the positive impacts of authentic assessment on teaching and learning are found throughout the literature. One of the more general and pervasive premises is that learning experiences that reflect real-world activities are more valid. This validity represents more meaningful educational experiences that are proposed to be the driving force behind improved learning. “The expected positive effects of performance assessments on teaching and learning follow from their substantive validity” (Shepard, Flexer, Hiebert, Marion, Mayfield and Weston, 1994).

Falk (1995) contends that many of these claims are closely associated with a constructivist view of knowledge generation. The California Assessment Collaborative (1993) suggest that authentic assessment activities engage students in instructional tasks that require them to construct meaning. Simon and Gregg (1993) indicate that authentic assessments can “stimulate critical thought and input, which suggests that students are engaged in developing higher order thinking. Simon and Gregg (1993) also assert that
authentic assessments “involve students in their own learning.” These claims are parallel to those made for cognitive and metacognitive-based approaches to learning. Arguments have also been made that authentic assessment experiences encourage multiple modes of expression and support collaboration with others. (California Assessment Collaborative, 1993; Henderson and Karr-Kidwell 1998; Simon and Gregg 1993). Simon and Gregg (1993) also opine that authentic assessment can “increase interest” and “improve attitudes”.

Portfolio Assessment as a Means of Assessment

A portfolio in the context of the classroom is a collection of student work that shows evidences of mastery of a set of skills, applied knowledge, and attitudes. The individual works in a portfolio are often referred to as “artifacts.” A teacher portfolio is a collection of work produced by a teacher. Just as an artist uses a portfolio of collected works to illustrate his or her talents, a teacher portfolio is designed to demonstrate the teacher’s talents. Thus, teachers to highlight and demonstrate their knowledge and skills in teaching construct teacher portfolios. A portfolio also provides a means for reflection; it offers the opportunity for critiquing one’s work and evaluating the effectiveness of lessons of interpersonal interactions with students or peers.

Portfolio assessment has become widely used in educational settings as a way to examine and measure progress, by documenting the process of learning or change as it occurs. Portfolios extend beyond test scores to include substantive descriptions or examples of what the student is doing and experiencing. Fundamental to “authentic assessment” or “performance assessment” in educational theory is the principle that children and adolescents should demonstrate, rather than tell about, what they know and can do (Cole, Ryan, & Kick, 1995). Documenting progress toward higher order goals such as application of skills and synthesis of experience requires obtaining information beyond what can be provided by standardized or norm-based tests.

Characteristics of Portfolio Assessment

• A portfolio is a form of assessment that students do together with their teachers.
• A portfolio is not just a collection of student work, but a selection – the student must be involved in choosing and justifying the pieces to be included.
• A portfolio provides samples of the student’s work which show growth over time. By reflecting on their own learning (self-assessment), students are made to identify the strengths and weakness in their work. These weaknesses then become improvement goals.
• The criteria for selecting and assessing the portfolio contents must be clear to the teacher and the students at the outset of the process.

Advantages of Portfolio Assessment in learning

• They allow the teacher to see the student as an individual, each with his or her own unique set of characteristics, needs and strengths.
• They transform the role of the teacher away from generating comparative rankings of achievement (grades, percentile rankings, test scores) and toward improving student achievement through evaluative feedback and self-reflection.
• They help teachers standardize and evaluate the skills and knowledge we expect students to acquire without limiting creativity in the classroom.
They help students to be more accountable for the work they do in class and the skills and knowledge we are asking them to acquire.

- They aid in the diversification of approaches to teaching and learning, thus increasing the connections with a wider range of learners and learning styles.
- They involve students in the assessment process, thus giving them a more meaningful role in improving achievement.
- They invite students to reflect upon their growth and performance as learners.
- They involve parents and the community in taking measure of their children’s academic achievement in the context of the school curriculum rather than as measured by more ambiguous standardized tests and grades.

Purpose of the Study

This study was designed to address the following research objectives:

(i) To determine the relationship between Achievement in Authentic Assessment and Achievement in Portfolio Assessment;

(ii) To determine the relationship in the Attitude towards Authentic Assessment and Attitude towards Portfolio Assessment

(iii) To determine if there is significant difference in Achievement and Attitude towards Authentic Assessment

(iv) To determine if there is significant difference in Achievement and Attitude towards Portfolio Assessment.

Hypotheses

For the purpose of this study, four research hypotheses were postulated

1. There is no significant difference between Students Academic Achievement in Authentic Assessment and Achievement in Portfolio Assessment.

2. There is no significant difference between students Attitude towards Authentic Assessment and Attitude towards Portfolio Assessment.

3. There is no significant difference in Achievement and Attitude towards Authentic Assessment.

4. There is no significant difference in Achievement and Attitude towards Portfolio Assessment.

Methodology

Research design

The research design for this study is a survey research design. This is because a survey research design is one in which a group of people or items is studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few people or items considered to be representative of the entire group.

Sample

The sample of this study consisted of 480 students drawn from two secondary schools in Ife Central Local Government area of Osun State, Nigeria. Purposeful random sampling technique was employed in selecting the sample. The subjects of this study were students in Junior Secondary School Two (JSS 2).
Instrument used

Three research instruments were used to collect data for the study. They are:

1. Social Studies Achievement Test (SSAT)
2. Instructional Guide on Authentic Assessment (IGAA)
3. Instructional Guide on Portfolio Assessment (IGPA)

Specific information on each of research instruments are as follow:

**Social Studies Achievement Test (SSAT)**

This comprises 40 objectives questions drawn from a unit on JSS 2 social studies syllabus. The topic is leadership and followership. This topic was effectively taught in the two selected schools with the usage of only one instructional guide in a school and the other instructional guide in the second school. The initial version of the social studies achievement test comprise of 65 items. The items were subjected to pilot test on 30 students in another school. Some items were later discarded and the remaining 40 items were subjected to reliability index which yielded 0.708.

**Instructional Guide on Authentic Assessment (IGAA).** This was developed by the investigator. Emphasis was placed only on a topic which is leadership and followership. This guide was employed in School 1 alongside with achievement test in Social Studies. All that involved in ensuring authentic assessment were put into consideration when designing the instructional guide so that the aims of the study will not be derailed. It comprises 3 stages; (i) purpose (ii) assessment criteria (iii) evidence which is in line with Barton & Collins (1997). The instrument was trial tested through test-retest on 40 students in Faith Standard Cephalo Model College Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria and reliability index of 0.84 was obtained.

**Instructional Guide on Portfolio Assessment (IGPA).** The investigator developed this. Emphasis was placed only on a topic, which is leadership and followership. This guide was employed in School 2 alongside with achievement test in Social Studies. All that involved in ensuring portfolio assessment were put into consideration when designing the instructional guide so that the aims of the study will not be derailed. It comprises 4 stages; introduction, presentation, conclusion, and evaluation. The instrument was trial tested through test-retest on 30 students in Faith Standard Cephalo Model College Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria and reliability index of 0.79 was obtained.
Test of hypotheses
HO1: There is no significant difference between Academic Achievement in Authentic Assessment and Portfolio Assessment.

Table 1: Difference Between Academic Achievement In Authentic Assessment And Portfolio Assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>tc</th>
<th>tr</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achievement in Authentic Assessment</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>8.43</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement in Portfolio assessment</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>7.84</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P < .05

\[ t_c = 2.85 > t_r = 1.96 \] The result is significant; therefore the null hypothesis is rejected

HO2: There is no significant difference between students Attitude towards Authentic Assessment and Portfolio Assessment.

Table 2: Difference Between Students Attitude Towards Authentic Assessment And Portfolio Assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>tc</th>
<th>tr</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards authentic assessment</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards Portfolio assessment</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P ≤ .05

\[ t_c = 0.84 \] which is less than \[ t_r = 1.96 \]. The result is not significant; therefore the null hypothesis is accepted.

HO3: There is no significant difference in Achievement and Attitude towards Authentic Assessment.

Table 3: Difference in Achievement and Attitude towards Authentic Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variance</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>Fc</th>
<th>Ft</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Group</td>
<td>859.48</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>429.74</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Group</td>
<td>7685.71</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>30.99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8545.19</td>
<td>250</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ F_c = 13.9 < F_t = 3.00 \] at \( p = 0.05 \)

We then accept the null hypothesis, that there is difference between the means. This implies that the result is significant.

HO4: There is no significant difference in Achievement and Attitude towards Portfolio Assessment.
Table 4: Difference in Achievement and Attitude towards Portfolio Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variance</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>Fc</th>
<th>Ft</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Group</td>
<td>687.42</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>343.71</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Group</td>
<td>6974.83</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>30.86</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7662.25</td>
<td>228</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ F_c = 11.1 < F_t = 3.00 \text{ at } p = 0.05 \]

We then accept the null hypothesis, that there is difference between the means. This implies that the result is significant.

Discussion

Based on the tables above, it could be deduced that Tables 1, 3 and 4 indicated significant relationship among the variables in the study, whereas table 2 indicated that no significant relationship existed between the variable of studies. The result is therefore in consonance with some of the empirical study conducted earlier that reported implementing portfolio assessment does appear to have salutary effects on instruction and student learning and attitudes (Shepard, 1989; Wolf, 1989; Brandt, 1989; Aschbacher, 1993). Also, Nasrin and Mohammad (2002) in a study of assessment of achievement through portfolio and teacher-made test supported the contribution of portfolio assessment to EFL learners’ achievement and their feelings of responsibility for monitoring their own progress, provided that the assessment is used in conjunction with teacher-made tests.

The study further confirms the probable correlation between the score of portfolio assessment and those of teacher-made test. This indicated that portfolio assessment is a promising testing and teaching tool for teachers in EFL classes, offering an assessment practice, which is truly congruent with instruction. Previous Studies have demonstrated that students engaged in different learning approaches when attempting to accomplish a learning task. Each of the different approaches to learning encompasses a motive for learning and a set of appropriate strategies to accomplish the task. From both qualitative (Marton and Saljo, 1976) and quantitative (Biggs, 1987a). The two studies made use of two general approaches of learning: surface and deep. It was discovered that students that engaged in a surface approach had an extrinsic motive to carry out the task for some external achievements other than their immediate task, which was an approach that aimed at avoiding failure with minimum effort. On the other hand, students who were engaged with deep approach had intrinsic motivation of felt need based on interest in the task.

The strategies thus adopted were task specific and aimed at seeking and understanding the meaning of what is being learned. Not only do these students relate the different aspects of the information to one another, they also relate them to their previous learning and their personal experiences. Hattie, Biggs and Purdie (1996) conducted a study to explore the impact of authentic assessment on learning. To this end, a meta-analysis of 51 studies was used to determine the effect of learning skills interventions to enhance learning. Although their analysis was not limited to studies related specifically to authentic assessment, their findings support the value of metacognition. They recommend, “Training for other than mnemonic performance should promote a high degree of learner activity and metacognitive awareness”. This finding supports authentic assessment approaches, which...
call for students to participate actively in self-assessment, thereby maintaining a sense of where they have been and where they need to go.

**Conclusion and Recommendation**

The results of the present study seem to support the contribution of authentic and portfolio assessment to the teaching and learning process. This implies that these two modes of assessment would go a long way in ensuring academic success in learner as they are vital tools in testing and teaching for both teachers and students.

The two modes of assessment are therefore recommended for use in our schools.

For this to be enhanced, the following should be done:

- The government should make provision for proper funding of our education system, if this is done, it will be possible to assess students’ performance on worthy intellectual tasks.
- Adequate facilities which are crucial and essential in our education system should be made available so that it will be easy for teachers to evaluate how well students are progressing in a particular instructional programmes.
- Teachers in schools should be ready to adjust to changes taking place from time to time in our educational system. This will assist them not to be stereotyped in evaluating students’ progress based on already obsolete approach of assessing or evaluating students progress through the use of pencil and paper.
- Efforts should also be made in seeing that offices are made available and materials should be properly kept by whosoever is designated in the school system to keep students’ records.

**REFERENCES**


