

Practices of School-Based Assessment: The Junior High School Teachers Perspective

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Abstract

Practices of School-based assessment is one of the critical components of assessment in Ghanaian schools. It practices and challenges teachers faced were explored in the Bawku Municipality in the Upper East Region of Ghana. All the teachers at the Junior High Schools in Bawku Central were involved. Questionnaires were used in the collection of the data. Means and standard deviation were used for the analysis. The study revealed Junior High School teachers' practices of Classroom-based assessment were very low. Also, the study revealed numerous challenges teachers at the Junior High School in Bawku Central faced. The study, therefore, recommended that the stakeholders of the schools in Bawku Central should take it as a matter of urgency to encourage teachers to develop positive attitudes towards the application of SBA. Also, Ghana Education Service in Bawku Municipality should ensure that there is a regular supply of assessment materials to all schools to avoid teachers asking students to provide their assessment materials for their projects. Moreover, Bawku Municipal Education Service should negotiate with stakeholders who have an interest in education to organize in-service training on how to prepare assessment items, especially SBA tasks. This would go a long way to help the teachers construct good SBA items.

Keywords: Classroom-based assessment.

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

In Ghanaian schools, School-based assessment (SBA) is implemented in the first and second cycles. SBA places significant emphasis on inculcating various essential skills among students, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, numerical proficiency, moral and spiritual growth, as well as formal presentation abilities (CRDD, 2011). A school-based assessment is an assessment method conducted within schools and graded by the student's teachers (Awoniyi, 2016). Its purpose is to establish an internal assessment system that helps schools meet the expected standards. According to Opara *et al.*, (2015), SBA takes a comprehensive approach to achieve the three domains of learning that are cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. Similarly, Aduloju, *et al.*, (2016) highlighted that this practice involves continuous assessment of students learning in education using various assessment tools like tests, assignments, observations, interviews, questionnaires, and projects. The primary focus of SBA lies in active student engagement and participation in the

classroom, prioritizing learning. Yan (2014) noted that despite SBA being a low-stakes assessment it provides students an opportunity to improve their learning, SBA also contributes to students' final grades for the nine years in school.

In Ghanaian schools, teachers are responsible for developing assessment instruments for both formative and summative evaluations, and this process continues until the students take the external examination. The formative assessment provides feedback on students' progress, while the summative assessment yields final grades. This aligns with Yan's (2014) viewpoint that SBA combines formative and summative assessments, allowing it to assess both learning outcomes and the learning process itself. School-based assessment plays a supplementary role to external examinations, offering a more comprehensive assessment of students' accomplishments (Adediwura, 2012). In implementing SBA, the excessive reliance on grades and scores from centralized examinations is

reduced (Reyneke, 2016). This shift emphasizes the significance in terms of students' achievement, rather than solely focusing on their numerical outcomes (Md-Ali, *et al.*, 2015).

SBA has a beneficial impact on students' learning, encouraging a shift from mere memorization of facts to a deeper understanding of the subject matter (Velloo *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, Omorogiuwa and Aibangbee (2017) also support the idea that SBA data collected as feedback can be used to adjust teaching methods and enhance students' experiences. Similarly, Yahay (2016) pointed out that students excel in class due to the regular and varied assessments involved in SBA practices. The SBA is specifically planned to offer schools an internal assessment approach that serves various purposes (CRDD, 2011). These purposes include:

1. Periodic data collection: SBA entails administering assessments at the end of each month during the school term. This approach provides a more accurate gauge of students' performance by considering their average scores over an extended period.
2. Diverse test modes: SBA employs various test modes, such as class tests, exercises, projects, and practical activities, to better assess students' performance. Nevertheless, homework remains important in the educational process as it supports learning, even if it is not included in the SBA scoring.
3. Emphasis on challenging thinking skills: SBA requires students to demonstrate high-level thinking and problem-solving abilities. These tasks involve analytical thinking, creative problem-solving, project planning, and the generation of innovative ideas and products.
4. Teacher support and guidance: SBA allows teachers to offer assistance and constructive feedback to students during the project phase. This fosters cooperation between teachers and students, particularly in collaborative class projects.
5. Reduced assessment workload: Compared to the previous continuous assessment system, SBA significantly reduces the assessment and grading workload, lightening the burden by 64 percent for students and 53 percent for teachers. This reduction is aimed at alleviating the tedium associated with excessive assessments.
6. Focus on student-centered learning: SBA places great importance on project-based learning, granting students the freedom to explore ideas and skills independently or collaboratively, leading to the creation of their projects.
7. Standardization across schools: Ensuring uniformity in the practice of SBA across all schools in Ghana is an essential aspect of the system's implementation. This standardization

helps maintain consistency and fairness in the assessment process

1.1.1 SBA Administration in Ghana

CRDD (2011) indicated that SBA is comprised of a total of twelve (12) assessments per year, distributed across three different types of assessments conducted within a single term. These assessments include:

- i) Class test
- ii) Group task
- iii) Project work.

Each term encompasses two (2) class tests, a group assignment, and a project work, making up the twelve assessments in total. Assessments, as defined by CRDD (2011), mean Class Assessment Tasks (CATs). The CATs are structured as follows:

CAT1: The task comprises test items.

CAT2: Involves group work.

CAT3: Class test

CAT4: The project work for the first term.

CAT5: Class test conducted at the end of week 4 in the second term.

CAT6: A group assignment given to students at the end of week eight in the second term.

CAT7: Another class test, to be administered at the end of Week 11 in the second term.

CAT8: The project for the second term.

CAT9: A test to be given at the end of Week 4 in the third term.

CAT10: Group exercises assigned at the end of Week 8 in the third term.

CAT11: A class test to be administered at the end of Week 11 in the third term.

CAT12: The project for the third term.

The SBA administration ends at week eleventh of the term, allowing schools to use the twelfth week to conduct the End-of-Term exams. The process of selecting project work topics and gathering data should be on the second week and should be submitted by the end of the term.

1.1.2 Structure of Assessments and Mark Allocation for the CAT

The various subjects in the curriculum have distinct requirements, and as a result, they employ different approaches in constructing class assessment tasks. Subjects that involve logical reasoning and moral issues may use objective tests, whereas subjects like Music, Dance, and Physical Education may use practical tests instead. At the Junior High School (JHS) level, subjects are categorized into different groups for SBA implementation:

1. Group 1 comprises Mathematics, Science, Religious and Moral Education, and Social Studies.
2. Group 2 includes languages such as English, French, and Ghanaian languages, as well as Culture.

3. Group 3 consists of practical or performance-oriented subjects like Basic Design and Technology and Information and Communication Technology.
4. Group 4 encompasses subjects with internally assessed practical components, such as Music and Physical Education.

1.1.3 SBA Projects

CRDD (2011) explains that School-based assessment (SBA) projects encompass a variety of tasks, including examinations, experiments, material production, or idea development. The projects can be based on research leading to the creation of a physical product, a novel idea, or a new process. Awoniyi (2016) contends that SBA project work provides students with an opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired during their schooling to conduct authentic assessment tasks and write analytical reports. Furthermore, CRDD (2011) posits that SBA projects require the application of high-order skills, such as analysis, evaluation, and inventive thinking. This includes synthesizing ideas and skills to develop a new product, idea, or process. The group projects in each term are scored out of 100, specifically CAT4, CAT8, and CAT12.

1.1.4 Undertaking SBA Projects

CRDD (2011) identifies three distinct approaches to undertaking SBA projects, namely the fused curriculum approach, emerging approaches, and trans-disciplinary curriculum approach. The fused curriculum approach involves combining two or more subjects' knowledge in solving problems, with one subject serving as the primary subject. The project is primarily based on the primary subject, while other subjects are incorporated when relevant or appropriate. The emerging curriculum approach, on the other hand, is developed based on the needs of society and the nation as a whole. It aims to address the current and emerging challenges and demands of the community. The trans-disciplinary curriculum approach requires students to draw upon knowledge and skills from multiple subjects to solve a particular problem. Projects using this approach are designed in a way that integrates various skills from different subject areas. This approach is particularly suitable for Junior High School (JHS) and above because it required students to apply their higher-level learning from multiple subjects to complete such projects.

Despite the significance of SBA, extant literature has shown that teachers in Ghana lack

sufficient understanding of it and, consequently, fail to implement it effectively in their classrooms. For example, studies conducted by Akugri (2023); Awoniyi (2016) and Oduro-Okyireh (2008) demonstrated that many teachers lack the necessary knowledge of SBA for assessing their students' learning. As a result, these teachers are reluctant to incorporate SBA in their teaching practices. Similarly, Kapambwe (2010) asserted that teachers who were the implementers of the curriculum at the level of the classroom have little or no knowledge of SBA best practices, while some knowledgeable teachers have a negative attitude towards it. This study therefore sought to explore Junior High School teachers' perspective of Classroom-Based Assessment Practices in Bawku Municipality.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What is the nature of SBA practice in Junior High Schools in Bawku Central?
2. What are the challenges encountered by teachers at the Junior High School level when practicing SBA in Bawku Municipality?

2.0 METHODS

2.1 Research Design

A descriptive survey design was used for the study and the data was collected using a questionnaire of which it was distributed to all the JHS teachers in Bawku municipality. The researcher had a return rate of 70 percent which represented 313. Four-point Likert-type scale questionnaire was adapted from Iddrisu, (2020) which was used to examine teachers' knowledge of SBA at the primary school. The questionnaire had reliability of 0.62. The questionnaire was modified after pilot testing and had a reliability of 0.78.

3.1 RESULTS

3.1.1 Research Question One

Research question one aimed to explore the nature of Junior High School teachers' practices regarding SBA in Bawku Central. Teachers were asked to rate their SBA practices using the categories of Never, Sometimes, Very Often, and Always. The responses from items 1 to 13 were used to address this question. The rating was as follows: Always = 4, Very Often = 3, Sometimes = 2, and Never = 1. A mean score of 2.50 was set as the criterion value (CV). Mean scores ranging from 0.00 to 2.49 were considered indicative of low practice, while mean scores from 2.50 to 4.00 were classified as high. The descriptive results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Teachers' practices of SBA

Practices	MEAN	SD
I award marks based on the effort of each student	3.268	0.876
I always follow the laid down procedure of administration SBA	1.191	1.092
When carrying out school-based assessments, I ensure that all group exercises are conducted as planned.	1.137	0.914

Practices	MEAN	SD
During the group exercises, I actively engage with the groups, assisting as necessary, while refraining from giving away correct answers.	1.051	1.000
I create test items that align with the most crucial objectives covered during each term's coursework.	1.044	0.039
When implementing school-based assessments, I ensure that group projects are an integral part of the assessment process.	1.987	0.006
In my school-based assessment practice, I provide my students with two tests, one group exercise, and project work within a single term	1.948	0.056
After analyzing the difficulties pupils encounter with the assessment items, I arrange a remedial session for the class to address those issues.	0.894	0.069
When implementing school-based assessment, I ensure that classroom instruction incorporates practical examples to motivate pupils to apply their knowledge to solve problems of different levels of difficulty.	0.888	0.159
In my SBA practice, project tasks are designed to require various subjects' knowledge in solving the task.	0.830	0.900
I complete my SAB by the end of the eleventh week	0.785	0.055
I ensure that individual projects are included as part of the assessment process.	2.770	0.963
I request the various groups to self-assess and assign themselves a mark and grade for the work they have completed.	1.028	0.054
MM/SD	1.295	0.251

Source: Field Data (2023) Cut-off mean = 2.50, (n = 313) Key-M = Mean Value, SD = Standard

Table 1 indicates a significant number of teachers at the Junior High Schools in Bawku Municipality do not practice school-based assessment (SBA). This was evident as the group mean ($M = 1.295$, $SD = 0.251$) was found to be lower than the cut-off value ($CV = 2.50$). This suggests that teachers in the municipality do not recognize the importance of assessing their students using SBA.

The findings from Table 1 revealed the following:

1. The majority of Junior High School teachers in Bawku stated that in SBA practice, they award marks based on the effort and performance of each group ($M = 3.268$, $SD = 0.876$).
2. Most of the teachers indicated that they do not follow the procedures and designated time of administration when practicing school-based assessment ($M = 3.191$, $SD = 1.092$).
3. Teachers in Bawku Municipality does not ensure that all group exercises were conducted ($M = 1.137$, $SD = 0.914$).
4. Furthermore, a significant number of teachers stated that during group exercises, they do not actively move around the groups to offer assistance ($M = 1.051$, $SD = 1.000$).
5. Many teachers indicated that they do not develop test items based on objectives that are critical in each term's coursework ($M = 1.044$, $SD = 0.039$).
6. Teachers indicated that they do not include project work in their SBA ($M = 1.987$, $SD = 0.006$).
7. Most teachers in Bawku Municipality mentioned that they give two tests, one group exercise, and project work in a term ($M = 1.948$, $SD = 0.056$).

8. Similarly, teachers often analyzed the problems faced by students with the assessment items but do not organize remedial sessions for the class ($M = 0.894$, $SD = 0.069$).
9. A significant number of teachers in Bawku Municipality stated that they do not incorporate practical illustrations in classroom instruction to encourage students to apply their knowledge to complex problems ($M = 0.888$, $SD = 0.159$).
10. Additionally, teachers do not ensure that project tasks were designed to involve knowledge and competence from various subjects ($M = 0.830$, $SD = 0.900$).
11. The majority of teachers in Bawku Municipality indicated that they do not always complete SBA ($M = 0.785$, $SD = 0.055$).
12. However, teachers in Bawku Municipality mentioned that they assigned individual projects ($M = 2.770$, $SD = 0.963$).
13. Most teachers in Bawku Municipality stated that they do not apply peer assessment skills ($M = 1.0281$, $SD = 0.054$).

3.1.2 Research Question Two

What challenges do teachers encounter at the Junior High School in practicing SBA in Bawku Municipality? The teachers were asked to rate their challenges using categories such as "Strongly Agree," "Agree," "Disagree," and "Strongly Disagree." For a better understanding of the mean scores, statements on challenges that scored a mean of 0.00 to 2.49 were considered as not representing significant challenges. However, those whose scores above 2.49 were deemed to be actual challenges. The findings from this analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Challenges that JHS Teachers in Bawku Municipality faced in Practicing SBA

Challenges of SBA	MEAN	SD
I perceive school-based assessment as being more engaging.	3.466	0.980
Occasionally, I request students to bring their materials for the projects assigned to them.	3.124	1.206
The Municipal Education Directorate does not provide sufficient materials for assessing the students.	2.875	1.296
The school-based assessment format consumes a significant amount of my time.	2.872	1.249
The school does not supply test materials for assessing students	2.862	1.246
I do not receive any assistance or support for the preparation of assessment items	2.731	1.295
My challenge lies in maintaining appropriate record-keeping of my students' progress.	2.607	1.311
A school-based assessment is confusing	2.575	1.306
I have difficulty being consistent and fair in allocating marks to my students	2.534	1.387
I face challenges when converting observed scores to the 50% score	2.405	1.356
I encounter difficulties when constructing test items for my students.	2.309	1.294
It appears that my test items do not effectively assess the content I have taught.	2.287	1.310
MM/SD	2.713	1.269

Source: Field Data (2023) Cut-off mean = 2.50 (n = 313), n = Sample Size, SD = standard deviation, MM = Mean of Means

Based on the data in Table 2, it is evident that Junior High School teachers in the Bawku Municipality face several challenges in implementing SBA. The group mean (M = 2.713, SD = 1.269) surpassed the cut-off value (CV = 2.50), indicating the presence of challenges. The challenges encountered by the teachers in the municipality are ranked in magnitude as follows:

1. Teachers in Bawku municipality perceive SBA to be more engaging (M = 3.466, SD = 0.980).
2. Another notable challenge is the need to occasionally ask students to provide their materials for the projects given to them (M = 3.124, SD = 1.206).
3. Teachers are also challenged with insufficient materials (M = 2.875, SD = 1.296).
4. The school-based assessment format is perceived to consume a significant amount of time for Junior High School teachers in the Bawku Municipality (M = 2.872, SD = 1.249).
5. Moreso, testing materials were also challenged (M = 2.862, SD = 1.246).
6. Teachers reported that they do not receive adequate support for the preparation of assessment items (M = 2.731, SD = 1.295).
7. Another challenge is the appropriate record-keeping of students' progress, which is considered difficult (M = 2.607, SD = 1.311).
8. Some teachers find school-based assessments confusing (M = 2.575, SD = 1.306).
9. Teachers were not faithful in allocating marks to their students (M = 2.434, SD = 1.387).
10. Similarly, teachers do not find it challenging to convert observed scores to percentages (M = 2.415, SD = 1.356).
11. Moreover, teachers in Bawku Municipality were not having much difficulty in constructing test items for their students (M = 2.309, SD = 1.294).

12. Finally, teachers reported that they can construct test items that effectively assess what they have taught (M = 2.287, SD = 1.310)

4.1 DISCUSSION

Junior High School teachers in Bawku Central do not practice SBA as outlined in the SBA manual. This is not surprising because the situation in that part of the country has been engulfed with unresolved chieftaincy conflict and because of that teachers have no peace of mind to do an effective SBA. The findings confirm the work of Oduro-Okyireh (2008) that teachers do not follow the basic principles of SBA construction, administration, and scoring. The principles of SBA are a special area that needs commitment by teachers in its implementation and if teachers are not committed there will not follow its laid down procedures and thereof will see its practice to be difficult. Yahaya (2016) opined that teachers had a perception of SBA practices as they indicated that it slows down teaching, is difficult to implement, has unknown scope, and is time-consuming. Until a conscious effort is made by Ghana education service to erase the unhealthy thinking about the practice of SBA, its practices by teachers will continue to be questionable.

Junior High School teachers face challenges in their quest to practice SBA in Bawku Municipality. The challenges of teachers are enormous ranging from their professional development to logistic constrain. In terms of teachers' professional development, teachers do not get in-school professional support, external professional support, or ongoing professional development in SBA preparation. Logistically, teachers have shown to be facing a lot of challenges in their practices at Bawku municipality. Veloo and Md-Ali (2016) confirmed that teachers face difficulties related to the availability of assessment tools and resources, along with managing their Physical Education classrooms. Likewise, John (2000) stated that the scarcity of SBA materials presents

a hurdle for numerous teachers striving to implement SBA effectively.

It was also found that teachers were having difficulty in constructing test items for students. The construction of test items is a core of SBA because teachers' ability to construct a test item that measures the intended construct is the sole prerogative of SBA. The teacher's inability to construct SBA items could attribute to the fact that most of the teachers are not taking through how to construct test items that measure the class-based construct. This finding of the current study confirms the study of Fook and Sidhu (2006) that teachers do not have adequate knowledge in constructing their tests.

5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Stakeholders of the schools in Bawku should take as a matter of urgency to encourage teachers to develop positive attitudes toward the application of SBA.
2. Ghana Education Service in Bawku Municipality should ensure that there is a regular supply of assessment materials to all schools to avoid teachers asking students to provide their assessment materials for their projects. This will enable teachers to administer the various CATS at the appropriate time.
3. Bawku Municipal Education Service should negotiate with other stakeholders who have an interest in education to organize in-service training on how to prepare assessment items, especially SBA tasks. This would go a long way to help the teachers construct good SBA items.

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