INFUENCE OF STANDARDIZED TESTING ON STUDENTS ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: STAKEHOLDERS PERCEPTION

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Abstract

The increase demand in educational accountability and comparability of students' test scores that gave rise as a result of standardized testing has placed a grater premium on emphasis on students standardized test scores and generated stressful challenges for students and teachers in all educational institutions in Nigeria. This article explores different points of view or opinions from teachers, evaluators/researchers, parents, and students on the positive and negative influence of standardized testing on students and teachers. The paper recommends that the test should be modify to suit the various classes of learners; taking into consideration; the school location, certain environmental, psychological and social factors since all the students do not dwell in the same environment, and do not subscribe to the same learning environment. Individual schools or educational zones should be allowed to develop and standardized their tests in line with the national objectives of learning and the needs of the society. Students should be trained on how to excel or perform well on standardized testing and any other tests and to function effectively in an environment where critical thinking, collaboration, and intellectual articulation are essential.

Introduction

In recent time, standardized testing seems to have become the driving energy in shaping students' ability, quality and accountability of education all over the world (Dodge, 2007). Standardized tests are administered to millions of students each year for different purposes. The pressure for students and schools to perform on standardized tests in Nigeria has become so intense for students, teachers, principals or proprietors and the entire school system. Hirsh (2006) pointed out that standardized testing movement has continued to play an increasing role in how learners are educated. The tests measure learned skills in core academic subjects and the outcomes are employed to evaluate instructional effectiveness and make placement, promotion, and certification decisions (Hershberg, 2004).Students and schools performance on standardized testing is seriously an existing concern, especially for students, principals and proprietors of students and schools in the rural setting where there are no good supervision, no electricity, no good classroom, no adequate number of subject experts or teachers, no library, no instructional materials, no well-equipped laboratory, and no modern instructional materials and are pressured to meet state benchmark in order to earn federal allocation.

Standardized tests are tests that are designed such that the questions, conditions for

administration, scoring procedure, and interpretation are consistent and are administered in a predetermined standard manner for all the candidates taking the test, regardless of when, where or by whom (Popham, 1999). Standardized tests are usually more elaborate in preparation. Subject experts, psychometricians, and teachers usually come together to prepare standardized tests (Inko-Tariah, 2004). The questions may be simple or complex, multiple –choice tests. The tests can be on academic skills, driving tests, creativity, personality tests, professional ethics or other attributes (Phelps, 2016). The increased demand in students' performance and schools accountability brought about by standardized testing has placed a greater emphasis on standardized test scores and guarantee stressful, and emotional challenges for students, teachers and school administrators across Nigerian. Students and schools performance standard requirements and expectations are challenging especially for students of low income background and those living in the rural settings and have no access to quality education, information communication technology (ICT) and no good learning environment.

This paper explores different points of view or opinions from teachers, evaluators/researchers, parents, and students on the positive and negative influence of standardized testing on students and teachers.

Issues about standardized testing
Standardized testing is adding tremendous amount of stress and emotional challenges to the educational environment, both for learners and teachers. Dewey (1956) as cited in Owens (2004)stated that class room instruction should promote progressive practices such as group enquiry, active construction of knowledge and socialization, thus teachers should see themselves as facilitators of knowledge rather than presenters of knowledge. Hands – on

instruction, scientific investigation, adequate evaluation, and multiple intelligence theory are contemporary progressive instructional methods advocated by Dewey's educational philosophy. Pragmatic educators see intelligence as abstract thinking and comprehension of complex tasks or ideas and not as book learning or test taking. Many educators are aware that one instructional method does not benefit all students, hence they teach according to how students teach (Dodge, 2007).

Tomlinson (2006) asserted that effective instructional classroom environment motivates learners to become thinkers, problem solvers and producers. The evaluator further noted that students learn better when challenge slightly beyond where they could work without assistance and when there is a connection or relationship between the curriculum and their life experiences. Educational evaluators and researchers have gathered data that support how learners' needs must be addressed from different points of view for students to become life-long learners. When students' basic learning needs are made available, they learn better and become students capable of focusing on the objectives/goals or standards set by the educational agencies and teachers.

Positive influence of standardized testing
Standardized testing is often perceived as an assessment which takes account of the collection of information about students' achievement. When tests are standardized, it means that a particular group of tastes or students will take the same test that will be administered, scored, analyzed and the result disseminated the same way irrespective of the geographical setting of the schools, candidates or situation. The score for each student is then compared to the rest of the group to see how the student performed and the school that has the highest number of students that performed better. The test is believed to be fairer than non-standardized test since all the candidates get

the same grading system. Standardized testing conditions and content increases the reliability of students' scores by reducing sources of error extraneous to the skills and abilities being measured (Phelps, 2016).

Standardized testing provides norms and score of students for possible comparison; establish formats, in order to assist in determining how well students are doing in their academic pursuit with regard to their peers in other institutions of learning. It answers such questions as how well are the students performing among various educational institutions or schools, in different states, nations or local government areas. How can the system ascertain which students are performing well in various school or states or nations? Standardized testing provides teachers, parents, educators, students and educational agencies the necessary information about how well students are progressing or retarding (Phelps, 2016).

Some scholars have argued that standardized testing are reliable objective estimate of students' academic performance, and that without standardized testing policy makers would have to depend on teacher made test, which does not provide enough information for policy reform. Standardized testing gives valuable insight into broader issues such as the standard of curriculum necessary for grade level requirements, and reference point for fair and equitable education for all students in all educational institutions (Lee, 1989). Standardized testing provides the teacher necessary diagnostic data about what each student is learning in relation to what has been done. This information helps the teacher to know if the student needs intervention or remediation, if actually the course content of the curriculum matches the course requirement. With the help of standardized testing, parents are better informed of their children's level of educational attainment, make informed choices

for their children since data reveals schools that are meeting state benchmark or standard. With standardized testing, students are motivated to study harder to avoid being nicked name school dropout.

Standardized testing gives students the desire to study well, it gives the urge, the zeal, and drive or pushes to achieve. It gives students the determination to succeed, even in difficult and un-stimulating circumstances. Standardized testing gives students the will to go when all else around them want to let go. For example, the student who carries on his academic work in-spite of operating on zero-one-zero, one-zero-one, one-zero-zero or zero-zero-one feeding formula and other inadequate educational resources does that because he has a motivation. The student who continues to sit for Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examinations (UTME), National Examination Council (NECO) or Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSSCE) or other certificated professional exams such as Bar exams, and Bachelor in Medicine Bachelor in Science in-spite of successive failure does that because the test assures of brighter future (Davids, 2003). Standardized testing serves as feedback mechanism to inform students of their academic progress which assist them to know whether they performed well or not. It helps students to seek knowledge in diverse ways. For example, students in preparation for standardized testing often time do hire private tutor(s) for the different subject areas or register extra-moral classes, devote extra study hour, burn candles and sometimes shun unnecessary life styles. All to ensure they are successful in the examination.

Negative influence of standardized testing
Standardized testing is seen as beneficial in some aspects, it has also been citizen in some aspects as not being beneficial to students. In a study conducted by Cheryl and Jenifer (2007),

teachers were asked on how new educational accountability measure influences the stress and pressure on teachers in elementary classroom, 95% out of a population of 51 respondents indicated that they feel increased pressure to improve on their students standardized test scores, with the greatest pressure being felt from the media, school boards and school principals or proprietors. Bigelow (2000) noted that the pressure that exist for the teachers are mainly administrative pressure, media pressure and pressure from stakeholders. Some of the respondents stated that school principals and teachers are threatening of their job if test scores are not improved. The pressure to increase test scores has potential effect of taking away the joy teachers derive in inculcating the right knowledge, skills, and competencies in their students. Standardized testing is adding very great amount of stress to the school environment both for the students and teacher (Bigelow, 2000).

Educational accountability based on test scores is turning instructional classroom into an atmosphere where skills and memorization is receiving better attention than students' discovery and developing love for learning (Cheryl & Jenifer, 2007).These amounts to reduction in content knowledge: students are trained to take high stakes test that does not provide them the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of subject when tested with a different format. Standardized testing narrows curriculum, with focus on reading and math's scores, students lose other important courses or subjects such as history, mother tongue, arts, and other educational programmers. This always amount to lack of balance in the school curriculum (Holloway, 2001). Popham (1999) stated that standardized testing fails to measure instruction adequately. Administration may not be possible for some students who are disabled,

thus, the test does not provide enough information needed for curriculum change.

Standardized testing shuts out educational programmers. Some students are excluded when test results count as advantage or extra weight for entrance into gifted programmers or advanced courses (Holloway, 2001). Standardized testing sometimes results to loss or diversion of resources. Schools that are known for not doing enough on standardized testing are often seen as failing on the basis of test scores, this can lead to educational resources been taken away from such school and can result to closure of the school (Phelps, 2016). This situation can result to some students dropping out of school completely; hence some parents may not be able to enroll their children or wards into another institution due to high cost of education or poor economy.

Popham (1999) maintained that standardized testing often leads to loss of curiosity and love for learning. Such tests are developmentally inappropriate for testing learners. Emphasis on skill drill fails to stimulate students' imagination and limit their natural curiosity. Students are pressured not to demonstrate their knowledge but also to represent the effectiveness of their teachers and schools. The pressure also causes students health failure such as throwing up, losing control of their bowels and increased commitment for psychiatric and anxiety issues. Standardized testing makes students feel worthless. Especially when such student have failed test severally, the students sees him or herself as a bad test taker who cannot succeed in school. Standardized testing such as adaptive testing, students from low income background and those from rural setting who are not computer literate and sometimes no electricity are usually disadvantaged. Even if electricity is there, these students sometimes lack the necessary social awareness to appreciate the impact of information communication technology (ICT). Thus, administering such test on a

student who falls within this class may end up producing some harmful effects which most likely may result in the student developing hatred for education.

Madams (1988) pointed out that when high stakes tests, which link students' academic achievement and teachers instructional effectiveness weigh too heavily into the curriculum or scheme of work and pedagogy, testing may become the end of instruction instead of instrument or tool of instruction. Standardized testing make teachers view occupational work as changing due to the influences of multiple standardized assessment with varying heights of accountability associated with each (Pedulla, 2003). Negative influence of standardized testing according to Amrein and Berliner (2003) include indirect control of local curriculum, lowering of faculty morale, increase in undue cheating, and negative psychological and physical effects on students and teachers. Teachers are pressured to improve students test scores, even when students' instruction is not improved, thereby making teachers to play the number game. The emphasis is no longer on individual learning rather it is the making of adequate yearly progress. Teachers are forced to abandon what they know will benefit students (Cheryl & Jennifer, 2007).

Wood (1999) pointed out that when standardized testing becomes an end to itself, the worth of investigation, creativity, and positive social interaction is diminished and will ultimately be lost. Bracey (2000) highlighted that the pressure of standardized testing make teachers to abandon their usual modes of delivering classroom instructions such as demonstration, questioning, collaborative, constructivism and students teacher interaction/ student-students interaction to lecture about test - oriented material. A situation that commonly provide room for teachers to omit some important aspect of the curriculum that are of immense benefit to students but are not on the test. Wood (1999) further hinted that the more time teachers spent preparing for test and testing, the less time will be created for real classroom instruction or learning to take place. Hence, if educational institutions permit success to be defined by state mandated standardized decision-making and direct instructional programmer solely on standardized testing assessments, the range of students' experiences in schools could be hindered (Danielson, 2002).

Summary

Standardized testing provides avenue for educational accountability and comparison of students' academic performance among schools, states and countries. Standardized testing is important because it is designed to measure how well students have learned the skills necessary to meet state benchmark. Standardized testing also posed some stress and pressure on the students and teachers because the test is timed and seen to be the better measure for evaluating students educational attainment and teachers instructional delivery methods. This paper discussed the stress and emotional pressures that surround standardized testing in terms of the positive and negative influence on students' academic achievement and the educational programmer.

Conclusion

Standardized testing is everywhere in the global educational system, all over the media. The test has become the most essential part of our educational programmers, so it is important to think about how the test can influence students' performance and teachers' methods of instructional delivery in the right direction. Though, the test is accompanied with stress and pressure, it is difficult to face standardized testing without such feelings, but sometimes a little bit of stress and pressure can help motivate students to retain information and also help teachers to improve on their methods of

instructional delivery and sensitize it for future utilization. Considering the global call for educational accountability and increase in students tests score, Bigelow (2000) and Christensen (2000) call for teachers to maintain a critical stance towards standardized testing, while at the same time provide instructions that will improve the students not only for testing but also about the social and potential issues influencing the test and their subsequent achievement.

Since the students do not dwell in the same environment, and do not subscribe to the same learning environment. The test should be modifying to suit the various classes of learners; taking into consideration; the school location, certain environmental, psychological and social factors. Individual schools or educational zones should be allowed to develop and standardized their tests in line with the national objectives of learning and the needs of the society. Students should be trained on how to excel or perform well on standardized testing and any other tests and to function effectively in an environment where critical thinking, collaboration, and intellectual articulation are essential.

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