

# THE EXTENT OF ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT PRACTICES IN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS AMONG JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL (JSS) TEACHERS IN GOMBE LGA

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## **Abstract**

*This study aims at establishing the extent to which JSS teachers in Gombe LGA adopt alternative assessment practices in their inclusive classrooms. It adopted a survey design premised on two research questions. JSS teachers in Gombe LGA served as the population of the study sampled through proportionate and purposive sampling techniques. Data was collected through the use of Alternative Assessment Questionnaire (AAQ) and was analyzed through the use of mean and standard deviation. Finding of the study indicated that educational qualification and years of services do not significantly influence the extent to which JSS teachers adopt alternative assessment practices in Gombe LGA.*

**Keywords:** Alternative Assessment, Inclusion, Achievement, Accountability

## **Introduction**

The Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education held in 1994 declared that inclusion is the most appropriate form of education in meeting the diverse learning needs of all learners. This explains why Okeke-Oti (2009) contends that inclusion is the central issue in the educational services provision today. According to Andzayi (2012), inclusion is an educational program for children with special needs which stipulates that, all children and young people with or without disabilities learn together in ordinary pre-school provision, schools, colleges and universities with appropriate network of support. From the foregoing, inclusive classrooms could be seen to be student-centered, in which the students have a high level of responsibility for creating their own community. It is a classroom where students understand that others will be doing different things and everyone is treated equally though on an individual basis (Gomos, Uzor & Ekwok, 2012). Gomos et al (2012) have identified inadequate plans for the identification or assessment of children with special needs as one of the weaknesses of inclusive program. Meanwhile, as we shift towards inclusion, there are two opposing views influencing educational assessment. On the one hand are the proponents of more standardized tests and on the other hand, those whose views require alternatives to standardized testing to assess student learning (Worley, nd).

In the past, pressure to get high test scores and good grades, it was believed, would motivate greater effort and thus more learning. However, according to O'Connor (2007) this did not work for regular classroom students nor for those with special needs since students moved along from grade level to grade level and developed their sense of self-efficacy and competency from their successes or failures within the classroom. In effect, the goal of attempting to motivate students through assessment did as much to discourage students from attaining academic excellence as it did to produce successful learners. In this context, alternative assessment is meant to identify individual strengths and weaknesses as teaching and learning progress. Part of this process is allowing students to realize that their success is a shared responsibility. If special needs students are to believe in themselves as productive learners, then they must first experience credible forms of academic success as reflected in the results of what they understand to be rigorous assessment.

In spite of the obvious implication of alternative assessment on the success of meeting the diversity of needs amongst learners in inclusive classrooms thereby ensuring their full participation. This study is therefore significant as it intends to find out the extent to which Junior Secondary School (JSS) teachers in Gombe Local Government Area (LGA) use alternative assessment in the assessment of students in their classes. To achieve this, two research questions were formulated as follows to guide the study:

- To what extent does the educational qualification of JSS teachers influence the practice of alternative assessment in Gombe LGA?
- To what extent does the experience of JSS teachers influence the practice of alternative assessment in Gombe LGA?

### **Statement of the Problem**

The launching of the the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 1999 guarantees access to basic education for every Nigerian child of school going-age irrespective of their diverse learning needs. This calls for resourcefulness of teachers in their assessment practices in meeting the differing conditions of learners. However, the preparedness and competence of teachers in meeting the demands of inclusion in terms of alternative assessment practices is still in doubt in spite of its obvious implication in meeting the diverse characteristics of all learners in the classrooms vis-à-vis actualizing the objectives of UBE. This study is therefore meant to investigate the extent of alternative assessment practices amongst JSS teachers in Gombe LGA.

### **Methodology**

**Design:** This study adopted a descriptive survey design. This was because the design was helpful to the researcher in identifying the characteristics of the population and enabled the researchers to gather reliable information for the study.

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**Area of the Study:** The area of the study is Gombe LGA. The LGA is one of the 11 LGAs of Gombe State. It also hosts the state capital. Its cosmopolitan nature makes the residents to be mostly business men and civil servants and the people are predominantly Christians and Muslims. The choice of Gombe LGA as the area of study is because observation has shown that large numbers of exceptional children are seen in classes.

**Population:** The population of the study consists of all the 759 teachers from the 35 public JSSs in Gombe LGA. The JSS teachers are chosen because of the policy thrust of UBE which has made inclusion a must at that level of education.

**Sample and Sampling Technique:** The sample for this study consists of 200 teachers drawn from 20 out of the 35 public JSSs consisting of 130 and 70 female teachers. 10 teachers each were drawn from each of the 20 sampled schools through a proportionate and purposive random sampling techniques for the study.

**Instrument for the Study:** The instrument for data collection was Alternative Assessment Questionnaire (AAQ). The 7-item instrument was designed by the researchers to assess the extent to which JSS teachers in Gombe LGA practice alternative assessment. The 4-point rating scale instrument was divided into two sections; section A seeks for bio-data of the respondents; while section B seeks to investigate the extent to which JSS teachers apply alternative assessment practices in their classroom settings.

**Method of Data Collection:** The AAQ was administered to the respondents by 2 research assistants employed and trained by the researchers. The research assistants administered the instrument and went back at a later date for the retrieval of completed instruments from the respondents.

**Method of Data Analysis:** The data collected through the use of AAQ was analyzed with the use of mean and standard deviation. Each research question acceptance level is 2.50 and above as frequent while rejection as not frequent is any means rating below 2.50. Meanwhile, 200 copies of the AAQ were distributed to the respondents but the distribution yielded a return rate of 150 copies only representing 75%. However, only 145 (73%) copies were properly completed and used for the data analyses.

## **Result**

**Research Question 1:** To what extent does the educational qualification of JSS teachers influence the practice of alternative assessment (AA) in Gombe LGA?

**Table I:** Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) on the Influence of Educational Qualification on AA Practices among Gombe LGA JSS Teachers.

<i>Educational qualification</i>	<i>No</i>		<i>AA</i>	<i>Decision</i>
Degree & above	60	Mean	2.35	Not Frequent
		SD	0.66	
Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE)	85	Mean	2.41	Not Frequent
		SD	0.71	

Table I shows that teachers with degree and above have mean scores of 2.35 on the application of alternative assessment practices with a corresponding standard deviation of 0.66. While the NCE teachers have mean scores of 2.41 on the practice of alternative assessment with a corresponding standard deviation of 0.71. Thus, teachers with degree and above do not adopt alternative assessment practices frequently in their classrooms. On the other hand, NCE teachers also do not frequently adopt alternative assessment practices in their UBE classes. This suggests that educational qualification does not influence the extent to which teachers adopt alternative assessment practices in their classroom.

**Research Question 2:** To what extent does the experience of JSS teachers influence the practice of alternative assessment (AA) in Gombe LGA?

**Table II:** Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) on the Influence of Experience of Teachers on their AA Practices.

<i>Teachers' Level of Experience</i>	<i>No</i>		<i>AA</i>	<i>Decision</i>
High level Experience	59	Mean	2.33	Not Frequent
		SD	0.67	
Low Level Experience.	90	Mean	2.42	Not Frequent
		SD	0.70	

Table II shows that the high level experienced teachers had mean scores of 2.33 on alternative assessment practices with a corresponding standard deviation of 0.67. While the mean rating of low level experienced teachers on alternative assessment practices is 2.42 with a corresponding standard deviation of 0.70. The mean scores for both high and low experienced teachers imply that they less frequently make use of alternative assessment. The finding indicates that years of experience is not a factor in the practice of alternative assessment.

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## **Discussion**

The result of the study as shown in Table I revealed that educational qualification does not influence the frequency to which Gombe LGA JSS teachers employ alternative assessment practices in their classroom situations. This finding negates the emphasis of the National Capital Language Resource Center (2004) that alternative assessment is performance based on authentic tasks that demonstrate learners' ability to accomplish learning goals and it helps to reveal to the teachers what students can do, emphasizing their strengths instead of their weaknesses. Therefore for the educational needs of students with disabilities to be met in inclusive classrooms, alternative assessment must be used so as to accommodate all learners in the teaching-learning process. However, Wade (1999) concurs with the finding of this study as his study reveals that, teachers' level of educational attainment may not be a good predictor of classroom effectiveness. The extent to which JSS teachers adopt alternative assessment practices is likely to be impacted by a number of factors, including but not limited to teachers' educational qualifications

Also, the result of the study has indicated in Table II that teachers' level of experience does not influence the frequency to which Gombe State JSS teachers employ alternative assessment practices in their classroom situations. Though the finding significantly indicates that years of experience is not a factor in the adoption of alternative assessment practices, the study of Kuhus and Chapman (2006) on the contrary strongly suggests that the use of inclusive practices amongst newly appointed teachers is ineffective and as such it negatively impacts the process of inclusion for the special needs students.

## **Conclusion**

It is the conclusion of the researchers that, JSS teachers in Gombe LGA do not practice alternative assessment currently in their classrooms which will not positively influence the actualization of UBE objectives. Though, educational qualification and years of experience do not influence the use of alternative assessment practices, teachers need to strive to employ alternative assessment measures in evaluating learning outcome instead of the traditional paper and pencil test.

## **Recommendations**

The following suggestions are offered:

- There is the urgent need for training, retraining and retention of competent teachers in the use of alternative assessment.
- There is need for policy/legislative framework on alternative assessment practices particularly in view of UBE implementation
- Teachers should be provided with in-service opportunities to attend conferences, workshops and seminars on alternative assessment practices

- There is need for budgetary allocation to teacher training institutions to organize conferences, workshops and seminars on alternative assessment
- Teacher training institutions also need to review their programs to accommodate alternative assessment for pre-service and in-service teachers.
- The application of alternative assessment practices calls for extra work by teachers. This implies teachers morale needs to be boosted through improved condition of service.

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