

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION

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Abstract

A study was carried out to tap the perceptions of teachers on effective strategies to assess performances of adult learners in continuing and distance education. A purposive sampling technique was used to select fifty teachers who were tested through a five-point Likert scale rating to determine the extent to which they agreed on eight assessment strategies and other measures on assessment, identified through key informant interviews and from literature. Findings favoured application of both formative and summative assessments to achieve objectives. Also respondents favoured assessments to be based on well written objectives that contain appropriate performance criteria as well as developing ways to assess whether critical thinking has occurred. Respondents also favoured assessments that would be appropriate to measure experience, performance and behaviour with emphasis on selecting the appropriate assessments for educational settings from variety of assessment tools.

Keywords: Education management, Perception, Assessment, Continuing education, Teachers

INTRODUCTION

Due to the potential to enhance the effective, efficient and equitable provision of education for various categories of disadvantaged learners by the continuing distance education, open and distance learning are separately complex and critically important fields of endeavor (Danaher and Umar, 2010). The complexity of delivery made continuing and distance education to undergo several significant transformation from date of its inception in the 20th century.

Bernath et al. (2008) identified continuing and distance learning as a simple hypothesis that indicate teaching and learning without learner and teacher meeting face to face that possibly brings an effective, efficient and equitable education to desirous student anywhere. An independent or correspondence study adult and lifelong learning is a process of providing access to knowledge and learning as a universal right, one of the key rights of the global community.

Learning-oriented assessment supervisory practices enhance teacher construction of professional knowledge and self-regulated learning (Tang & Chow, 2006). Critically looking at the feedback that is communicated after teaching practice supervision within the distance learning-oriented exposure would make it easier for teachers and great thinkers to conceptualize educational theories. Dissemination of design and evaluation strategies using a constructive feedback and supervisory-based assessment strategy for teachers' provides professional development by providing teachers a pedagogical content knowledge from teaching (Parr & Timperley, 2010). Dobbelaer, Prins and Dongen (2012) added that feedback provided by trained inspectors fostered the professional development of teachers in primary education.

Several studies on learning-oriented assessment focused on understanding the ways in which feedback was communicated in post-observation conferences in teaching practice supervision, design and evaluation strategies for a year-long teacher learning and development experience and also how teachers collaborate during teacher-fronted interactions from a micro-interactional perspective (Park, 2014; Hardre' et al., 2013; Parr & Timperley, 2010). These indicates that studies of synergistic knowledge sharing on the perceptions of teachers on assessment strategies for continuing education is relatively few and as such this paper take a closer look at it. The study was carried out to tap the perceptions of teachers on effective strategies to assess performances of adult learners in continuing and distance education in Ghana.

The purpose of this study is to examine the perception of teachers on appropriate assessment strategies, perception about informed teacher judgment, the perceptions about the function criteria in assessment and the perception about standard based criteria to provide a reliable and fair evaluation plans and measures for continuing and adult learners in Ghana. Towards achieving this purpose, the study sought to answer these questions;

1. What are instructor's perceptions on appropriate assessment strategies for adult learners?
2. What are instructor's perceptions about suitable criteria for assessment?
3. What potential is there for a criteria related assessment model?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perceptions on the appropriate assessment strategies

Formative assessment is a potentially powerful instructional process because the practice of sharing assessment information that supports learning is embedded into the instructional process by design (Clark, 2012). If the potential of formative assessment is to be realized, it must transform from a collection of abstract theories and research methodologies and become a creative and systematic classroom practice. Policy-makers and school administrators must support this transition from theory into practice, particularly in the early stages of professional adaptation, and design assessment systems that teachers may internalize and enact efficiently (Clark, 2012).

In order to promote tailored continuing education programs and inter-professional continuing education strategies, and identify the support to offer to learners who were healthcare workers according to their needs, Cadorin et al. (2012) argues that educators should be aware of their students' self-directed learning skills. The argument was that since individuals with high competence would adopt different strategies from those who have limited skills, reflecting on self-directed learning competence of students before their graduation incorporated self-directed learning into the professional continuum and clarified the University's contribution in developing this important skill (Cadorin et al., 2012).

Hargreaves, (2013) explored the experiences of secondary teachers in four London schools in United Kingdom who participated in Teacher Learning Communities, defined as meetings in which professional learning was supported as they learned about assessment for Learning (AfL). The claim for those communities is that they led to sustained improvements in teaching and learning, where the following design principles are adhered to: where leaders respect and value a need that has been identified by participants as of importance to themselves; they are school-based and integral to school operations; there is teacher collaboration; and there is input from within and beyond the school to support teachers' theoretical as well as practical learning.

The findings from the research suggested that Teacher Learning Communities' benefits were compromised specifically: where they were imposed on teachers; where they were not accommodated sufficiently within other school commitments; where leaders were too directive; where meeting formats were adhered to inflexibly; and where practice was emphasized at the expense of theories.

Hargreaves conclusion is that both AfL and Teacher Learning Communities relied for their success on sustained critical reflection among their participants, which can be inhibited where the above limitations applied. Findings from the research by Saunders, (2012) supported

the view that a Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM) provides an effective framework for better understanding teachers' professional change in a vocational education and training sector (VET) context in terms of its practical usefulness and implications for the future design, implementation and assessment of professional development initiatives.

Perceptions about informed teacher judgments

Various judgment characteristics affect the correspondence between teachers judgments and students academic achievement. Various aspects are distinguished as informed versus uninformed judgments, number of points on the rating scale used, instruction specificity, norm-referenced versus peer-dependent judgments and domain specificity of teachers judgments (Südkamp, Kaiser, & Möller, 2012). According to Hoge and Coladarci (1989), teacher judgments can be categorized as direct and indirect judgments. When teachers are asked to assess students' academic achievement on a standardized achievement test by estimating the number of items each student will solve correctly, this can be considered as direct or informed judgment.

Where teachers are asked to rate students' performance in a certain subject on a Likert-type rating scale, and teacher judgments in this case is considered as indirect or uninformed (Hoge and Coladarci, 1989). Researchers have found higher correlations for direct and informed teacher judgments than for indirect/uninformed (Feinberg & Shapiro, 2003, 2009); Demaray & Elliott, 1998). A correlation of 0.7 between students test performance and direct teacher judgments was found whereas the correlation with indirect teacher judgments was 0.62 (Shapiro, 2003).

Südkamp, Kaiser, & Möller, (2012) summarized empirical results on the correspondence between teachers' judgments of students' academic achievement and students' actual academic achievement from investigating theoretically and methodologically relevant moderators of the correlation between the two measures, using, 75 studies. The overall mean effect size was found to be .63. The effect sizes were moderated by use of informed versus uninformed teacher judgments, with use of informed judgments leading to a higher correspondence between teachers' judgments and students' academic achievement.

Criteria and standard based criteria assessment as strategy

Morais & Miranda, (1996) investigated pedagogic practices, which can improve students' science achievement, in complex cognitive competencies. The study based on Bernstein's theory, built on previous knowledge suggestion that the explicitness of the criteria of evaluation is related to students' scientific understanding and achievement and that one of the many ways

in which the evaluation criteria can be made explicit to students is through assessment tests, and their correction and marking. Morais & Miranda analyzed the extent to which students understand teachers' evaluation criteria, more specifically, teachers' marking criteria and procedures (i.e., the extent to which they have recognition and realization rules to the assessing context).

They also analyzed the relation of that understanding with social class, social context of the school, teacher's conceptual demand, teachers' explicitness of criteria, and science achievement. They established, a clear relation between students' acquisition of recognition and realization rules and social class. They find that, the higher the social class, the higher that acquisition. A privileged school's social context and the teacher's explicitness of assessing criteria also contributed to students' understanding of teachers' evaluation criteria. This understanding influenced science achievement, especially in complex competencies (Morais & Miranda, 1996).

Schafer, (2005) examined concerns related to setting performance standards on educational assessments from the point of view of a standard-setting sponsor, called here "institutional criteria and the concept of vertical moderation of performance standards as well as considerations that can lead to different choices for moderation of standards. The empirical study by (Taylor, 2013) examined the information seeking behavior of a group of undergraduate college students assigned to a set of research assignments (work tasks). Findings indicate a strong statistical association between work task and criteria used to judge relevance. Findings also included identification of specific criteria used to judge relevance and the relative importance of those criteria based on frequency of selection of criteria for a work task.

Relevance judgment influences revealed in these findings in the form of criteria used to make relevance judgments further explicate the relevance judgment process and provide suggestions for the improvement of information retrieval systems and information literacy efforts. Understanding the relevance judgment process is critical to understanding information behavior in general (Taylor, 2013). A study by Tuñón & Brydges, (2006) used citation analysis in conjunction with a subjective rubric with five criteria deemed valid to assess the quality of 144 dissertation reference lists from a non-traditional program.

Criteria included the breadth of resources; the depth of the literature review as shown through the citing of critical historical and theoretical works; depth as demonstrated through the scholarliness of citations chosen; currency; and relevancy. The approach ascertained that there was no statistically significant difference between traditional or non-traditional scores for any criteria except breadth of resources, which measures the number and variety of citation sources.

Hambleton, (2001) recommends that learners should complete assessment under conditions that simulate the actual testing. He argues that learners should also be given understanding of the actual testing context and tasks that learners' will face or be tested on. Learners and the independent evaluator are two sources of data that can be used in current as well as future standard setting studies to evaluate the quality of learning. Hambleton, (2001) further notes that checking participants understanding throughout the process and having personnel available to correct misperceptions can lead to improved judgments and positive impression, enhancing their value as advocates for the standards.

Lewis and Green, (1997) pointed out that, some standard-setting procedures target average student (s) within the range and others sometimes called borderline descriptions target the lowest-performing students. Loomis & Bourque, (2001) observe that, continually refining the category descriptions (or borderline descriptions) may be an effective way for facilitators to focus the discussions that arise in panels at each of the rounds.

METHODOLOGY

This paper investigated three research questions as follows:

1. What is teachers' perception on the appropriate assessment strategies?
2. What is the prevailing perception of teachers on informed teacher judgment?
3. How relevant is the criteria and standard based criteria assessment to teachers as assessment strategy?

Population and Sample Sizes of the study

Population for the study comprised faculty from the School of Continuing and Distance Education and other Schools from the University of Ghana within the Legon campus of the University Ghana. The study population was estimated to approximate about 500 faculty members. The sample size was 100.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select 100 teachers who were tested through a five-point Likert scale rating to determine the extent to which they agreed on eight assessment strategies and other measures on assessment, identified through key informant interviews and from literature.

Questionnaire Development

The questionnaire employed Likert scale with five levels ranging from strongly agree (5 points), agree (4 points), uncertain (3 points) disagree (2 points) and strongly disagree (1point) was used.

Validation of Instruments

The instruments for the study was assessed for content and construct validity. Each item of the instrument was carefully analyzed and checked to ensure that it conveyed the necessary message.

Data Preparation and Analytical Approach

Quantitative data resulting from the survey was entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Data entered was analyzed and mean responses were examined. Descriptive Statistics (tables of means, and standard deviations) were used to present results.

ANALYSIS & RESULTS

In coding the questionnaire and analysis of the responses obtained, the IBM Version 20 of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used. Means, standard error of the mean and standard deviation was used in analyzing study research objective. The Standard deviation informs us about the shape of the distribution of the perception of respondents on a specific issue, how close their responses are from the mean response. The standard error of the mean also show how close our sample mean is to the true mean of the overall population. These together were used to help achieve study objectives.

In responding to research question1, Table 1 shows perception of instructors on assessment strategies appropriate for adult learners in Ghana. Based on the five-point rating scale, any item with mean 3.50 and above is considered as agree while any item with mean less than 3.50 is regarded as disagree to the issue. The tables below are responses from 100 instructors of adult learners in continuing and distance education on Ghana, on the issues of assessment strategies.

Instructors agreed that instructional objectives should be written clearly (Mean = 4.4). They also agreed that the most appropriate assessment method should be selected and applied (Mean = 4.3). Assessments should have a specific performance criteria (Mean = 4.2). That assessments should be differentiated from course evaluations (mean = 4.2) and should employ both formative and summative assessments (Mean = 4.1). That assessments should be designed to reflect the set objectives (mean = 4.1). Respondents also agreed on having an assessment plan (Mean = 3.8).

Data presented in Table 1 shows that the respondents agreed on all the items of assessment strategies used to develop valid, reliable, and fair evaluation plans for continuing education. These perceptions were based on the means from the study respondents, which

ranged from 3.8 to 4.4. The standard deviation shows that the respondents are not far from each other on their responses.

Table 1: Instructor's Perception on appropriate assessment strategies for adult learners

Assessment strategies	Mean		Std. Dev		Remarks
	N	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	
Writing instructional objective clearly	100	4.35	.086	.857	Agree
Selecting most appropriate assessment method	100	4.33	.071	.711	Agree
Developing appropriate assessment plan	100	3.78	.093	.927	Agree
Developing performance criteria	100	4.23	.094	.941	Agree
Applying both formative and summative assessments	100	4.07	.074	.742	Agree
Designing assessments based on well written objectives	100	4.08	.099	.992	Agree
Differentiating assessments from course evaluation	100	4.15	.086	.857	Agree
Valid N (listwise)	100				

Instructors agreed that instructional objectives should be written clearly (Mean = 4.4). They also agreed that the most appropriate assessment method should be selected and applied (Mean = 4.3). Assessments should have a specific performance criteria (Mean = 4.2). That assessments should be differentiated from course evaluations (mean = 4.2) and should employ both formative and summative assessments (Mean = 4.1). That assessments should be designed to reflect the set objectives (mean = 4.1). Respondents also agreed on having an assessment plan (Mean = 3.8).

Data presented in Table 1 shows that the respondents agreed on all the items of assessment strategies used to develop valid, reliable, and fair evaluation plans for continuing education. These perceptions were based on the means from the study respondents, which ranged from 3.8 to 4.4. The standard deviation shows that the respondents are not far from each other on their responses.

However, we can infer that the most prevailing appropriate assessment strategy identified by the instructors was writing instructional objective that describes potential assessment tools for assessing learning outcome with a mean of (Mean = 4.4). The standard error of a least of 0.071 and a high of 0.099 are relatively small given us an indication that our

means are relatively close to the true mean of the overall population. The margin of error (at 95% confidence) for our means is ± 0.14 (least), ± 0.20 (high) telling us that the true mean is close to the means obtained from the study respondents.

In responding to research 2, the study found out that the prevailing perception of appropriate informed teacher judgment strategy for higher learning in Ghana. The Table 2 also shows the teachers perception about the informed teacher judgment. Data presented in Table 2 shows that the respondents agreed on all the items of informed teacher judgment in Ghanaian educational certain used to assess performances of adult learners in continuing and distance education. These perceptions were based on the means from the study respondents, which ranged from 3.71 to 4.18. The standard deviation shows that the respondents are not far from each other on their responses.

Table 2: Instructors perception about the criteria for assessment

Criteria	N	Mean		Std. Dev.	
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Remarks
There is explicit assessment criteria and established standards	100	3.71	.107	1.066	Agree
Learners understand of learning objective	100	4.18	.089	.892	Agree
Learners understand the course criteria for assessment	100	4.10	.098	.980	Agree
Judgments should be based on sound evidence and a shared understanding of standards	100	4.10	.103	1.030	Agree
Criteria are fundamental to appraising student work	100	4.14	.095	.954	Agree
Valid N (listwise)	100				

The most important criteria was that student have clean understanding of the learning objective (mean = 4.18). A mean of 4.18 with a standard deviation of 0.892 showed respondents firmness on this issue. The standard error of at least of 0.089 and a high of 0.107 are relatively small given us an indication that our means are relatively close to the true mean of the overall population. The margin of error (at 95% confidence) for our means is ± 0.18 (least), ± 0.21 (high) telling us that the true mean is close to the means obtained from the study respondents. With the errors indicated we can confidently say that instructors agreed that all the listed criteria

for assessment are and should be applied in the Ghanaian settings of adult learners in continuing and distance education.

In responding to the research question 3, the criteria shown in Table 3 tapped instructors perception on what performance strategy to use to measure learners performance.

Table 3: Instructor Perceptions on Performance Strategy

Performance Strategy	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error	Remarks
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	
Criteria Based	100	4.0633	.18341	1.83414	Agree
Standard Based	100	3.8400	.05241	.52407	Agree
Valid N (listwise)	100				

Data presented in Table 3 shows that the respondents agreed on all the two items of performance strategies used to evaluate adult learners of continuing education. It can be inferred that the most effective performance strategy, as per instructors views or perceptions for adult learners in continuing and distance education is the criteria based performance strategy, a mean of 4.1 indicated the respondents assessment on this issue. It can be inferred that adult learner instructors in Ghana do declare broad performance dimensions on which a range of student performances can be represented; embody curriculum intent; and reflect what is valued by the assessment task as the criteria performance strategy of adult learners in continuing and distance education.

DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of assessment in adult education is to provide information about adult student learning and development that happens because of the academic programs implemented. In results presented, Instructors have indicated what should go into developing an appropriate assessment strategy. Notable among them are; that instructional objectives should be written clearly (Mean = 4.4). That the most appropriate assessment method should be applied and (Mean = 4.3). Assessments should spell out a specific performance criteria (Mean = 4.2). And that assessments should be differentiated from course evaluations (mean = 4.2) and should employ both formative and summative assessments (Mean = 4.1).

That assessments should be designed to reflect the set objectives for the course (mean = 4.1). Wiggins, (1998) argues students must have a complete understanding of the standards and objectives in which they will be evaluated so that they can become active members in the process, thus allowing them to self-assess and self correct. It is only when instructional

objectives are written clearly and explained that learners can have a complete understanding of the standard and objectives in which they will be evaluated so that they can indeed become active members in the process. That way the goal of assessment to educate can be achieved. It is evident from the literature that instructors who have supported the active engagement of their students have been more successful and clarifying the objectives of learning during assessment tasks (Carlson, 2012).

Furthermore, adult learners are diverse and come to course with varied needs, it is best to design appropriate assessment that will suit the needs of learners. Instructors agreed that assessments should be differentiated from course evaluations. This is understandable given that the purpose of assessment is to provide information about the student learning and development that occurs as a result of a program. Student's opinions and satisfaction ratings are considered indirect measures of student learning (Hoge and Coladarci, 1989).

They provide some information, but it is insufficient to make inferences about the program. In order to feel comfortable basing decisions about a program on assessment results, the assessment needs to use a direct measure of student learning (criteria based and standard based assessments). Direct measures means that scores reflect the student's actual level of knowledge or development, which occurs with assessments. By using course evaluations as assessments, learners can only be asked about learners' perceptions or what they thought about the program's effectiveness? These are indirect measures and do not provide sufficient information to make informed judgments about the program. This is the reason why assessments should be a distinct activity from course evaluations.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the study set up to answer three research questions is follows; instructors' perceptions on appropriate assessment strategies for adult learners? Instructors' perceptions about suitable criteria for assessment? And what potential is there for a criteria related assessment model? Instructors perceive that hat instructional objectives should be written clearly. That the most appropriate assessment method should be applied. It was perceived also that assessments should spell out specific performance criteria and should be differentiated from course evaluations. These results support findings from Wiggins (1998); which finds that, students must have a complete understanding of the standards and objectives in which they will be evaluated. When there is knowledge about the criteria for assessment in the respective course area, the ability to identify and articulate the objectives for the assessment task enable learners to recognize both their strength and limitations within the context of the assessment task; which

might stimulate specific plans based on the individual for improvement of themselves (Carlson, 2012).

On question two, respondents perceive that among important criteria that should be employed in assessments should ensure that, judgment made about assessments should be based on sound evidence and a shared understanding of standards. When this is done well, assessment would provide information that can inform decisions about education programs. Regardless of the results of specific assessment cycle, if the right judgments are made to about the needs students have and what assessments should be based on, there should be some action that can be made to improve the program. Therefore assessments results must reflect the extent to which students achieve the objectives of a program.

It can be said that the study shows potential of a criteria related assessment. It is inferred from the analysis of Table 3 that, instructors perceived performance strategy of promise is the criteria based performance strategy with a mean of 4.1 indicated the respondents agreement on this issue. It can thus be concluded that adult learner instructors in Ghana do permit a broad performance dimensions on which a range of student performances can be represented; This embody curriculum intent; and reflect what is valued by the assessment task as the criteria performance strategy of adult learners in continuing and distance education.

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