

# The Use of Performance Based Assessment in Early Childhood Centers: Pre-School Teachers Perception

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**Abstract:** *Assessment is a key component of learning, and curriculum. It enables the teacher, the learners, and the stakeholders to know how well the educational objectives have been achieved. As an integral part of instruction, assessment can be used to introduce, monitor, and evaluate learning in all levels of education. The paper-pencil test which is the traditional form of assessment has been criticised over time for its inability to reveal the true performance of learners. This however, as led to the introduction of performance-based assessment, most especially at pre-schools and basic education levels. This study therefore, investigate the perception of early childhood practitioners toward the use of performance based assessment in preschool. A researcher-designed questionnaire was used to elicit responses from selected respondents. The instrument was validated and reliability of 0.81 using PPMC was obtained. The research questions were answered using frequency, percentage, and mean. The findings revealed among others that paper-pencil is widely used and the awareness of performance based assessment depends on the practitioner's level of education. Recommendations were made based on the findings.*

**Keyword:** Pre-school teacher perception, Performance based assessment, Paper-pencil assessment

## Introduction

Assessment in preschool is as important as it is in all other levels of education, the need to monitor, guide, plan and ascertain to what level educational goals and objectives have been achieved are among the rationales that necessitate the use of assessment in preschool and other educational levels. Childhood assessment is a process of gathering information about a child, reviewing the information, and then using the information to plan educational activities that are at a level the child can understand and is able to learn from Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (MDEEC, 2014). Unlike other levels of education, preschool require a more flexible and informal means of assessment, this is because of the nature and peculiarity of children at this level.

Assessment is a great way to chart a child's progress over time, provide feedback to a child's parent(s), or help with classroom management and discipline. Teachers sometimes choose to engage in assessment because they see disruptive or dangerous behavior, or because they see "normal behavior exhibited in inappropriate contexts" (Susan, 2008). The primary reasons for assessment identified in the literature are to screen for disabilities; to assess kindergarten readiness; to assist in developing curriculum and daily activities; to evaluate the effectiveness of a project or a program; and to provide feedback to parents (Susan, 2008).

Assessment provides educators, parents, and families with critical information about a child's development and growth. Assessment can also help in recording growth in all developmental areas namely cognitive, physical, language, social-emotional approaches to learning, it is as well used to identify children who may need additional support and determines if there is a need for intervention or support services (MDEEC, 2014). Assessment helps educators plan individualized instruction for a child or for a group of children that are at the same stage of development, and in identifying the strengths and weaknesses within a programme and information on how well the program meets the goals and needs of the children. It also provides a common ground between educators and parents or families to collaborate on a strategy to support their child (MDEEC, 2014). Despite all these benefit and use of assessment, it will be of no good consequence if the true information of preschool children are not what is revealed. Recently, the main form of assessment in preschool is paper-pencil assessment.

According to Melissa (2017), paper-pencil assessments are types of assessment that requires children to provide written responses to written items, this is a type of assessment in which children fill out answers on the assessment form itself or in electronic forms, like Scranton. Typically, paper and pencil assessments include questions to answer, topics to address through paragraph responses and problems to solve. This form of assessment is also refers to as traditional assessment. Traditional assessments are the conventional methods of testing which usually produce a written document, such as quiz, exam, or paper. Traditional assessments are "tests" taken with paper and pencil that are usually true/false, matching, or multiple choice or essay type. These assessments are

easy to grade, but only test isolated application, facts, or memorized data at lower-level thinking skills. Traditional assessment provides little evidence of what a learner actually can do with the acquired knowledge (Pamela, 2013).

Paper-pencil assessment usage in preschool may affect young children's development and against the primary principle of preschool which is to provide enabling environment for children to grow and develop in their own pace. The assessment formal nature requires children composure which is difficult at this level. In the bid to assess children using paper-pencil assessment, preschool teachers end up in ill practice like holding children hand during assessment, indirectly forcing their choice on the children, failing to report the child capability and ability and even answering the questions for children, all of which are not developmentally appropriate. Sadly despite all the weakness of paper-pencil assessment, preschool teacher still use it as the only form of assessment (Pamela, 2013)

Performance based assessments, unlike paper-pencil assessment, are assessments in which children demonstrate their knowledge and skills in a non-written fashion. These assessments are focused on demonstration versus written responses. It includes, giving oral presentations, completing physical assessments on physical activities, producing an item or product, exhibiting and displaying mastering of skills, performing experiments in a lab, or dissecting (Melissa, 2017). Performance-based assessment measures pupils' ability to apply the skills and knowledge learned from a unit or units of study. The task challenges pupils to use their higher-order thinking skills to create a product or complete a process. Performance based approach assessment enables pupils to use their knowledge and apply skills in realistic situations. Learners must use more complex, higher-order thinking skills. They must reason, problem-solve, or collaborate with others to produce individual responses (Pamela, 2013).

Performance-based assessment requires pupils to generate rather than choose a response. While one student may choose to write a response, another student may perform better in a role-play situation. Although some teacher may agree that paper and pencil assessment can be effective when assessing listening and reading comprehension skills, they are not appropriate assessment methods for performance skills (Faye, 2013). Performance based assessment can be presented in many forms including conducting experiments; performing mathematical calculations, extensive essay writing, and performing computer simulations performance tests produce high level of reasoning processes, since these tests are closely related to what pupils do (Figuroa & Montenegro, 2010). The goal of assessment is to accurately determine whether students have learned the materials or information taught and reveal whether they have complete mastery of the content with no misunderstandings (James, Allen, James, & Dale, 2017). In other achieve the purpose of assessment, teachers should use multiple types of assessment to evaluate the level of pupils learning.

Teachers are the administrators of assessment; their perception on the use of any kind of assessment can make or mar the assessment process as a whole. Despite the weakness of traditional/paper-pencil assessment, and the enormous benefits of performance based assessment, the reality in preschool is that teachers still use paper-pencil assessment instead of performance based assessment. This study therefore investigated the perception of preschool teachers toward the use of performance based assessment in Kwara state.

### Research questions

1. What is the gender distribution of the preschool teacher?
2. What is the qualification of the preschool teachers?
3. What is the perception of pre-school teachers towards the use of performance based assessment in early childhood centre?

### Methodology

Descriptive survey was adopted for this study. A total of 150 preschool teachers were sampled. Multi stage sampling was used to select the respondent from the three senatorial district in Kwara state, and they cut across the 16 Local Government Area of Kwara State. A ten item questionnaire was structured by the researcher and was validated by expert in the field of early childhood education. Also the researcher carried out a pilot study to ascertain the reliability of the instrument, and reliability index 0.81 PPMC was derived. Frequency count, mean, standard deviation were used to answer the question by analysing the collected data.

### Result

**Research questions One:** What is the gender distribution of the preschool teacher?

Table 1: Gender distribution of the preschool teacher

| Gender | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|--------|-----------|---------|--------------------|
| Female | 99        | 66.0    |                    |
| Male   | 51        | 34.0    | 100.0              |
| Total  | 150       | 100.0   |                    |

Table 1 shows the distribution of preschool teachers based on gender. 51 of the respondents representing 34.0% were male while 99 of them who represent 66.0% were female. It is apparent that female respondents were more in number than male teacher respondents

**Research questions Two:**What is the qualification of the preschool teachers?

Table 2: Qualification of the preschool teachers?

| Qualification | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------------|-----------|---------|--------------------|
| NCE           | 107       | 71.3    | 71.3               |
| B.ED          | 38        | 25.3    | 96.7               |
| M.ED          | 5         | 3.3     | 100.0              |
| Total         | 150       | 100.0   |                    |

Table 2 shows the distribution of preschool based on qualification. 107 of the respondents representing 71.3% were N.C.E holders, 38 of the respondents representing 25.3% were B.ED/ B.A/ B.SC, while 5 representing 3.3% were M.ED. It is apparent that N.C.E holders were more in numbers other respondents.

**Research questions Three:** What is the perception of pre-school teachers towards the use of performance based assessment in early childhood centre?

Table 3: Perception of pre-school teachers towards the use of performance based assessment in early childhood centre.

| S/N | Item Statement   | SA           | A            | D            | SD           | MEAN | SD    |
|-----|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------|-------|
| 1   | Performance based assessment is the best way to assess pre-school children   | 26<br>(17.3) | 45<br>(30.0) | 59<br>(39.3) | 20<br>(13.3) | 2.51 | .932  |
| 2   | Pre-school children ability is best revealed using informal assessment   | 23<br>(15.3) | 55<br>(36.7) | 53<br>(35.3) | 19<br>(12.7) | 2.55 | .902  |
| 3   | Informal assessment is not a waste of time   | 78<br>(52.0) | 28<br>(18.7) | 24<br>(16.0) | 20<br>(23.3) | 3.09 | .101  |
| 4   | Performance based assessment is better use in pre-school instead of paper pencil   | 22<br>(14.7) | 66<br>(44.0) | 48<br>(32.0) | 14<br>(9.3)  | 2.64 | .846  |
| 5   | Using performance based assessment in pre-school is easy for me to use   | 36<br>(24.0) | 80<br>(53.3) | 32<br>(21.3) | 2 (1.3)      | 3.00 | .714  |
| 6   | Performance based assessment is best used in pre-school when teaching topics that requires children to produce something | 74<br>(49.3) | 48<br>(32.0) | 21<br>(14.0) | 7 (4.7)      | 3.26 | .870  |
| 7   | Performance based assessment can be used to assess any area in pre-school  | 66<br>(44.0) | 52<br>(4.7)  | 26<br>(17.3) | 6 (4.0)      | 3.19 | .862  |
| 8   | Pre-school teachers should be able to assess children using performance based assessment                                 | 23<br>(15.3) | 49<br>(32.7) | 37<br>(24.7) | 41<br>(27.3) | 2.36 | 1.045 |
| 9   | Paper-pencil should be replaced with performance based assessment in pre-schools   | 29<br>(19.3) | 47<br>(31.3) | 52<br>(34.7) | 22<br>(14.7) | 2.55 | .966  |

|    |   |              |              |              |         |      |      |
|----|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------|------|------|
| 10 | Informal assessment like Performance based assessment should be the core form assessment in pre-schools | 41<br>(27.3) | 69<br>(46.0) | 35<br>(23.3) | 5 (3.3) | 2.97 | .802 |
|----|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------|------|------|

**Weighted Average**

**2.81**

Table 3 shows perception of pre-school teachers towards the use of performance based assessment in early childhood center; preschool teachers disagreed that performance based assessment is the best way to assess pre-school children ( $X=2.51$ ), preschool teachers should be able to assess children using performance based assessment ( $X=2.36$ ). They agreed that children ability is best revealed using informal assessment ( $X=2.55$ ), informal assessment is not a waste of time ( $X=3.09$ ), performance based assessment is better use in pre-school instead of paper pencil ( $X=2.64$ ), using performance based assessment in pre-school is easy for me to use ( $X=3.00$ ).

Furthermore, they agreed that performance based assessment is best used in pre-school when teaching topics that requires children to produce something ( $X=3.26$ ), performance based assessment can be used to assess any area in preschool ( $X=3.19$ ), paper-pencil should be replaced with performance based assessment in pre-schools ( $X=2.55$ ), informal assessment like Performance based assessment should be the core form assessment in pre-schools ( $X=2.97$ ). From the table, the weighted average is 2.81. Based on this, it can be concluded the perception of preschool teachers towards the use of performance based assessment in early childhood center

### Discussion of Findings

The result of the study revealed that most pre-school teacher's perception towards the use of performance based assessment in early childhood center is positive. This implies that preschool teachers themselves perceive performance based assessment as a good way to assess children and find it more effective than paper-pencil tests. They are of the opinion that children ability is best revealed using informal assessment, they also believe that informal assessment is not a waste of time, although preschool teachers are still in the habit of using paper-pencil assess but are aware that performance based assessment is better use in pre-school instead of paper pencil, they find the use of performance based assessment in pre-school easy, these perception may be because of the benefit of performance based assess to children's learning. Rosaroso and Rosaroso (2015) revealed that learners were highly motivated to learn in classroom engagements specifically when lessons are integrated with performance based tasks.

More so, preschool teachers agreed that performance based assessment is best used in pre-school when teaching topics that requires children to produce something, they consider performance based assessment to be appropriate in assessing any area in preschool, they agreed that paper-pencil should be replaced with performance based assessment in pre-schools, and that informal assessment like performance based assessment should be the core form assessment in pre-schools these are in line with the finding of Greet, Marcel and Jeroen (2010). However, preschool teachers disagreed that performance based assessment is the best way to assess pre-school children and that preschool teachers should be able to assess children using performance based assessment. In addition, preschool teacher's general perception towards the use of performance based assessment in early childhood center is positive.

### Conclusions and recommendations

Paper-pencil assess is till the norm of preschool teacher in assess children, although many believe that there are more beeter way to assess children and sees performance based assess as one of the best trend use to assess children performance, the continues non use of performance based assess may be because majority of the preschool teachers are N.c.e holders who need to under go further training, most especially in early childhood education, however their perception toward the use of performance based assess is positive. It is therefore recommended that preschool teacher should under go more training on how to assess children, school administrators should encourage teachers to use performance based assessment instead of paper-pencil test, teachers and school administrators should enlighten parent on the important of performance based assessment.

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