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## CHAPTER 30

### ASSESSMENT OF CLASSROOM LEARNING OUTCOMES OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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#### **Introduction**

Assessment is an information-gathering exercise for decision-making about a thing. It is an exercise that is found in different spheres of life. For example, traders will, from time to time, take stock of goods in their shops and think carefully about the ways in which the things they buy and put in the shops are being sold, to know whether or not progress is being made in the business, in order to decide what to do next. We can refer to the activities carried out in order to gather the information required for decision-making about the businesses as assessment. In the same way, a teacher who sets out to teach some content of the syllabus to learners in the classroom will also carry out assessment at intervals in order to make decisions about the learners' learning. Classroom assessment therefore, can be seen as a systematic process of gathering information from learners, using different methods, to monitor how successful instruction has been in achieving intended learning outcomes. The aim of classroom assessment is to provide information on what students are learning, how much and how well they are learning.

Assessment is central to classroom teaching and learning. It helps the teacher in effective planning of lessons as well as in answering some questions about learners' learning. In order to understand the extent learning has taken place after instruction, the following questions can be asked: What have learners learned, what have they not learned? Are they experiencing difficulty in learning any aspect? What should be taught next or what adjustment should be made in future lessons? Which learner needs intervention and which intervention matches the need? Assessment can help the teacher measure, evaluate, observe, monitor and document learning progress, academic readiness, achievements, skills acquisition and educational needs of learners. It helps learners demonstrate what they have learned, discover their errors and understand content better. It motivates learners to learn. It also gives the teacher an opportunity to evaluate the instructional method used and make necessary changes (Klint, 2020; Johnson, Spanella & Pisano, 2021).

In Nigeria, education is inclusive (Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN, 2013) and is the basic right of every child. This implies that rejection and exclusion of learners from admission into public schools is prohibited, so learners in the classroom consist of normal children and those with special needs. Special needs



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children are those who have one form of impairment, disability and disorder or the other. This could be visual, hearing, physical or health, speech and language impairment, intellectual, learning and multiple disabilities, emotional and behavioral disorders, albinism as well as giftedness (FRN). There are several challenges arising from inclusive schooling in that special needs children require teaching and learning approaches that are different from the traditionally used ones, this also applies to their assessment.

Classroom teachers from time to time gather information about the learners in order to make decisions on their mastery of learning outcomes through assessment. These learning outcomes describe knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes that learners should attain through learning experiences (University of Georgia, n.d). The learning outcomes are usually aligned to the syllabus and stated by the teacher before commencement of the instructional process. Assessment of learners' classroom learning outcomes therefore entails systematic collection of information from the learners, using different methods in order to ascertain the extent of attainment of the specified learning outcomes. To do this successfully in an inclusive setting, the technical nature of inclusion becomes highlighted in that different skills, competencies, resources and expertise are needed by the classroom teacher, who is expected to attend to both normal and special needs children. The traditional methods like writing tests and assignments, employed in the classroom for assessment of learning outcomes may work for some children in the class but may not work for children with special needs. The teacher is expected in this case to look for alternative methods that will aid collection of the needed information from the children with special needs. When learners with special needs are not identified or the identified ones are not assessed with considerations to their unique circumstances, their classroom assessment will not be properly done. When this is the case, many children with special needs struggle through traditional assessment processes in schools, some get frustrated, drop out of school and some resort to begging to earn a living, instead of being educated to be self-reliant.

The thesis statement of this write-up therefore, hinges on the fact that children with special needs are not adequately catered for in classroom assessment in inclusive schools. Many teachers do not give consideration to their peculiar nature which requires that they be assessed not just like every other child but with special consideration of their circumstances. A change is needed to enable children with special needs to benefit fully from classroom assessment. This chapter therefore, discusses different types of assessment and methods teachers can adopt in the classroom during assessment of learning outcomes, the process of assessment, challenges of classroom assessment of children with special needs and how to effectively assess learning outcomes of learners with special needs.

### **Types and Methods of Assessment of Classroom Learning Outcomes**

Assessment by its principle, should be consistent with the objectives of the content taught and learned and should help learners learn by providing feedback

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that encourage them to participate. The methods chosen for assessment therefore need to align with the learning outcomes to be measured. Assessment methods help teachers answer the question on how to know that required learning has taken place and what might need to be modified about the lesson to best support learners' learning. When choosing a method of assessment to adopt, it is important to ensure that the method will provide evidence needed to determine the extent to which the outcomes were achieved. The choice should also be based on the nature of data that is needed for the specific outcome being assessed (Fredonia State University, 2022).

The type of assessment to be carried out in measuring students' learning, according to Center for Teaching Innovation, Cornell University (CTICU, 2022), can help in the decision of method to employ. Depending on the purpose for assessment in the classroom, different types can be carried out using different methods. When teachers want to measure learning on a daily and ongoing basis to reveal what and how learners are learning during instruction, formative assessment is done. It provides teachers with information which helps them decide on the next step to take in classroom teaching and learning activities. The aim in this case, is not to grade and report learners' performance but to monitor learning progress and to help learners improve by providing them with feedback on their performances and carry out remedial activities to correct errors and misconceptions. Improving learning is the target here, thus this type is called assessment for learning. During such assessment, the teacher can adopt the method of asking learners at instruction, to write the most important point or most confusing aspects of the lesson, this is reviewed to provide insight to teacher on future instructional plan. Other methods include; in-class oral/written tests, quizzes, classwork/presentation, learners can also rate themselves on knowledge about a topic after instruction as compared to what they believe they knew before instruction (CTICU).

Classroom teachers can also carry out placement assessment before beginning a lesson or programme, using tests/quizzes, interviews, questionnaires, to determine learners' readiness for a particular topic or level of academic programme learners may be transferring into. This type of assessment is done mainly to match learners with appropriate learning experiences that address their learning needs. Summative assessment becomes necessary when a teacher wants to evaluate learners' overall learning at the end of a specific instructional period, unit or programme. This type is periodic and is said to be an assessment of learning because it evaluates learning at the conclusion of an instructional period. The assessment in this case is graded and results used for certification, promotion, selection and so on. Methods used include; projects, portfolios, tests/examinations, presentations and other graded activities used to measure learners' performance. Screening assessment is employed in schools to determine whether learners need specialized assistance and services or are ready to begin an academic programme. It can be used to evaluate health, potential learning disabilities and other learner attributes. Methods used are different forms of screening tests, for example,

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preschool screening tests to determine if children are physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially ready to begin preschool. Diagnostic assessment on the other hand, is done when learners are experiencing difficulties in learning, in order to pinpoint their areas of difficulty. Different types of diagnostic tests can be used in this case. Some teachers, however, use formative assessment for diagnostic purposes (The Glossary of Educational Reform, 2015; CTICU, 2022).

Assessment can be carried out in many ways. When considering how to assess learning outcomes, it is helpful to seek answers to these questions: What type of data are needed? How best can the data be collected? How will the information be specifically used? (Fredonia State University, 2022). The nature of data required determines whether direct or indirect assessment methods should be adopted. Direct assessment method is any process used for data-gathering which requires participants to demonstrate their knowledge, behaviour or thought process. Such methods look at actual learners' work to determine whether learners have learned what they are expected to learn. Most commonly used direct methods include; portfolios, projects, performances, essays, case study analysis and oral presentations. Others are; debates, group discussions/conferences, laboratory reports, research papers, examinations/tests/quizzes, internships and other field experiences. Indirect assessment methods on the other hand, are processes used to gather data, requiring participants to reflect upon their knowledge, behaviour or thought process. These require that learners' actual abilities, knowledge and value be inferred rather than being observed through direct methods. Examples of these are: surveys, interviews, focus groups, enrollment information, inventories of syllabi, assignments, learners' participation rates, learners' perception of learning, retention and graduation rates, external reviews (San Diego Mesa College, 2017; Fredonia State University, 2022; Skidmore College, 2022). Generally, collection of direct evidence of learning is preferred for full assessment of learners' learning outcomes. However, direct and indirect measures can be included when developing methods of assessment. Given that assessment results are used to improve teaching and learning in the classroom, appropriate methods need to be used to maximize its benefits for both normal children and those with special needs.

### **Process of Assessment of Learning Outcomes**

Before a teacher embarks on any type of assessment, several questions will usually come to mind and answers are sought. Some of the questions are: what are the things learners are expected to learn? How are the learners faring in the learning and how can that be found out? What kind of information is needed in order to determine how the learners are faring? How can the information gathered be used to improve learning? How can assessment results be documented as well as outcomes of improvement exercises? Answers to these questions help the teacher to embark on an assessment process having decided on what to do at each step. The steps in assessment process according to California State University,



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Fullerton (2017), Missouri State University (2022) and University of Georgia (n.d) are:

1. Clearly define and identify the learning outcomes to be assessed-These are made up of essential learning that students achieve at the end of the instructional process. Learning objectives describe what learners need to be able to do/produce based on their learning experiences. These span across the three domains of learning; cognitive, affective and psychomotor, they are formulated to include; students' abilities, knowledge, values and attitude. Good outcomes are focused on high priority learning, stated in simple language to be specific, clear, concise, discrete and measurable. Action verbs should be used in stating them to make them demonstrable and measurable.
2. Identify appropriate assessment methods and measures- Direct measures of learning outcomes are preferred to indirect. In choosing the right measure, certain considerations must be made which includes that: measures chosen must be measuring what is intended to be measured and do that consistently, meaning they should be valid and reliable, results must clearly reveal what students can or cannot do, thus making the measures actionable. Triangulation should be possible, that is, use of multiple lines of evidence for some learning objectives. Methods and measures chosen should be meaningful, engaging to the learners and should be managed effectively within the programme context.
3. Determine criteria for success- These stipulate levels of proficiency learners should be able to express and is presented as a percentage. For example, learners should be able to solve addition of numbers with 90% accuracy. If it is a skill, rubrics used might be expressed as growth, moving from one level to the other. If a qualitative measure, learners might be required to create portfolios of their creative writing, showing growth in elements of style and character (Tustin, 2021).
4. Gather evidence/ data - At this stage, the assessment task is presented to the learners using methods earlier chosen.
5. Analyze and interpret the result of assessment- After analysis of data gathered, the result should be interpreted to make them meaningful to every user/stakeholder.
6. Plan and implement improvement action- Here, assessment findings are reviewed in order to determine action for change/improvement if needed.
7. Document assessment activities.

To get started with assessment of classroom learning outcomes, the teacher needs to review assignment and assessment by seeking answers to the following questions: What are the learners supposed to get out of each assessment? How are the assessments aligned with learning outcomes? What is the intrinsic value of the assessment in terms of knowledge acquired, skills development, value clarification and performance attainment? How are the homework and problem sets related to

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the examinations and how are the examinations related to each other? What other forms of assessment can be used as indicators of learning? In the case of writing assignments, are there enough of them for students to develop requisite skills embedded in them? How will feedback be provided to learners to help them improve? Are the assessments structured in ways to help learners self-assess? (CTICU, 2022). Answers to these questions will help the teacher plan and carry out appropriate and quality assessment.

### **Challenges of Classroom Assessment of Children with Special Needs**

Assessment, which involves different methods of gathering information from learners for decision-making, plays important roles in classroom teaching and learning activities of children with special needs. Each of such children has unique needs as well as strengths. For them to be taught effectively in the classroom, the teacher needs to identify and understand their needs. These are complex issues for the classroom teacher. However, through assessment, information can be gathered about the children which will in turn inform decisions related to their placement, instruction, intervention and so on. For valid and reliable decisions to be made, care must be taken to get it right in the place of assessment. Special needs children are unique and so should be assessed with considerations to their circumstances.

According to Individuals with Disability Education Acts (IDEA), disability categories include: autism, hearing impairment, emotional disturbance, visual impairment, intellectual disability, deafness and multiple disabilities. Others are: developmental delay, special learning disability, other health impairment, deaf-blindness, traumatic brain injury, orthopedic impairment, speech/language impairment (Positive Action Staff, 2022). The National Policy on Education, in addition to the listed categories included; behavioral disorder, albinism, the gifted and talented. The requirement of National Policy on Education, is that “persons with special needs shall be provided with inclusive education services in schools which normal persons attend, in age-appropriate general education classes, directly supervised by general teachers” (FRN, 2013, p65).

Given that inclusion is a basic principle in the education of children with special needs and that assessment ought to be equal for children in such an inclusive setting, assessment therefore, becomes a complex and challenging task to the classroom teacher who must use methods appropriate to each child to collect feedback from them. Some of these children, in an inclusive setting, find it difficult to respond to tests with free response items, essays and performance tests (Hussu, 2010) which are commonly used by teachers for classroom assessment of learning outcomes. The teacher in such cases must devise alternative methods to use in assessing the learning outcome of the special needs children whose needs might also be diversified. This might entail translating what is administered to others into another language like braille to enable them understand the task or constructing entirely new measures of learning different from but equal to what is administered to others, thus making the assessment special. It is noteworthy that this special

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nature of assessment of children with special needs has some problems associated with it since not all general teachers are graduates of Special Education and so, may not be able to translate tasks to braille sign and other languages. All general teachers also are not specialists in Educational Measurement and Evaluation and so may not be competent in development of needed assessment instruments. Some schools may even lack the needed assistive devices, like brailing machines. All these and other reasons, make assessment of children with special needs to be bedeviled with problems in schools, especially in inclusive settings.

Some of the problems include: low quality of teacher-made assessment instruments, absence of initial screening to identify children who have special needs, some teachers may not be aware of the diverse methods of assessment besides the traditional test and assignment. Other problems identified by Gutuza, Khosa, Gazimbe and Mapolisa (2016) are: Lack of sustainable staff training, inadequate teacher support mechanism, unclear policies on matters of assessment of children with special needs and a need for Legal framework to deal with problems of assessment of children with special needs. The Legal framework should protect them from neglect, social stigma and prejudice. Design of a diversified and appropriate curriculum for the different target groups is stated as one of the aims of Special Needs Education in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013), however, the extent of availability of such curriculum as well as possible ways of implementing it in an inclusive classroom are not known.

### **How to Effectively Assess Learning Outcome of Children with Special Needs**

Looking at the intricacies involved in the assessment of children with special needs, it is clear that it is a challenging task. Since teachers are often left to their own judgment in the decision of best ways of assessing children with specific disabilities, following carefully the steps in the assessment process will help them think things over properly, make right decisions and take appropriate steps. The specific needs and capabilities of the children should be taken into consideration during assessment which should be equal for all children in the class. The questions should be presented in such ways that each child understands them, whether written or oral. Care should also be taken to integrate both direct and indirect measures of learning outcomes and appropriate methods to classroom assessment should be adopted to collect valid and reliable data which will enable learners' benefit maximally from assessment. Given that children with special needs are said to be in constant feeling of failure and so need to be helped as well as be taught how to help themselves, therefore, the following should be done during assessment (Hussu, 2010):

- a) Provide assessment feedback that shows them where to go and how to reach the goal, this increases their level of effort. The feedback should be positive, pointing out what has been learned rather than what is yet to be learned. Such feedback enhances their improvement, increases their self-esteem and analytical thinking.



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- b) Teachers can adopt a team-based approach, as well as cooperation with other practitioners and specialists that work with special needs children.
  - c) Clearly established goals for each assessment are needed.
  - d) Adequate adaptation is needed to ensure assessment is in accordance with each child's need.
  - e) Sharing of experiences and ideas on assessment of children with special needs is a must for teachers.
  - f) Pupils' achievement should reflect their knowledge and true effort.

Some children, like those with autism who cannot remain at a task long enough to complete it, experience difficulties with testing situations. Given the importance of assessment, such children need to be provided with an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding, so that teachers can have a true picture of their learning and know when help is needed and what help. The following alternative methods to testing are considered to support and enhance assessment of children with special needs (Watson, 2019):

#### **Presentation**

This is a verbal demonstration of skills, knowledge and understanding. Learners can narrate answers to questions. It can also take the form of discussions or debate in small groups or one-on-one.

#### **Conference**

This method is informal one-on-one between teacher and learner. The teacher prompts and cues the learner to determine level of understanding and knowledge. This removes pressure from written tasks. The learner's reasoning, explanations of concepts are observed and rated.

#### **Interview**

This entails one-on-one interaction between learner and teacher. The teacher acts as the interviewer while the student is the interviewee. The technique helps the teacher clarify the level of understanding for specific purpose, activity or learning concept.

#### **Observation**

This can be done in small group settings as children engage in learning tasks. Things to look out for are determined by what is being assessed, they may include: persistence, child looks for assistance, becomes impatient, gives up easily, etc. results of observation can be documented using rating scales, checklists or other ways of recording observations.

#### **Performance Task**

Here, tasks that learners can do are presented to them while the teacher assesses performance. The teacher in this case, looks for skills, ability and attitude towards the task. Both processes followed in performing the task as well as quality of products are scored.

#### **Self-Assessment**

This helps learners to identify their own strengths and weaknesses. In this case rubrics are provided by the teacher, based on these, the learners assess their

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own efforts. This can lead learners to a better sense of understanding of their learning.

There are many methods of collecting valid and reliable assessment data besides writing tests and examinations. Any of the methods earlier discussed, that presents assessment items in ways and manner that learners with special needs can understand, can equally be used in the classroom. Innovative methods can also be developed and used by teachers for classroom assessment, taking into consideration the peculiar needs of the learners.

### **Conclusion**

Assessment which involves systematic collection of information from learners, is done by classroom teachers to be able to make decisions about teaching and learning activities. The teacher uses different methods to gather the needed information from learners, some of which are considered traditional. However, given that education is inclusive in Nigeria, children in the classrooms may not all be normal, some have different forms of impairment, disabilities and disorders, thus, having special needs. As a result of this, traditional ways of assessment may not work for them. Children with special needs require special and innovative ways of assessment with considerations to their circumstances. They should benefit from assessment which informs a lot of classroom teaching and learning activities, therefore, non-traditional methods discussed in this chapter can be used by teachers. These methods can help the teacher to effectively collect valid and reliable assessment information from learners for planning and executing remedial and other classroom learning activities in order to improve classroom learning.

### **Suggestions**

Based on the foregoing discussion, the following are suggested:

1. Assessment screening should be done regularly in inclusive schools to identify children with special needs and what the needs are.
2. In choosing assessment methods to be used, teachers should ensure questions are presented to special needs children in forms they can understand them.
3. Considerations should be given to learners' special needs in the choice of assessment methods to be adopted in the classroom.
4. Assessment results should always emphasize what has been learned to help sustain the self-esteem of children with special needs.
5. Assistive devices such as brailing machines, should be made available in schools to enable teachers to translate assessment questions and tasks for children with special needs.
6. Regular training and retraining should be done for general teachers to enable them acquire necessary skills required for teaching and assessing children with special needs.



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7. Clear policies on matters of assessment of children with special needs are needed.
  8. Legal framework to deal with problems of assessment of children with special needs, which should protect them from neglect, social stigma and prejudice are also needed.

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