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**Teachers' Assessment Patterns and their Effect on Senior
Secondary Students' Achievement and Retention in English
Grammar**

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Abstract

This study investigated teachers' assessment patterns and their effect on senior secondary II students' achievement and retention in English grammar. Two research questions and two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. A quasi experimental design was used. The instruments used for data collection were English Grammar Achievement Test (EGAT) and Teachers' Assessment Patterns Questionnaire (TAPQ). The sample size was 78 SS2 students of both sexes drawn from two secondary schools within Makurdi Metropolis. Data collected were analyzed using means and t-test statistics. The results showed that students benefitted from assessment patterns that included assessment for learning and assessment as learning more than those assessed solely by assessment of learning. The results also indicated that both male and female students benefitted equally from assessment patterns that included assessment for and as learning. It was recommended that teachers should employ assessment approaches that involve assessment as and for learning and should not use assessment of learning only. It was further suggested that Educational administrators/implementers, publishers and policy makers, should endeavour to incorporate assessment for learning and assessment as learning into the nation's education policy and ensure their implementation.

Key words: *assessment patterns, grammar, achievement, retention*

Introduction

The attainment of proficiency in English grammar has remained the crucial goal of many students, parents and the society at large. This is because students' success in grammar is instrumental to success in English and by extension all other subjects as grammar directly affects students' attainment in their entire academic pursuit. Assessment on the hand has traditionally been linked with formal examinations particularly; high stakes, promotion, end-of-term/year and school-leaving examinations. It follows therefore that the approach teachers' use in assessing their students would also have implications for the realization of this all important goal of grammatical competency. The assessment of students' learning achievement has become the object of great attention and activities all over the world (Kellaghan, 2001). The World Conference on Education for all in Jomtien, Thailand in March 1999 stated that the focus of basic education should be on "actual learning acquisition and outcome" (Dowrich, 2008). In addition, McMillan (2007) emphasizes the importance of having a clear definition of assessment and accurate assessment of learning outcomes.

A plea for formative assessment in classrooms has become a common denominator in academic publications and most educational fora across different countries and across different educational cultures (Ramsesal, 2007).

Consequently, educational reforms have led to the introduction of continuous assessment with a corresponding move away from rote-learning and memorization of information to an increased emphasis on the continuous testing of higher order skills. Though continuous assessment has now been implemented in most countries around the world and there has been great improvement in students' achievement (USAID Missions, 2003), Remsesal (2005) stresses the level of difficulty (if not impossibility) of establishing general guidelines for all countries to implement formative assessment. There is little doubt among educationists about the special value of assessment as a basic condition for effective learning. The major problems of assessment of learners have been in the approaches or methods. Some teachers still erroneously treat Continuous Assessment like an end to a topic or part of a term with the sole aim of generating scores for computation of results. There has to be a change if our students' performance must improve and their retention enhanced.

Literature Review

Assessment comes in various forms and serves different purposes. One of the main reasons why teachers assess students' learning is to obtain feedback that will guide teaching and assist in making modifications to lesson planning and delivery so as to ensure greater students' progress (Lubisi & Murphy, 2002). Assessment allows teachers to monitor progress, diagnose individual or group difficulties and adjust teaching practices. Assessment can support students' motivation when they are provided with ongoing information about their progress and with opportunities to set further goals for learning. Assessment also informs teachers about what individual students know and what they will be able to do in relation to learning outcomes. As a result, teachers can make decisions about which types of content, method and skill development need to be modified or stressed by the teacher, the class as a whole or by individual students.

The question that bothers this researcher therefore is, whether the approaches or strategies adopted by teachers have any significant positive impact on students' ability to comprehend grammatical structures let alone retaining and applying same. Effort will also be made to ascertain whether teachers' assessment strategies would have different impact on male and female students' achievement in English grammar and retention respectively. Rodriguez (2004) opines that teachers' assessment patterns can directly influence students' achievement, study patterns, self-perceptions, attitudes, effort and motivation to learn. The terms formative and summative evaluation which are being redefined in education circles readily come to mind whenever the issue of assessment is being discussed. Many teachers know formative evaluation as the informal, daily type of assessment used with students while learning is taking place. Summative evaluation was the term used to "sum it

all up,” to indicate a final standing at the end of a topic or a term. Current trends in assessment focus on judging students’ progress in three ways: assessment for learning, assessment as learning and assessment of learning. Each assessment approach serves a different purpose.

Assessment for Learning: According to Western and Northern Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Education WNCP (2006) assessment for learning is used by teachers to develop, modify and differentiate teaching and learning activities. It is continuous and sustained throughout the learning process and indicates to students their progress and growth. In assessment for learning, teachers monitor the progress made by each student in relation to the program of studies outcomes and determine upcoming learning needs. Assessment procedures are planned and methodical. It is important for a teacher to reflect on why and when students’ progress is assessed. Teachers ensure that learning outcomes are clear, detailed and that they are assessed according to these outcomes. They use a range of methods to gather and provide students with descriptive feedback to enhance students’ learning. These methods may include checklists and written notes based on observations of students as they learn. The descriptive feedback gathered is used to inform planning for learning and to assist the teacher in differentiating instruction in order to meet the needs of all students. To McMillan (2007), this pattern of assessment caters for learners’ needs and improves students’ achievement in learning. The feedback may be shared in oral or written form with individual students or with the class as a whole. As the information gathered guides the planning process, it leads to the improvement of future students’ performance in relation to specific outcomes (Smith, 2011).

Assessment as learning: focuses on fostering and supporting meta-cognitive development in students as they learn to monitor and reflect upon their own learning and to use the information gathered to support and direct new learning (WNCP, 2006). Assessment as learning focuses on the role students’ play in their learning. In this approach to assessment, students are viewed as the bridge between what they know and the unknown (what is yet to be learned). A clearer way of explaining this is to look at assessment for learning and assessment as learning as formative evaluation. The process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers, to identify where the learners are in the learning process, where they need to go and how best to get there. Assessment for Learning and Assessment as Learning are formative by nature. Sadly, some teachers treat formative assessment as an instrument for generating scores for terminal results. Current research demonstrates that a focus on assessment for learning improves overall learning and can be a powerful motivator for students (Gardner 2006).

Assessment of learning is an approach that determines result, marks, or grades known formally as summative evaluation. Assessment of learning refers to strategies designed to confirm what students know, demonstrate whether or not they have met curriculum outcomes or the goals of their individualized programs, or to certify proficiency and make decisions about students' future program or placements. Assessment of learning focuses on the cumulative results of learning. It involves providing quantified information on students' knowledge. Assessment of learning takes place at specific times in the instructional sequence, such as at the end of a term, a topic or the school year. Its purpose is to determine the degree of success students have attained in the course of learning.

Statement of the Problem

A large number of students have serious difficulties comprehending, retaining and applying grammatical structures in school and even after their secondary education. It must be noted that grammar and reading are two sides of the same coin as they depend on each other. Many studies have shown that students cannot succeed in their academic work without the ability to read with adequate comprehension and a good knowledge of the structure of the language (Enyi & Ereke, 2011). The low performance or outright failure of most students in national English examination such as the ones conducted by West African Examinations Council and National Examinations Council has become a source of serious concern to both the students, parents and other stakeholders. For instance, the WAEC Chief Examiners reports for the past few years as cited in Ochogu (2012) lament the poor performance of Nigerian students in English and emphasize the need to inculcate reading culture among secondary school learners (2004, 2005, 2006 & 2009).

The patterns of assessment used by teachers may have contributed to the failure rate being witnessed today especially given the fact that continuous assessment is one of the determinants of the final grading of candidates in these examinations. It is therefore pertinent to examine the implications of the patterns teachers adopt in assessing students with a view to either modifying or changing them for the overall academic progress of the students in particular and the society in general. Thus, the problem under study could be stated in question form as: what could be the implications of using Assessment for Learning and Assessment as Learning as against the use of Assessment of Learning (that is prevalent in our educational system) on students' achievement in English grammar? Would the use of these patterns make any difference in male and female students' achievement in comprehending grammatical structures respectively?

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' assessment patterns and their implications on students' achievement and retention in English grammar. Specifically, the study sought to;

1. Determine the extent to which teachers' assessment patterns affect students' achievement in English grammar.
2. Determine whether teachers' assessment patterns affect male and female students' achievement in English grammar.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do teachers' assessment patterns affect students' mean achievement scores in grammar?
2. To what extent would teachers' assessment patterns affect the mean achievement scores of male and female students in grammar?

Hypotheses

1. Teachers' assessment patterns do not significantly affect students' mean achievement scores in grammar.
2. Teachers' assessment patterns do not significantly affect the mean achievement scores of male and female students in grammar.

Methodology

The design of this study was quasi-experimental specifically the non equivalent groups' pre-test, post-test design. This design was adopted because intact classes were used as it was not possible to have complete randomization of the students into groups. The sample consisted of 78 students drawn from two (2) co-educational secondary schools in Makurdi metropolis. The schools were gotten using the simple random sampling technique. The researchers designed a questionnaire which helped to determine the assessment patterns adopted by English language teachers in 15 secondary schools in Makurdi metropolis. The sampled schools were grouped based on whether the teacher used more of *Assessment for Learning* and *Assessment as Learning* on one hand and assessment of learning on the other. One of the schools where the English teacher used *Assessment for* and *as learning* was assigned the experimental group while another teacher who used more of *Assessment of Learning* was assigned the control group. The instruments used for collecting data were English Grammar Achievement Test (EGAT) for students and Teachers' Assessment Patterns Questionnaire

(TAPQ) used to group teachers into those who use *Assessment for and as Learning* on one hand and the ones who use *Assessment of Learning* on the other.

EGAT consisted of twenty multiple-choice questions with five options (A, B, C, D, & E) drawn on lexis and structures. The Instruments were validated by experts before the RCAT was trial tested on two classes within the study area. The reliability of the instrument was computed using Kuder-Richardson₂₁ coefficient and found to be 0.70. The questionnaire, TAPQ contained 20 items which sought to elicit information on the patterns of assessment teachers use to assess students.

The instruments were administered to both teachers and students in both the experimental and control groups in the sampled schools. The scores obtained were analysed using means and t-test statistics.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

Data collected were presented in tables according to research questions and hypotheses with interpretation below the table.

Research Question 1: Determine the extent teachers' assessment patterns affect students' achievement in grammar.

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations of Students in Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviations
Experimental Group	41	19.93	8.09
Control Group	37	16.16	5.28
Mean Difference		3.77	

Table 1 reveals the mean score of students in the experimental group as 19.93 with a standard deviation of 8.09. The table also shows the mean score of students in the control group as 16.16 with standard deviation as 5.28. The mean difference between the two groups was 3.77 in favour of the experimental group. However, whether the observed difference was significant was subjected to the testing of hypothesis 1.

Research Question 2: Determine if teachers' assessment patterns affect male and female students' achievement in grammar.

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations of Male and Female Students in Experimental Group

Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Male Students	14	17.93	9.10
Female Students	27	20.96	7.49
Mean Difference		03.03	

Table 2 reveals the mean score for males as 17.93 with standard deviation of 9.10. The mean score of females was 20.96 with 7.49 as standard deviation. The mean difference between male and female students was 3.03 in favour of female students but superiority of female students was subject to a confirmation in hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis1: Teachers’ assessment patterns do not significantly affect students’ mean achievement score in grammar.

Table 3: Independent Sample t-Test for Effect of Teachers’ Assessment Patterns on Students Achievement

		Levene’s test for equality of variance		T	Df	Sig 2-tailed
		F	Sig			
RCAT	Equal variance assumed	8.54	0.005	2.40	76	0.02
	Equal variance not assumed			2.46	69.45	0.02

Table 3 indicates the significant value (p) as 0.02 with t =2.46. Since $p < 0.05$, the set significant level for the study, the observed difference between the mean achievement scores of students in the experimental group with those in the control group was adjudged significant. The hypothesis that teachers’ assessment patterns do not significantly affect students mean achievement score in grammar was not accepted. The conclusion drawn was that students benefitted from assessment

patterns that included assessment for learning and assessment as learning more than those assessed using assessment of learning.

Hypothesis 2: Teachers' assessment patterns do not significantly affect the mean achievement scores of male and female students in grammar.

Table 4: Independent Sample t-Test for Effect of Teachers' Assessment Pattern on Male and Female Students Achievement in the Experimental Group

		Levene's test for equality of variance		T	Df	Sig 2-tailed
		F	Sig			
RCAT	Equal variance assumed	1.46	0.23	-1.14	39	0.26
	Equal variance not assumed			-1.07	22.35	0.30

Table 4 shows the significant value (p) as 0.23 with $t = -1.07$. Since $p > 0.05$, the set significant level for the study, the observed difference between the mean achievement scores of male and female students was adjudged not to be significant. The hypothesis which states that, teachers' assessment patterns do not significantly affect the mean achievement scores of male and female students' grammar was accepted. The conclusion drawn was that both male and female students benefitted equally from assessment patterns that included assessment for and as learning.

Discussion

This study examined teachers' assessment patterns and their effect on students' achievement in grammar (English language). The study investigated how teachers used three assessment patterns namely: assessment for, assessment as, and assessment of learning. Findings revealed that students whose English teacher used assessment for learning and as learning, performed better than those whose teacher used assessment of learning pattern.

This finding agrees with Ebedi (2010) who submitted that standardized achievement tests that are used for assessment and accountability purposes (assessment of learning) may not provide reliable and valid outcomes for English language learners because extraneous sources may confound the outcome of

assessments for these students. Performance assessments (assessment for and as learning) by contrast, offer opportunities for these students to present a more comprehensive picture of what they know and are able to do which makes learning more permanent. This finding also confirms Rodriguez' (2004) finding that teachers' assessment pattern can directly influence students' achievement, study patterns, self-perceptions, attitudes, effort, and motivation to learn. Rieg (2007) conclusion that teachers can spend a third or more of their time on assessment-related activities in order to boost students' achievement is another discovery that the finding of this study agrees with. OECD (2003) also reports that formative assessment methods have been important in raising overall levels of students' achievement with the gains in achievement appearing to be among the most important finding ever reported for educational interventions.

Result of this study also reveals that male and female students' achievement in grammar did not differ in the group where the teacher used assessment for and as learning with the students. This finding agrees with Elsevier (2014) who investigated gender effect using a Differential Item Functioning (DIF) and found that there was no gender difference in an achievement test in reading comprehension. Mandler (2008) investigation also shows that both males and females had improved achievement in reading comprehension.

Conclusion

When planning for effective classroom assessment, teachers should begin teaching with the end in mind. Teachers could ask themselves which learning outcomes they intend to help students achieve, and then tailor their teaching towards those outcomes. The assessment should come before, during and after teaching in order to develop and refine on a continuous basis, the students' ability to attain those outcomes.

While assessing, teachers should endeavour to share the intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria with students and find ways to involve students in the assessment process. In their planning, teachers should decide on ways to employ a variety of assessment methods and purposes of assessment and to provide frequent and descriptive feedback to students. Teachers can also model how they themselves reflect on their learning in order to demonstrate to students how one can continue to develop knowledge and skills.

Recommendations

Based on the result of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Teachers should employ assessment approaches that involve assessment for learning and assessment as learning and not just the use of assessment of learning as the result of this study favoured the use of the former more than the later.
2. Educational administrators/implementers, publishers and policy makers should endeavour to incorporate assessment for learning and assessment as learning into the nation's education policy and also design strategies for their implementation so as to enhance students' performance in their examinations as well as outside school.

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