

EDITORIAL

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This Special Issue marks an important milestone for the Botswana Educational Research Association (BERA) and the Botswana Examinations Council (BEC) efforts at collaboration. The Special Issue focuses on the Southern Africa Association for Educational Assessment (SAAEA) Conference hosted by BEC in Gaborone, Botswana in May 2019. The Special Issue contains eight articles covering a wide range of topics on educational assessment.

Mogapi and Maule-Sethora explore the value addition of the teachers on learner's performance scores for reading after controlling for several characteristics of learners, teachers and schools. The study used the data obtained from Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). There were 4197 learners matched to 141 teachers. Data sets also contained the background information of teachers, learners and schools. The study used the contemporaneous specification of the value added model (VAM). The results of VAM suggest that the effect of the teacher on students' scores was attributable to between school and within school effect. The study also suggests that teacher qualities that influence the students' achievement included level of education, ability to use computer, experience beyond 16 years and the better teaching strategies.

Cele explores three areas where assessment results are used as part of a basis for decision making. These areas are: use of assessment outcome for improving the quality of instruction and learning; use of assessment outcome for accountability decisions; and use of assessment outcome for fostering an inclusive education system. These assessments generate a lot of data which may not be adequately utilised. Teachers may not be adequately trained in assessment and therefore may not fully use the information provided for improving instruction. Holding someone responsible for assessment outcomes requires collateral data to inform decisions. The paper concludes that the effectiveness of assessment utilisation is still limited by such factors.

Mosalakgotla and Masemola sought to compare the reliability of five techniques used by members of the Southern Africa Association for Educational Assessment (Regression Analysis, Criterion Mean Method, Same Percentile Position, Z Score Method, Standard Mark Calculation) and another technique used in the United Kingdom (Absolute Standard Deviation Method) in order to recommend a more valid, reliable and fairer technique. The study used Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE) data from Botswana Examinations Council (BEC) and National School Certificate (NSC) data from Umalusi. The results revealed that Criterion Mean Method (CMM) was superior since precision of its estimated scores was higher. Despite good performance displayed by this method, the study identified limitations which could hinder its full potential. The study developed an improved version of the CMM, tested its performance against the original version and the improved version of CMM is recommended for estimating missing scores.

Maphorisa argues that instructional leaders and curriculum drivers should account for learner performance. Data for this study was collected through interviews, lesson observations and documentary analysis. The results show that all the 14 schools inspected were ineffective in their instructional supervision and pedagogical approaches thus compromising on assessment and learner achievement standards. The paper concludes that

holding schools responsible for their results has a positive impact on both the learner and overall school performance. Thus, every process needs to be audited; thereof school inspections need to be intensified to monitor, track and raise performance standards.

Nkambule discusses the use of assessment feedback to improve teaching and learning in public primary schools in a South African school district. A qualitative approach, located in an interpretative paradigm, was adopted for this study while the requisite data was gathered by means of individual and focus group interviews, as well as documents analysis, observation of meetings and a cluster workshop. The study shows that poor reading, inability of learners to answer questions due to lack of critical thinking and problem solving skills are the main causes of poor learner performance in public primary schools in South Africa. The study recommends the use of assessment feedback for supporting teachers to improve learner performance should focus on enhancing the teacher content knowledge, the choice of teaching strategies, the setting of quality tasks, and improving the feedback practices.

Masemola and Lepota describes the application of the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) and Subject Pairs Analysis (SPA) for evaluating subjects' difficulty. The study assesses the difficulty of National Senior Certificate (NSC) subjects for the Grade 12 exit examination and aimed at providing information on the actual performance of learners in different subjects. The study further intended to determine subjects which were consistently more difficult relative to other subjects. The study used data provided by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) on learner performance in the Grade 12 NSC examinations during the 2014 to 2018 academic years. The study was quantitative in nature and used R and SAS software for the statistical analysis. Two techniques, namely AHP and SPA were compared in the analysis of data to identify subjects that were consistently difficult across the years. The results indicate that despite some variation, the trend was that chemistry, physics and mathematics were found to be harder than other subjects.

Mapungwana reviews the efficiency of the software in comparison with an existing manual development process. Instruments used to collect data were questionnaires and interviews. Subject managers at ZIMSEC, Item writers, Vettors and Proof readers were the main respondents in this survey. Results show that electronic systems are user friendly, interactive and more secure because they have security features that ensure the security of Question papers and non-leakage. The tracker within the software ensures that papers are not predictable from one year to another. They are also friendly to the environment by reducing the amount of paper used. This study recommends that examination boards adopt the technology to ensure credibility of examinations. Manual systems are easier to use but require more manpower.

Nchabe and Moampe sought to determine how foundation modules could be assessed so that they do not inhibit progression of learners. The findings of the study show that both lecturers and trainees are not satisfied with how foundation modules are assessed in as far as they disadvantage learners. The study recommends that there should be no examinations for foundation modules.

It is hoped that the collection of articles in this special issue will be of immense interest to the general readership.