

Chapter 12

Complexity Ramifications of High Stakes Examinations as a Measure of Accountability in Education Systems

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ABSTRACT

Examinations occupy a strategic position in our lives and society today. In a situation where moral principles, rules and regulations for conducting examinations are truncated by either teacher or the learner, the validity and reliability of examination and certification are at risk. The nature and process of examination is something that should be looked into deeply having known the role of examination in our lives. That is essence of this paper; the way high-stakes examinations have affected various aspects of the education system in the realm of teaching, learning, assessment, discipline, roles of stakeholders, teachers' beliefs, community expectations, functional role of education, educational outcomes, individual differences, psychological status of learners, educational returns, school completion etc. This paper articulated these issues in terms of using high-stakes examinations as a measure of accountability in the education system and premised on the level of faith placed on these high-stakes examinations irrespective of educational value thereof.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a fulcrum and rightly so, since all other developmental facets of life are hinged on it (Denga & Denga, 1998 cited by Nweze, 2009). Nweze (2009) also asserts that, “education is an ongoing process that facilitates the process of learning and acquisition of theoretical and practical skills that equip mankind to utilize the environment effectively for personal as well as national development”. Proper education, in this case, has to do with the “balanced development of the cognitive” (intellectual), affective (emotional/feeling, ethical, moral) a psychomotor (practical) domains of an individual since this will curtail the development of simply one aspect of the individual while ignoring the relevance of others.

Since theoretical and practical skills needed for both personal and national development, it remains important to find out the extent to which the learners have acquired the same skills. This is because education is all about accountability on the part of educational managers to the various stakeholders especially guardians and educational authorities. The only process through which this may be clearly ascertained is known to us as examination. Examination according to Adeyemi and Akindele (2002) is “the process, which comes after a period of learning, and it is an organized assessment of an individual’s performance, on the basis of his or her institutional procedural exposure”. Nsude (1998) looks at examinations as “tools meant for evaluation of the progress made by individuals in the course of acquiring skills or seeking knowledge over a specific period of time”.

Examination, premised on the above, has to do with the “passing of value judgment on an individual”, on the basis of the individual’s performance in a set of questions, statements or series of tasks given, with the intention of assessing how much of a desired skill, trait, knowledge or behaviour the individual possesses. In some cases terms like measurement, assessment, testing and evaluation are used interchangeably to refer to examination.

The Oxford Advanced learner’s dictionary of contemporary English defines the term examination as the “process or act of testing for knowledge and ability in order to determine its worth”. The implication of this is that a test is a means of “measuring the knowledge, skills or aptitude of an individual”. The word examination is indeed a broad term which connotes the assessment within an educational system meant to establish how much has been acquired by learners in terms of knowledge, skills and intelligence (Osindeinde, 2000 cited by Ibara, 2009). From this assertion, it is clear that measurement of the extent of learners’ achievement in terms of educational objectives is the purpose and essence of examination. Even in distance learning institutions, examination serves a number of functions such as selection, certification, and accountability. But the fact remains that these examinations are indeed high stakes at all levels of measurement and evaluation.

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