

## Assessment Practice of Special Need Students in Special Education Schools in Zamfara State, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

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Assessment practices of special need students have been a concern in the educational system of most countries, especially in Nigeria. The aim of this study is to examine the assessment practice of special need students in special education Schools in Zamfara state, Nigeria. The Survey design was adopted for this study. The population of the study comprised all the 55 teachers (special educators) in the two (2) School for Special Education in Zamfara State, which include School for Special Education Gusau and School for Special Education Gummi. School for Special Education Gusau and School for Special Education Gummi have 37 and 18 teachers respectively. Purposive or judgmental sampling technique was used to select all the 55 teachers of special education schools in Zamfara state from whom, we could gain deep insights and understandings of assessment practices in special schools. The instrument used for data collection is a researcher designed questionnaire namely "Special Educators' Assessment Practice Questionnaire (SEAPQ)". The Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics of Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation. The results showed that the components of student assessment practice conducted among special need students are curriculum-based assessments, intelligence Quotient (IQ), Test screening test, academic achievements, developmental assessments and end-of-grade assessments, and the methods of assessment used are formative assessment, summative assessment, speech therapy evaluation/language scales, developmental scales, diagnostic assessment, standardized test and direct observation. The findings also revealed that special educators' professional competence in choosing assessment methods appropriate for special need students, administering, scoring, and interpreting of their results and recognizing unethical and inappropriate assessment methods are inadequate. Based on these findings, it was recommended that Special educators should be train on all the components of assessments practices that will benefit special needs students learning outcomes.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent times, a number of changes have occurred in the context in which the assessment for children with special needs is carried out. These have generated questions in such areas as the nature and role of the teachers and administrators in the assessment practices, both in and outside special education schools. The Council for Exceptional children in the year 1983 adopted a code of ethics and standard for professional practice, which addressed appropriate assessment procedures for special needs students

Special education is a practice of educating students with special needs in a way that addresses their individual differences and needs. According to Laju (2012), the process involves the individually planned and systematically monitored arrangement of teaching procedures. It is a systematic process of

developing skills, attitudes and values in some set of individuals with body deformity which require separate attention. In the content of special education programme, many services are earmarked to normalize persons with disabilities to fit in the society. The programme makes it possible for them to adjust from the notion of being unable to carry on societal roles to fully responsible citizens.

National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004) stated that adequate provision of education for all categories of children and adults who require special education services as well as to provide a diversified and appropriate curriculum for each category of disability. But in reality, there seem to be variations in method of assessment in both special and regular schools. Assessment of students with special educational needs should not be regarded as a once-off diagnostic event but rather as an on-going process closely linked to intervention (NCSE, 2013). According to NASET (2010), assessment in special education is the process used to determine a child's specific learning strengths and needs, and to determine whether or not a child is eligible for special education services. Assessment in special education is a process that involves collecting information about a student for the purpose of making decisions.

Assessment is a fundamental feedback mechanism in education, allowing all stakeholders of the learning process to understand what is being learned and where learning resources need to be focused. Assessment of learning according to Liberman et al., (2020) is the process of gathering and evaluating information on what students know, understand, and can do in order to make an informed decision about the next steps in the educational process. Assessment in special education is regularly done within the schools by the teachers themselves using different methods. The usefulness of this assessment includes; shaping of students learning, provision of immediate and constructive feedback of students, monitoring of learning progress, ranking and promotion student to the next level. Assessment for learning makes it an essential element of special education classroom assessment practices, especially when the field of special education emphasizes the individual learner and her/his educational needs (Shriner, 2000).

Assessment practices of special need students have been a concern in the educational system of most countries, especially in Nigeria. But some researchers, who are interested in assessment, have also expressed concerns about assessment practices in special education schools. In special education schools recently, it seems there are limited assessment practices to effectively assess learning outcomes of special need students. Most special education schools use assessment practices based on standardized examination which comprises of essay questions or various forms of objective testing. Samuelowicz and Bain (2002) perceived that the assessment practices chosen by teachers are likely to be influenced by how teachers view the nature of knowledge, learning, teaching and the purposes of assessment not the nature of the students. Hale and Astolfi (2011) suggested that the types of assessment strategies practiced by instructors and how frequently they practice them would have an impact on the quality of students' learning.

Teachers in special schools have been frequently observed employing a range of assessment activities such as informal discussion, the observation of level of participation, and practical problem solving; these activities were considered to be an integral part of classroom teaching and help them understand students' strengths and weakness. Although there is little theoretical evidence to demonstrate that the assessment practice differs from regular schools to special schools, the fact is that, compared with assessment study in mainstream schools, the studies of assessment practice in special schools are still scarce (Hanafin et al., 2007).

Consequently this research seeks to investigate the assessment practice of special need students in special education Schools for comparison with assessment programme in mainstream schools and also validate the quality of certificates obtainable from such schools. This study represents the first stepping stone in building a comprehensive picture for assessment practices for special need students in the

schools for special education in Zamfara state, Nigeria. This Study comes to give a general national overview of current assessment practices for special needs students. Believing in the concept that good assessments promote learning and motivate both teachers and students, whereas poor assessments narrow the curriculum, de-skill, and demotivate teachers and frustrate students, there is an imminent need to further investigate classroom assessment practices and relate their pedagogical implications to policy-makers and interested parties. The development of sound pedagogical assessment practices is a never-ending process. Survey of classroom observations on assessment practices are needed to compare and contrast with survey responses and obtain a wider range of evidence related to classroom assessment practices for special needs students and other students in the mainstream schools.

There is also need for the identification and implementation of assessment practices that can assist students with disabilities achieve learning objectives and ensure the acquisition of the necessary skills to become independent, informed, and productive. For that reason, this research seeks to investigate the assessment practice of special need students in special education Schools in Zamfara state, Nigeria.

### **Objective of the Study**

The objective of this study is to examine the assessment practice of special need students in special education Schools in Zamfara state, Nigeria. Specifically, the study examine:

1. components of student assessment practice among special need students in special education Schools in Zamfara state.
2. methods of student assessment use by special education teachers in special education Schools in Zamfara state.
3. teachers attitudes toward special need students assessment in special education Schools in Zamfara state.
4. teachers' professional competency in choosing assessment methods appropriate for special need students in special education Schools in Zamfara state.
5. teachers' professional competency in administering, scoring, and interpreting the results of special need students in special education Schools in Zamfara state.
6. teachers' competence in recognizing unethical and inappropriate assessment methods among special need students in special education Schools in Zamfara state.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What are the components of student assessment practice among special need students in special education Schools in Zamfara state?
2. What are the methods of student assessment use by special education teachers in special education Schools in Zamfara state?
3. What are the teachers attitudes toward special need students assessment in special education Schools in Zamfara state?
4. What are the teachers' professional competency in choosing assessment methods appropriate for special need students in special education Schools in Zamfara state?
5. What are the teachers' professional competency in administering, scoring, and interpreting the results of special need students in special education Schools in Zamfara state?

What are the teachers' competence in recognizing unethical and inappropriate assessment methods among special need students in special education Schools in Zamfara state?

## 2. METHODS

Descriptive survey design was adopted for this study because collection of valid and reliable data is possible and inferences concerning the population drawn from the representative sample selected. The population of the study comprised all the 55 special educators in the two (2) School for Special Education in Zamfara State, which include School for Special Education Gusau and School for Special Education Gummi. School for Special Education Gusau and School for Special Education Gummi have 37 and 18 teachers respectively. Purposive or judgmental sampling technique was used to select all the 55 teachers of special education schools in Zamfara state from whom, we could gain deep insights and understandings of assessment practices in special schools. A researcher designed instruments was used namely "Special Educators' Assessment Practice Questionnaire (SEAPQ)". SEAPQ contained 40 items structured in a modified 4-point likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). Both face and content validity of the instrument were established by experts in Educational Research, Measurement and Evaluation. Cronbach Alpha method of reliability was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. Data collected were analyzed using both descriptive statistics of Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

Data collected were coded and analysed using Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation.

**Research Question one:** *What are the components of student assessment practice among special need students in special education Schools in Zamfara State?*

Table 1. Components of Student Assessment Practice among Special Need Students in special Education Schools

| SN | Component of assessment conducted among special need students are to: | N  | Mean   | Std. Deviation | Rate |
|----|---|----|--------|----------------|------|
| 1  | Screening tests   | 55 | 2.9106 | 1.0926         | 3rd  |
| 2  | Developmental assessments   | 55 | 2.0987 | 0.9967         | 6th  |
| 3  | Curriculum-based assessments  | 55 | 3.0264 | 1.0385         | 1st  |
| 4  | Adaptive behavioral assessments                                       | 55 | 2.1817 | 0.9961         | 5th  |
| 5  | Intelligence Quotient (IQ) Test                                       | 55 | 3.0182 | 1.0451         | 2nd  |
| 6  | Academic achievements   | 55 | 2.8909 | 1.0123         | 4th  |
| 7  | End-of-grade assessments  | 55 | 2.0909 | 0.9867         | 7th  |

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviations of special educators' responses on the components of student assessment practice among special need students in special education Schools in Zamfara State. The table revealed the components of student assessment practice conducted among special need students as curriculum-based assessments, intelligence Quotient (IQ), Test screening test, academic achievements, developmental assessments and end-of-grade assessments with mean values of 3.0264, 3.0182, 2.9106, 2.8909, 2.1817, 2.0987 and 2.0909 respectively.

**Research Question Two:** *What are the methods of student assessment use by special education teachers in special education Schools in Zamfara state?*

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviations of special educators' responses on the methods of assessment use in special education schools in Zamfara state. The table revealed the methods of assessment use in special education schools as formative assessment, summative assessment, speech

therapy evaluation/language scales, developmental scales, diagnostic assessment, standardized test and direct observation to see spontaneous behaviour of the students with mean values of 3.0909, 3.0478, 2.8909, 2.5896, 2.1920, 2.0319 and 2.0246 respectively.

Table 2. Methods of Student Assessment in Special Education Schools

| SN | Methods of assessment use in special education schools:                            | N  | Mean   | Std. Deviation | Rate |
|----|--|----|--------|----------------|------|
|    |  |    |        |                | 1st  |
| 1  | Formative assessment to monitor student progress during learning process           | 55 | 3.0909 | 1.0623         |      |
| 2  | Summative assessment to evaluate overall student achievement                       | 55 | 3.0478 | 1.0323         | 2nd  |
| 3  | Standardized test to measure students' performance against a standard or a norm    | 55 | 2.0319 | 0.9679         | 6th  |
| 4  | Diagnostic assessment to identify specific learning disabilities or difficulties   | 55 | 2.1920 | 0.9826         | 5th  |
| 5  | Direct observation to see spontaneous behaviour of the students                    | 55 | 2.0246 | 0.9897         | 7th  |
| 6  | Developmental scales to assess your child's cognitive abilities                    | 55 | 2.5896 | 0.9967         | 4th  |
| 7  | Speech therapy evaluation/language scales to assess student's communication skills | 55 | 2.8909 | 1.0123         | 3rd  |

**Research Question Three:** *What are the teachers' attitudes toward special need students assessment in special education Schools in Zamfara state?*

Table 3. Teachers Attitudes Toward Special Need Students Assessment in Special Education Schools

| SN         | Teachers Attitudes Toward Special Need Students Assessment                                 | N  | Mean   | Std.      |
|------------|--|----|--------|-----------|
|            |  |    |        | Deviation |
| 1          | I always use assessments to monitor special needs student progress during learning process | 55 | 2.5996 | 1.0061    |
| 2          | I believe that assessments accurately reflect the abilities of special needs students      | 55 | 2.5863 | 0.9968    |
| 3          | I always feel in my ability to assess special needs students                               | 55 | 2.0909 | 0.9867    |
| 4          | I always involve special needs students in the assessment process                          | 55 | 2.5798 | 0.9856    |
| 5          | I use assessment data to inform instruction for special needs students                     | 55 | 2.6058 | 1.0117    |
| 6          | I ensure assessment validity and reliability for special needs students                    | 55 | 2.4969 | 0.8997    |
| Grand Mean |  |    | 2.50   | 0.9811    |

Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviations of special educators' responses on their attitudes toward special need students assessment. The table revealed a grand mean of 2.50 and standard deviation of 0.9811. The grand mean of 2.50 compared to the scale mean of 2.50 revealed a positive attitude of special educators toward special need students assessment.

**Research Question Four:** *What are the teachers' professional competency in choosing assessment methods appropriate for special need students in special education Schools in Zamfara state?*

Table 4 shows the mean and standard deviations of special educators' responses on their level of professional competence in choosing assessment methods appropriate for special need students in

special education Schools. It revealed from the table a grand mean of 2.10558 and standard deviation of 0.99512 which shows inadequacy in special educators' professional competence in choosing assessment methods appropriate for special need students compared to the scale mean of 2.50.

Table 4: Teachers' Professional Competency in Choosing Assessment Methods Appropriate for Special Need Students

| SN         |  | N  | Mean    | Std. Deviation |
|------------|--|----|---------|----------------|
| 1          | Selection of assessment methods for special needs students must align with student's learning style, Curriculum requirements, Availability of resources      | 55 | 2.0818  | 0.9967         |
| 2          | Choosing assessment methods for special needs students must based on student's emotional and behavioral needs  | 55 | 2.1079  | 0.9986         |
| 3          | Establishment of the validity and reliability of assessment methods for special needs students is done by consulting with colleagues and use expert judgment | 55 | 2.0990  | 0.9946         |
| 4          | Selection of assessment methods for special needs students is based on collaboration with other professionals such as speech therapists                      | 55 | 2.1487  | 0.9989         |
| 5          | Assessment selection is used to inform instruction and make data-driven decisions for special needs students   | 55 | 2.0905  | 0.9868         |
| Grand Mean |  |    | 2.10558 | 0.99512        |

**Research Question Five:** *What are the teachers' professional competency in administering, scoring, and interpreting the results of special need students in special education Schools in Zamfara state?*

Table 5. Teachers' Professional Competency in Administering, Scoring, and Interpreting the Results of Special Need Students

| SN         | I am competent in:  | N  | Mean    | Std. Deviation |
|------------|---|----|---------|----------------|
| 1          | Assessments are administered in a way that is accessible and equitable for special needs students                 | 55 | 2.5696  | 0.9848         |
| 2          | Test security and integrity are ensured when administering assessments to special needs students                  | 55 | 2.6723  | 0.9898         |
| 3          | Modify assessment procedures are used to handle assessment modifications for special needs students               | 55 | 2.5583  | 0.9668         |
| 4          | Formal training program are given on assessment tools and procedures used for special needs students              | 55 | 2.4522  | 0.8973         |
| 5          | Multiple measures are used to ensure that assessment results are accurate and reliable for special needs students | 55 | 2.5996  | 0.9896         |
| 6          | Assessment results are communicated to parents/guardians and students with special needs                          | 55 | 2.6744  | 0.9899         |
| Grand Mean |   |    | 2.58773 | 0.9697         |

Table 5 shows the mean and standard deviations of special educators' responses on their level of professional competence in administering, scoring, and interpreting the results of special need students in special education Schools. It revealed from the table a grand mean of 2.58773 and standard deviation of

0.9697 which shows inadequacy in special educators' professional competence in administering, scoring, and interpreting the results of special need students compared to the scale mean of 2.50.

**Research Question Six:** *What are the teachers' competence in recognizing unethical and inappropriate assessment methods among special need students in special education Schools in Zamfara state?*

Table 6. Teachers' Competence in Recognizing Unethical and Inappropriate Assessment Methods Among Special Need Students

| SN         | I am competent in:  | N  | Mean    | Std. Deviation |
|------------|---|----|---------|----------------|
| 1          | I am very familiar with the ethical guidelines for assessing special needs students   | 55 | 2.1816  | 0.9972         |
| 2          | Assessment methods respect the privacy and dignity of special needs students  | 55 | 2.1009  | 0.9982         |
| 3          | Using diverse assessment tools its easy to recognize and address potential biases in assessment methods for special needs students      | 55 | 2.0935  | 0.9941         |
| 4          | Student consent is always sought to ensure that assessment methods respect the privacy and dignity of special needs students            | 55 | 2.1816  | 0.9972         |
| 5          | Updated on best practices and ethical guidelines for assessing special needs students is acquired by attending professional development | 55 | 2.1915  | 0.9936         |
| Grand Mean |   |    | 2.14982 | 0.99606        |

Table 6 shows the mean and standard deviations of special educators' responses on the level of teachers' competence in recognizing unethical and inappropriate assessment methods among special need students . It revealed from the table a grand mean of 2.14982 and standard deviation of 0.99606 which shows inadequacy in special educators' professional competence in recognizing unethical and inappropriate assessment methods compared to the scale mean of 2.50.

**Research Question Seven:** *What are the impact of student assessment practice on the educational development of special need students in special education Schools in Zamfara state?*

Table 7. Impact of Student Assessment Practice on the Educational Development of Special Need Students

| SN         | I am competent in:  | N  | Mean   | Std. Deviation |
|------------|---|----|--------|----------------|
| 1          | Assessment practices affect the educational development of special needs students                           | 55 | 2.9710 | 1.0956         |
| 2          | Assessment practices influence the identification and support of special needs students                     | 55 | 2.9098 | 1.0586         |
| 3          | Assessment practices impact the access of special needs students to educational resources and opportunities | 55 | 3.0446 | 1.0483         |
| 4          | Assessment practices help in the transition and placement of special needs students                         | 55 | 3.0276 | 1.0394         |
| 5          | Assessment practices impact the overall educational achievement and progress of special needs students      | 55 | 3.0769 | 1.0588         |
| Grand Mean |   |    | 2.25   | 1.030388       |

Table 6 shows the mean and standard deviations of special educators' responses on their level of professional competence in choosing assessment methods appropriate for special need students in special education Schools. It revealed from the table a grand mean of 2.10558 and standard deviation of 0.99512 which shows that special educators' professional competence in choosing assessment methods appropriate for special need students is inadequate compared to the scale mean of 2.50.

## Discussion

Based on the data collected and work done on the analysis of result, the findings of the study revealed that the components of student assessment practice conducted among special need students are curriculum-based assessments, intelligence Quotient (IQ), Test screening test, academic achievements, developmental assessments and end-of-grade assessments. This study is supported by Huda, (2008) stated that assessment is utilized among the special need students to identify child's special needs, assess child's communication skills, inform child's intervention or treatment plan, placement and detection of what the child knows or does not know, and in most cases curriculum-based assessment which is frequent, systematic, and measured learned tasks.

Findings from the study also showed the methods of assessment use in special education schools as formative assessment, summative assessment, speech therapy evaluation/language scales, developmental scales, diagnostic assessment, standardized test and direct observation to see spontaneous behaviour of the students. The result is consistence with Yan et al. (2021) pointed out that assessment at special education schools should serve two main purposes: to identify students current level of learning and inform teachers instruction, and to group students into different teaching groups according to their ability levels. Such assessment includes formative and summative assessment, psychological evaluation, speech therapy assessment, occupational therapy assessment etc.

The findings also revealed a positive attitude of special educators toward special need students assessment. This study is in consonance with Dessemontet, Morin & Crocker (2014) and Emmers, Baeyens & Petry (2020) stated that teachers' attitudes towards assessment of disabled is imperative. Teachers tend to have positive attitudes since they have had contact with disabled people in the past, and learned about special education policy and instructional strategies.

The findings of the study also revealed inadequacy in special educators' professional competence in both choosing assessment methods appropriate for special need students, and administering, scoring, and interpreting of their results. This study is supported by Kalra (2018) stated that teachers' professional competency remains significant barrier to quality assessment for special needs students. He believed that only a limited percentage of special educators had previously participated in professional development in assessment of special needs students. Skills in choosing appropriate, useful, administratively convenient, technically adequate, and fair assessment methods are prerequisite to good use of information to support instructional decisions. Special educators need to be well-acquainted with the kinds of information provided by a broad range of assessment alternatives and their strengths and weaknesses. In particular, they should be familiar with criteria for evaluating and selecting assessment methods in light of instructional plans for special needs students.

Findings from the study also showed inadequacy in special educators' professional competence in recognizing unethical and inappropriate assessment methods. The result is consistence with the statement of Airasian (2005) proposed that the assessment ethical standards should indicate some aspect of a teacher's fairness in dealing with his or her pupils. He emphasizing that many special educators modify students' grades due to presence or lack of effort, behavior problems, late work, and extra credit. The findings also supported Andrew (2015) who stated that special educators must be well-versed in their own ethical and legal responsibilities in assessment. The must be aware that various assessment

procedures can be misused or overused resulting in harmful consequences such as violating special need student's right to confidentiality, and inappropriately using special need students' standardized achievement test scores to measure teaching effectiveness.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that the components of student assessment practice conducted among special need students are curriculum-based assessments, intelligence Quotient (IQ), Test screening test, academic achievements, developmental assessments and end-of-grade assessments, and the methods of assessment used are formative assessment, summative assessment, speech therapy evaluation/language scales, developmental scales, diagnostic assessment, standardized test and direct observation. It was further concluded that special educators' professional competence in choosing assessment methods appropriate for special need students, administering, scoring, and interpreting of their results and recognizing unethical and inappropriate assessment methods are inadequate.

#### Recommendations

The study therefore recommended that:

1. Special educators should be train on all the components of assessments practices that will benefit special needs students learning outcomes. Training is important to guide special educators in practicing major of the assessment components such as choosing and developing of assessment methods, administering, scoring, and interpreting the results of assessment methods, using assessment results in making decisions about special need.
2. Special educators should also be well-acquainted with the kinds of information provided by a broad range of assessment alternatives and their strengths and weaknesses. In particular, they should be familiar with criteria for evaluating and selecting assessment methods in light of instructional plans. Special educators who meet this standard will have the conceptual and application skills.
3. Fairness, the rights of all concerned, special educators must equipped with the professional ethical behavior of assessment of special need students. By establishing standards for all special educators on special need students' assessment. That is, blueprint or rubric for all special educators to be followed in assessment practice. This will prevent special educators from playing unethical or bias level of assessment from one special need school to the others.
4. Special educators should also provided with knowledge of grading procedures, communicating assessment results to students' parents and recognizing unethical, illegal, and otherwise inappropriate assessment methods.

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