

Quality or Mere Formality? Food For Thought in the Use of Teacher-Made Tests in Masvingo Rural Secondary Schools in Zimbabwe

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The purpose of this study was to determine the quality, effectiveness and sustainable use of teacher-made tests among rural secondary school pupils. A cost-benefit analysis on the quality of teacher-made tests will be explored assessing whether their administration is of quality or a mere formality in the classroom setting in Zimbabwe. Teacher-made tests are highly vulnerable to misuse by teachers who adopt a haphazard approach to test planning, administration and scoring. The qualitative descriptive survey design was used with questionnaires, interviews, observations and document analysis as data collection instruments. Findings from this research study established that teacher-made classroom tests remain invaluable assessment devices for generating vital information which will ultimately be used to enhance educational practices. In rural secondary schools in Masvingo, a variety of factors, some concerning the individual taking the test, others inherent in design and content of the test itself, administration and test conditions have been noted to affect the validity, reliability and quality of test scores. This has a bearing on the effective assessment, teaching and learning in rural secondary schools in Zimbabwe. Efforts are being made to minimise errors though it is difficult to entirely eliminate errors in assessment. This study recommends in-service training programmes to sharpen the item writing skills of classroom practitioners to improve the quality of teacher-made tests. Moreover, an understanding of sources of errors in test scores help to minimise them in constructing, designing and administering of tests, thereby ensuring test validity and reliability.

Keywords: teacher-made tests; error; assessment, quality, formality, reliability, validity.

INTRODUCTION

One critical component of the professional duties of classroom practitioners at different tiers of education is the construction, administration and scoring of classroom tests to their respective students. Evaluation of pupils' progress is a major aspect and the scoring of the tests is a teachers' job. The evaluation instruments used in most secondary and primary schools in Zimbabwe are the teachers' own tests, thus making them teacher-made tests. Linn and Gronlund (2005) assert that the teacher-made tests are more frequently used in educational settings than any other type of test. One is then tempted to wonder if the rampant and regular use of teacher-made tests automatically implies that they are of high quality. Mpofu (2001:01) assert that a teacher-made test consist of a task or a collection of tasks that are used to enable the systematic observation and recording of behaviours that are selected to represent important educational goals. Kubiszyn and Borich (2003) are of the opinion that teacher-made tests are tests which are purely designed by classroom practitioners for use in their respective classrooms. This means that these tests are meant to elicit behaviours whose manifestation will signal the achievement of particular educational objectives. . Bertrand and Cebula (2000:108) assert, "... immediate and important reasons for testing (using teacher-made tests) is to evaluate individual children and the

individual progress of each one". The quality of teacher-made tests is rooted in their validity and reliability. Chakanyuka (2010:85) defines test validity as, "The ability of a test to measure what it is designed to measure". This means that validity is concerned with the degree to which a test serves its intended function. The reliability of a test is concerned with the degree of consistency of a test over several administrations.

The teacher-made tests essentially fall into two major categories which are objective tests and essay tests (Ogunniyi, 2004; Wiersma and Jurs, 2000). Objective tests basically limit the likelihood of subjective interpretation by the test-taker. The test items are constructed in such a way that there is a limited choice of responses. Objective tests mainly have four variations (types) namely multiple choice, matching, completion (supply items) and true or false tests (Bertrand and Cebula, 2000). On the other hand, essay tests enable those tested to exhibit their individual, creative and innovative thinking as well as exploring the various routes to the solutions of the given problems. Teacher-made tests are designed for a particular group of students at particular institutions. The test can be for a single class or few classes at a particular institution (Chikanyuka, 2010). The major advantage which stems from the use of teacher-made tests can be that they are tailor made to

suit the particular unique needs of the students in their particular circumstances. Teachers can construct test items which relate to the testees' settings. Moreover, the teacher may not use any guidelines in interpreting and using the tests. The interpretation and use of classroom tests can be done using the syllabi guidelines. Teachers who are habitually in contact with such pupils can come up with the appropriate tests which they will also administer accordingly. For instance, pupils who have writing problems can be allowed more time by their respective teachers for them to demonstrate what they have mastered. By virtue of having been secondary school teachers who have worked at a number of secondary schools in Zimbabwe, these writers noted that the teacher-made tests are also characterised by flexible administration procedures. Moreover, the test administration procedures are usually not written down especially at primary and secondary levels. There may be no time specifications and the pupils may sometimes negotiate for an extension of the duration of the test. Invigilation is not very formal since the teachers who would have constructed the tests sometimes supply some clues while pupils are writing the tests. Improvisation and the use of alternative or substandard test materials sometimes characterise the test-taking scenario (Mathews, 2006).

Kubiszyn and Borich (2003) claim that the quality of teacher-made tests remains difficult to establish. They go on to say that all tests are subject to various sources of error that impair their reliability and consequently their accuracy, because different teachers at different levels of education dedicate different time and energy in the preparation and administration of the tests. At primary school level, teachers construct different tests in a variety of subjects, some of which they did not adequately study during their tertiary training. Even at secondary school level where there is high subject specialisation, some teachers construct tests in subjects they never specialised in during their tertiary training. The quality of classroom test is sometimes compromised by lack of preparatory rigour. Pretesting and item analysis are rarely done especially at primary and secondary school level (Kuncel, 2007). All these factors compromise the quality of teacher-made tests. The reliability of classroom tests is mostly not clearly defined (Kubiszyn and Borich, 2003). This can be accounted for by the fact that a particular teacher-made test is customised for the group of testees at that time. Consistently, over several administrations, it might be difficult to establish since there are a myriad of loopholes in the construction and use of classroom test. The purpose of testing is for selection, placement, diagnosis, accountability and evaluation of school programmes with the view to change them. Though it serves those important functions in the teaching and learning it might have flaws which

should be taken into consideration. Sax (2009) postulates that, teacher-made tests might be unfair or biased against some kinds of students for example minority students with limited proficiency in English, students from low income families or female students (Kubiszyn and Borich 2003). Of greatest concern is the possibility that tests might be biased because their items assess knowledge or skills that are common to one group of culture, thus disadvantaging students from other cultures. According to Van Clief (2011) test bias is a term used to describe the possible negative effects that occur when a test favours one group over another. For example a test that includes a reading comprehension passage about a trip to the beach may be against students who live far from a beach or cannot afford to travel to a beach. Culture fair testing attempts to obtain a message of ability that is relatively free of all the differences (Slavin, 2000; Linn and Gronlund, 2005). Sometimes teacher-made tests act as part of the students' coursework which will be used for certification purposes. This is a common practice in tertiary institutions. It is important to note that at secondary school level, teacher-made tests can be used for certification purposes in practical subjects such as Agriculture, Metal work, Art, Computers and Fashion and Fabrics. Outcomes of teacher-made tests provide vital feedback to important stakeholders such as parents or guardians of the pupils and the community in general. The marks entered on the term reports at primary and secondary school levels are usually the pupil's scores in classroom tests.

Classroom practitioners can also use teacher-made tests to explicitly check on the effectiveness of different teaching styles. This will subsequently enable them to figure out the best instructional approach to be used in different situations. For instance, it is through the use of teacher-made tests that educationalists can establish whether the discovery method will augur well with low ability, gifted or average learners. Mpofu, (2001:103) concludes that, "The effectiveness of teacher-made tests in helping teaching depends on the testing skills of the teacher". One fundamental purpose of teacher-made tests is evaluating each learner's progress. They therefore enable the teachers to quickly determine whether the scholastic achievement of each and every student is declining, relatively stable or improving. All this will be used to improve instruction. Teacher-made tests can also be used for motivational purposes (Zindi, Peresuh and Mpofu 2007). Teacher-made tests also help pupils to prepare for the more formal final examinations. By virtue of being made for a particular group of students at a particular learning institution, teacher-made tests can hardly be used to compare these students with those in other parts of the country (Bertrand and Cebula, 2000). In other cases, comparison cannot even be made between students at the same institution who are in the same

grade, form or level but are not being taught by different teachers. However, with sound planning, teachers in the same province or district can team up and construct common tests. It remains admittedly difficult for joint efforts to be always made whenever these teachers want to come up with tests.

Teacher-made tests are highly vulnerable to misuse by teachers who adopt a haphazard approach to test planning, administration and scoring. It can be argued that ignorance on the part of the teachers can lead to low-quality teacher-made tests. A research by Gall, (2000) cited in Ogunniyi (2004) established that some teachers generate substandard test items due to ineffective training. Some teachers are unfortunately not cognisant of the appropriate procedure for constructing teacher-made tests. There are some instances where low reliability and validity of teacher-made tests occur due to time constraints (Linn and Gronlund, 2005). Apart from time constraints, lack of material resources such as textbooks, past exam papers can militate against the quest to come up with high quality teacher-made tests (Chakanyuka 2010). It is against this background that these researchers will explore the effectiveness of teacher-made tests in three rural secondary schools in Masvingo.

Major Research Question

What are the weaknesses and strengths of teacher-made tests used in Zimbabwe?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the qualitative descriptive survey to explore the quality, reliability and effectiveness of formulating, administering and scoring of teacher-made tests in rural secondary schools of Zimbabwe. Twenty-five (25) girls and twenty-five (25) boys were randomly selected from the three secondary

schools and they made up the sample. Six (6) teachers were also interviewed, all the twenty-five (25) girls and twenty-five (25) boys were allowed to fill the questionnaires to validate the interviews, observations and document analysis findings. Questionnaires were hand administered by the researchers. Participants’ ages ranged from 14 to 16 years with the mean age of 15 years and the standard deviation of 0.8 which shows that the ages were closely packed around the mean age of (SD = 0.8). This research targeted both teachers and the pupils. Testing teachers should provide collaborative data about the teacher-made tests used in rural secondary schools and the effects this has on pupils’ academic performance. The pupils will also give their attitudes towards the use of teacher-made tests in rural secondary schools of Zimbabwe.

Ethical Considerations

The purpose of the study was fully explained to the participants before data were collected. The study was meant for educational purposes and to enhance the formulation, administration, scoring and general use of teacher-made tests in rural secondary schools in Zimbabwe. For the purpose of privacy and personal dignity, no names were used and any of these that may occur in our presentation of findings are pseudo names meant for clarity.

Research Findings

After administering the aforementioned data gathering instruments, the following findings emerged:

- Teacher-related variables
- Within Students Variables
- Administrative Factors
- Content

Table 2:1 an assessment of the quality of teacher-made tests among ordinary level students in Masvingo Rural Secondary Schools

ITEM DESCRIPTION	A	%	NS	%	D	%	TOTAL
1. Errors in teacher-made tests are inherent in the design/content of the test itself.	80	80	4	4	16	16	100
2. The tests we write are of high quality.	30	30	10	10	60	60	100
3. There are also within students factors which affect the quality of teacher-made tests	74	74	3	3	23	23	100
4. Pupils have a negative attitude towards teacher-made tests	56	56	0	0	44	44	100
5. The relationship of the teacher and the student affects testing.	71	71	80	80	21	21	100
6. Teachers take their time to formulate teacher-made tests.	15	15	6	6	79	79	100
7. Lack of professionalism among most teachers has compromised the quality of teacher-made tests.	91	91	2	2	07	07	100
8. Pupils’ attitudes towards teacher-made tests affect testing scores.	50	50	0	0	50	50	100
9. Teachers’ attitudes towards teacher-made tests affect testing scores.	78	78	4	4	18	18	100
10. Administrative factors negatively affect the quality of teacher-made tests.	58	58	11	11	31	31	100
11. Testing environment should be conducive to promote the use of teacher-made tests.	94	94	0	0	6	6	100
12. Distractions during testing may affect tests takers concentration.	93	93	1	1	6	6	100
13. Scores on teacher-made tests should be treated as accurate measurement.	40	40	2	2	6	6	100
14. Teacher-made tests help in addressing needs of individual children.	48	48	6	6	46	46	100

Key: A – Agree; NS – Not Sure; D – Disagree

Source: Field data (2011).

As shown by the above table, the majority of participants, eighty percent (80%) are of the opinion that errors in teacher-made tests are inherent to their design, four percent (4%) were not sure while 16% did not agree to the assertion. Fifty percent (50%) of the respondents agree to the statement that the classroom tests they write are of high quality, twenty percent (20%) were not sure and thirty percent (30%) disagreed. Seventy-four percent (74%) of the participants support that there are also within student factors which affect the quality of teacher-made tests, three percent (3%) were not sure while twenty-three (23%) of the respondents disagreed. Generally, seventy-one (71%) of the respondents have the view that the relationship of the teacher and the students affects testing while eight (8%) of the respondents were neutral, twenty-one (21%) of the respondents disagreed to that assertion. Ninety-one (91%) of the respondents asserts that because of lack of professionalism, teachers did not take time to formulate teacher-made tests; two (2%) were not sure and only seven (7%) disagreed. Fifty percent (50%) respondents agreed that pupils' attitudes towards teacher-made tests affect testing scores, while fifty percent (50%) of the respondents disagreed. On the other hand, ninety-four (94%) of the respondents have the opinion that, testing environment should be conducive to promote the effective use of teacher-made tests, only six (6%) of the respondents refuted the claim. The findings indicated that generally all measurement is subject to the error from the teacher who gives the test, the students, test conditions and the test itself.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Content and Design of the Test

This study established that eighty (80%) of the respondents were of the idea that errors in the use of teacher-made tests were inherent in the design, content, administration and scoring of the test itself. Thirteen out of twenty teachers interviewed revealed that tests may be the source of unreliability if they contain tricky questions, ambiguous items, reading level that is too high, items that are too difficult or too easy, poorly written items and confusing formats. Sixty percent (60%) of the respondents purports that selection of test items should not be done haphazardly. The majority of teachers interviewed admitted that most of the test items were replicated from textbooks and the past exam papers without even considering the cognitive in most instances. Some students who were interviewed also revealed that poor arrangements of test items especially when the more demanding items are given at the beginning of the tests affected the performance of the pupils. Linn and Gronlund (2005) together with Chakanyuka (2010) claim that poor arrangement of the test might lead to underachievement as pupils will be tempted to spend too much time attempting the difficult items in vain. It was also observed in this study that pupils

were observed to spend too much time on the demanding items at the expense of the easier items performed dismally at the end of the test. . Anastasi and Urbina (2007:498) rightly remark, "The test constructor who plunges directly into item writing is likely to produce lopsided tests". This has a bearing on the quality and effective use of teacher-made tests in the three rural secondary schools studied in Masvingo region. It is against these findings that these researchers alluded to the view that the use of teacher-made tests was a mere formality in most secondary schools in Zimbabwe.

The History and English Literature teachers in the three schools studied were observed to be using language that was too difficult for the pupils such that the test measure comprehension rather than intelligence. In some instances, documentary analysis of teacher-made tests established that some questions may be too long so that pupils fail to get sense out of the question. These findings concur with studies made by Anastasi (2002) who purports that the vocabulary and sentence structure are too complicated for the students taking the assessments, thus distorting the meaning of the assessment results. Some of the questions given by teachers are double barrelled and therefore difficult to tackle and score.

All the students who were interviewed remarked that ambiguous statements in test items were common and contributed to misinterpretations of test results. Linn and Gronlund (2005:74) lament, "Ambiguity sometimes confuses the better students more than it does to the poor students". Ninety percent (90%) of the interviewee established that unclear directions that do not clearly indicate to the student how to respond to the tasks and how to record the responses will tend to reduce validity, compromising quality of the test and thus increase errors in measurement. Research evidence from the three secondary schools studied showed that most tests provide inadequate time limits that are they do not provide students with enough time to consider the tasks and provide thoughtful responses thus compromising the quality of the tests and the interpretation of results. A student from one secondary schools studied purports that a test might have a two hour time limit but students will only be allowed forty minutes. It was also observed that sometimes pupils are given more time for a test, a situation where one hour paper is written in one hour thirty minutes. Given the above scenario, these writers concluded that rather than measuring what a student knows about a topic or is able to do given adequate time, the assessment may become a measure of speed with which the students can respond. Whether the use of teacher-made tests in most secondary schools in Zimbabwe is of quality or a mere formality remains a heated debate among educationalists. Thirty percent (30%) of the respondents purport that the tests they write are of

high quality, ten percent (10%) were not sure while 60% disagreed. A test is only a sample of many questions that might be asked. Teachers interviewed concluded that a test which is too short will not provide a representative sample of the performance and its quality, validity and reliability will suffer accordingly. Some respondents are of the opinion that longer assessments will provide a more adequate sample of the behaviour being measured, and the scores are apt to be less distorted by chance factors such as familiarity with a given task or lack of understanding of what is expected on a given task. At the three secondary schools studied, all pupils highlighted that their teachers were giving them very short tests which they believed were easy to score.

This study also established that a longer test also tend to lessen the influence of chance factors such as guessing. An English language teacher in one of the three secondary schools gave the students a spelling test. The students were asked to measure only five words. These researchers established that the results were unreliable if the words chosen were too easy or too difficult. Scores based on a large number of spelling words thus are more apt to reflect real differences in spelling ability and therefore to be more stable. Given this scenario the use of teacher-made tests in most rural secondary schools is a way of passing duty, a mere formality. The tests could not be relied on since they are marred by various flaws. Documentary analysis of the tests given to the pupils in the nine ordinary level subjects were too short, they were just a formality since they did not cover all the important aspects of the syllabus. Wollack (2004) states that classroom teachers have a tendency to casually run off ditto sheets filled with poorly worded questions when they rely upon their own tests. The researchers also noted evidence of content bias in some ordinary level subjects and concluded that male representation was greater than that of females, sex stereotyping was noted in most Shona and English tests analysed. This is inline with findings made by (Kubiszyn and Borich 2003) who posit that tests are biased towards certain individuals.

Teacher-Related Variables

This research established that some of the teacher or test giver variables that compromised the quality of teacher-made tests include the teacher's physical appearance, demeanour and the professionalism the teacher brings to the situation. Pupils who were interviewed purport that some teachers are kind, warm and helpful thus creating a conducive testing environment while some teachers are rude, too strict and unapproachable. A student from one of the secondary schools studied helplessly says, "*Our teacher is so rude and fierce that it is difficult for us as pupils to solicit any educational assistance from him. He scolds us so much that we even fear to ask him questions*". This study has yielded significant

differences in test performance as a result of a warm versus a cold interpersonal relationship between teachers and pupils. From the above analysis, it should be noted that teachers could therefore affect positively or negatively the scores of pupils. Majority of the students, seventy-four (74%) agreed that teachers provide differing amounts of information to pupils. Some spell words, provide hints or tell whether it's better to guess or leave blanks whereas others remain fairly distant.

Teachers have ethical obligations that must be fulfilled even before the pupils are exposed to the test, for example, the test must be stored in a way that reasonably ensures that its specific contents will be made known from the students in advance leaving open the possibility of irregularities. It was established in the secondary schools studied that because of shortages of resources, teacher-made tests were written on chalkboards, only end of term and mid-year tests were sometimes typed. Pupils admitted that they piped through windows to see the contents of the tests before they were administered and made thorough preparations before they sat for the test. They echoed such sentiments like "*Maclass acho haana macurtains saka tinogodongorera*". "*Vanosara vachirongedza mabhuku ematicha vanoona matests pazvipepa*". "*Tinozonyora matests ChiponaPortia vamboiona nekuti vanofarirwa naticha*". "Tests are invigilated by prefects from other classes who give answers to their friends". Given the above scenario, these writers concluded that the use of teacher-made tests in secondary schools is a mere formality, quality is compromised and therefore the obtained test scores of different pupils will therefore not always reflect their true ability. At times the laxity on the part of the teacher is due to general professional incompetence which manifests itself in various domains including test construction. The other explanation to lacklustre testing is the teacher disgruntled attributable to factors such as the social and economic climate. The validity and reliability of teacher-made tests are thus compromised.

The importance of the test scores however, should not be overshadowed by the errors associated with them. To argue that better educational decisions would be made without test scores is to argue that better decisions are made when less information is available. Almost all teachers interviewed in the three secondary schools agreed that because of lack of resources, they administered the tests without sufficient supply of test protocols and other supplies, a stop watch, mathematical tables if necessary and so forth, thus impairing the reliability and validity of the test scores. Because of the departmental policies in schools which prescribed that pupils should write at least a test per week in a number of subjects observed, teachers tended to copy tests items from textbooks, past exam papers and pass duty without

putting into consideration the level of the pupils. Some teachers because of their lack of in-service and ignorance of Bloom's Taxonomy on test construction also produced tests for the sake of producing tests. It is against these reasons that this study was carried out. This study also established that teachers only give tests when they are lazy to teach, they also give tests to pupils with or without prior notice of test. . The test takers must be notified of the test in advance for them to prepare. Glass, Singer and Friedman (1999) cited in Mischel (2004) established through research that testees' performance in a test improves when they had been informed about the test in advance. The majority of the respondents lamented that this cause anxiety and stress among learners. Some high school students in the three secondary schools pointed out that, "*Tinongokaruka tapiwa test, Ndinovhunduka, ndobuda ziya rakawanda. Ndinofaira kana tikapiwa test dzekuvhundusirwa*". "*Ticha vanotipa test kana vakatsamwa*"(We are given tests abruptly without any prior notice. This frightens me a lot and I normally underachieve. Moreover, teachers sometimes administer tests when they are angry perhaps as a form of punishment). The respondents also remarked that they were unexpectedly given tests on Mondays when their teachers were not prepared any content to teach. This is in line with Kubiszyn and Borich (2003) who pointed out that administrators differ in the way they convey the importance of the test, the extent to which they are emotionally supportive of students and in the way in which they monitor the tests.

Within Students Variables

Within students variables are the factors that can result from students themselves. Sax, (2009) pointed out that test taker variables are factors that are characteristic of pupils to some extent are controlled by them or by teachers if some kind of action can be taken prior to the test. Kubiszyn and Borich (2003) refer to this source of error as 'intra individual error'. The use of teacher-made tests is compromised because on the day of test administration, test takers may vary on a continuum with respect to numerous variables including, the amount of test anxiety they are experiencing and the degree to which the test anxiety is manifested by restlessness, fatigue, headaches, sweating, shacking, lack of appetite, frequenting the toilet and irritability. The researchers also discovered that high test anxiety people allow their negative thoughts to distract them from working effectively on their tests. These researchers observed that the anxiety many children feel when they take Maths and Science tests often influence test results. The effects of poverty in most rural secondary schools among orphans and some vulnerable children have negatively impacted on the use of teacher-made tests. It was established by these researchers, those pupils who write the teacher-made tests when hungry usually they do not perform well. These writers noted

that students perform well in tests they wrote during midweek than in the tests they wrote on Monday and sometimes Friday. Events that took place during the weekend can have influence in the student's performance for example; social activities like weddings / soccer matches can have a bearing on the performance of the pupils. Some pupils also do not take seriously the teacher-made tests because they believe the highest marks in compositions and essays are often given to the pupils who write long essays and neatly. The general feeling from the schools studied was that teachers do not read their work, those with good handwriting, neat and those who wrote on white papers performed better than the pupils who used any other paper. Kuncel (2007) states that there is so much teaching in classroom tests, pupils get marks they do not deserve. Classroom tests are affected by operative attitudes, pleasantness, interest, neatness and good handwriting and these influence the grading system. Tests are of paramount importance in education because they are tools that teachers use to measure the students' performance. The test scores that the students obtain from a given test may inform the teacher to make a better decision such as placing, grading, selection, evaluation and planning for remedial work. These writers established that the testing process itself is equally important in the sense that it can affect the scores negatively and positively. The administration and use of teacher-made tests in the three secondary schools studied, to a larger extent is more of a formality since not much effort is exerted in the planning, administration and scoring of the teacher-made tests given to the pupils.

Administrative Factors

This research established that most rural classrooms do not provide adequate lighting, ventilation; adequate working space and favourable room temperature may result in physical discomfort by pupils. Inadequate lighting may imply that pupils may strain their sight in an effort to read what is written or misread some of the words. Pupils interviewed purport that they become tired easily if the room temperature and humidity are too high. One student asserts that, "This may cause students to have their attention divided that is attending to test items and responding to high temperatures resulting in a decreased score. In support of this view, Sax (2009) echoes that sometimes obtained scores are too high because of error or chance operates in favour of pupils as in the case of copying.

Distractions during testing may affect pupils' concentration and finally affects test scores. Eighty (80%) of the pupils assert that teachers distracted them either by taking, answering cell phones, eating, or standing behind them reading what they were writing. As a result, the students will not perform at their best. Beside the teachers' behaviour during

testing, noise from outside can also distract pupils' concentration. Thus the noisy environment will compromise the quality of the test given. Anastasi and Urbina (2005) put forth the idea of posting a sign on the door to indicate that testing is in progress. It was noted that rural secondary schools studied only put these signs when standardised tests were written. Virtually teacher-made classroom tests remain invaluable assessment devices for generating vital information which will ultimately be used to perfect educational practices (Zindi, Peresuh and Mpfu, 2007). Nevertheless, numerous challenges have to be overcome in the Zimbabwean situation, especially at primary and secondary school levels before the majority of teachers can come up with high quality teacher made tests. The validity and reliability of teacher-made tests can greatly improve if classroom practitioners increase their professional dedication (Anastasi and Urbina, 2005). Moreover, in-service training programmes meant to beef up the test processing skills of classroom practitioners can go a long way towards increasing the quality of teacher-made test.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While it remain true that teacher-made tests rarely match the validity of standardised tests, the quality of teacher-made tests can be boosted by undertaking ample preparation, meticulous administration and objective scoring. The following are some of the considerations which classroom practitioners need to make in a bid to improve the quality of teacher-made tests.

Teachers must commence by consulting Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (Wiersma and Jurs, 2000). In their ascending order of complexity, Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives enables the test constructor to arrive at the suitable testing objectives, the right content and the appropriate test type to use. Tests for primary schools have more questions on lower order objectives such as knowledge and comprehension while tests for more mature students focus more on analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

After establishing the appropriate educational objectives, a table of specifications for the test is drawn up. Bertrand and Cebula (2000:84) declare, "The table plan or blueprint helps teachers to decide the subject matter on which to test. Instructional objectives specify the actual learning behaviour and test items are designed to elicit those behaviours". The table of specifications enable the test constructors to find out the number of items to be constructed for particular objective on a particular unit. It is advisable to gather a pool of test items on the intended content units from which the final test items will be selected. Teachers must avoid textbook replication. Instead, classroom practitioners must

customise the test items to suite the educational needs and circumstances of the learners. The test constructor can also modify some items from published examinations. When assembling the test, the test items should be sequenced in their ascending order of complexity. Test items can also be sequenced according to testing techniques, order in which the content units have been taught or according to stipulated objectives.

As much as possible, the test must commence with words that explicitly define the task. Such words include divide, multiply, compare and contrast. Teachers must also guard against introducing ambiguity in the test items." A good test item must be detailed enough to explicitly spell out what the learners has to do or supply in response to it. Setting the test in advance is also important as this allows time for revising the test items. Validation of test can be done by the test constructors' professional allies at that particular educational institution. Once the compiling of the entire test is complete, a marking guide must be prepared out rightly. The marking guide must explicitly indicate where marks will be earned or withheld. In fact, preparation of the marking guide can help the teacher to detect some loopholes in the test well before administration.

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