Assessment and Certification in a Changing Educational, Economic and Social Context

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TOPIC:

The impact of assessment and certification on teaching and learning Process Botswana Context

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The impact of assessment and certification on teaching and learning Process Botswana Context

Perceptions of Teachers and Students of Senior Secondary Schools regarding examination and certification

ABSTRACT

Assessment can have both positive and negative effects on the teaching and the learning processes. Instructional Psychologists argue that if assessment tools are well constructed, they could be used to benefit the learning process (Kubiszyn and Borich, 1990). Since assessment tools drive the teaching and consequently the learning, the curriculum content may be ignored while teachers are drilling students for examinations. Ultimately, students come out of the learning process not ready to perform at various levels in higher learning institutions and in the job market. The burning issues are whether assessment represents the curriculum and how valid certification is if some facets of the blueprint are not covered.

This paper aims at determining the influence that examination has on the teaching and learning process through the use of a mini survey, which will target teachers and students of history at the Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education {BGCSE} level.

Aim: determining the influence of examination on the teaching and learning process.

Objectives

1. To determine the influence of examination on teaching and learning.
2. To determine problems caused by examination in the teaching and learning
3. To determine corrective measures as suggested by teachers and learners

INTRODUCTION

The education system in Botswana is such that students spend five years in high school. There is Junior certificate, in which students get examined after three years. The examination is a selection examination; it is used to select students who go for high secondary. The system also has two sets of examinations for senior secondary. There is Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE) and the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE). BGCSE is the testing that takes place in government schools and IGCSE is used by private schools.

Both examinations are selection examinations. This means that they are used to select students who qualify to go into tertiary institutions. Those students who do not qualify to go into tertiary institutions can go into the world of work. The study looked at BGCSE and IGCSE because they are the highest examinations that students take at the end of high school therefore these are high stake examinations. Kubisyzn and Borich argue that tests can be seen as deterrents that turn off students. They also argue that some people may see them as motivators that stimulate students to study and provide them with feed back about their achievement. They further argue that between these extremes may lie a third group, those who see tests as necessary to the educational process but question the status and power often afforded them.

It is against this background that a study was undertaken. A study was conducted to see how both the teachers and students view assessment in this case terminal asseesment. A mini survey was conducted to see both the teachers and students position. Do they view assessment as a deterrent or a motivator? What is their view concerning the power given to asseesment? A survey was conducted to see how both teachers and students of high school view examinations.

METHODOLOGY

Stratified sampling was used for the selection of both the teachers and students. This method was selected to capture students and teachers from both government and private schools. The study acknowledges that the sample population is small because of time constraints, but it is not too small for people to learn something from.

Originally the study was to use history teachers only, but now it has used teachers from all subjects.

This study was conducted to assess the effect of examinations on the teaching and learning process. A mini survey was conducted which consisted of two groups, namely the students and the teachers of Botswana General Certificate Of Secondary Education (BGCSE) and International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE); both are selection examinations, which are used for the intake into tertiary schools. Those who do not qualify for tertiary schools go into the job market.

For teachers, the sample population was those teachers who teach in senior secondary schools. The sample consisted of 37 teachers both from private schools and government schools. For the students the sample population was students in high school who will be sitting for either Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE) or International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE). Both BGCSE and IGCSE are high stake examinations that students take after five years in high school. BGCSE is taken by students in government schools while IGCSE is for students in private school. The average age of the sample population is about 17. I sampled from two government schools and two private ones, which are both in Gaborone city. These students have different economic backgrounds. 166 students were used.

FINDINGS

What are the students and teachers perceptions regarding the influence of assessment on the teaching and the learning?

This question was asked against the background that the teaching and the learning could be driven by examinations and in the process important teaching objectives be overlooked. Consequently the curriculum content may be ignored while teachers are drilling students for the examination. Ultimately students may come out of the learning process not ready to perform at various levels in higher learning institutions and the job market. Burning issues are whether assessment represents the curriculum content and how valid is certification if some facets of the curriculum are left out. The teachers' response to the survey tool shows that examinations provide a conducive teaching environment. That even with assessment in place teachers use any teaching methods they find appropriate. The question was asked to see if assessment put teachers under pressure such that they stop being innovative.

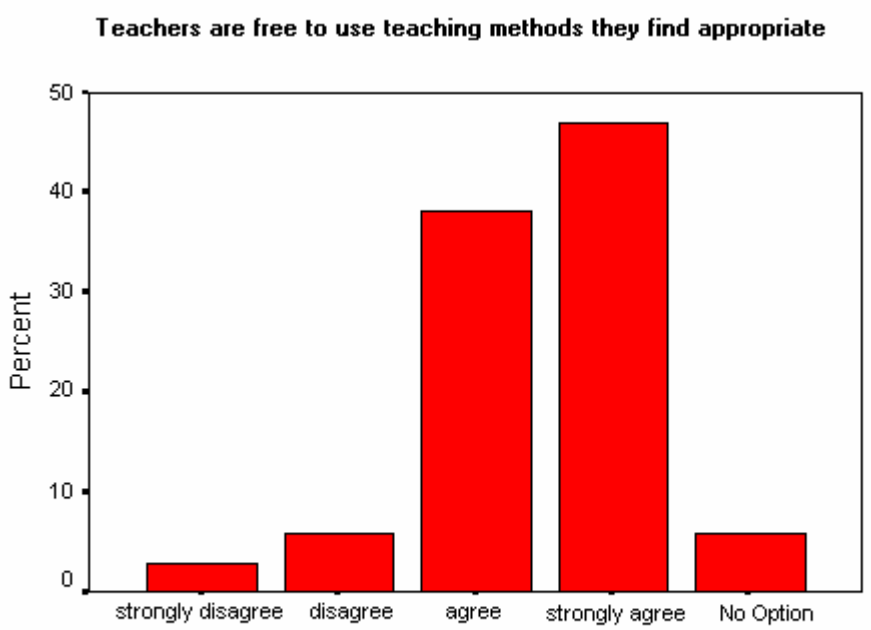

Fig 1

Figure 1 above shows that even with standardised assessment in place; teachers are able to be innovative in their choice of teaching methods. Only 9.8% report that their choice of teaching method is hindered by final assessment.

The Impact of the Assessment Syllabus versus the Teaching Syllabus

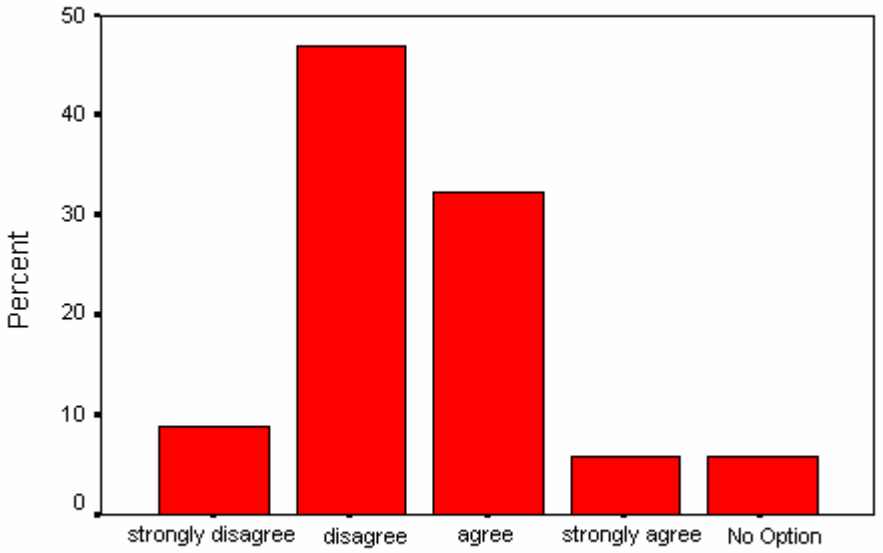

FIG 2

On whether the assessment syllabus impacts more than the teaching syllabus on the teaching process, 55.9% of the teachers argue that the assessment syllabus does not have a significant impact on the teaching while 44.1% says that assessment syllabus has an influence on the teaching. Figure 2 above shows the different responses of teachers regarding the two syllabi's effect on teaching. The fear was that maybe teachers ignore the teaching syllabus for the assessment one but teachers are saying that both syllabuses are important.

To the question statement that seeks to know if at the end of the course students are ready for tertiary institutions and the job market, teachers say they are not ready, which contradicts the learning objectives. If teachers cover most of the teaching syllabus like they say they do, the students must be ready for tertiary institutions. Even maybe for life because there are subjects in the curriculum, which are meant for that for example Agriculture, Design and Technology, Home Economics and others. 73.6% of teachers agree that assessment does put the teacher under pressure because

the teacher must have a wide coverage of the content if students are to do well. Some cite that they have to utilise the weekend to cover the teaching syllabus.

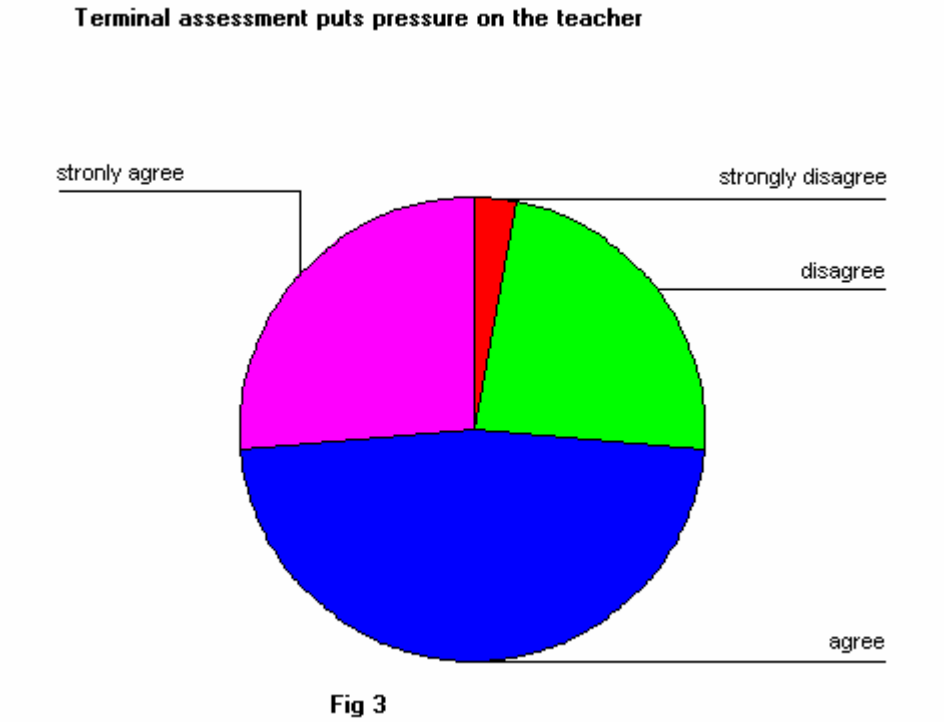

Fig 3

The above figure shows the response of teachers as to whether examinations put them under pressure or not, the responses show that examinations put teachers under pressure.

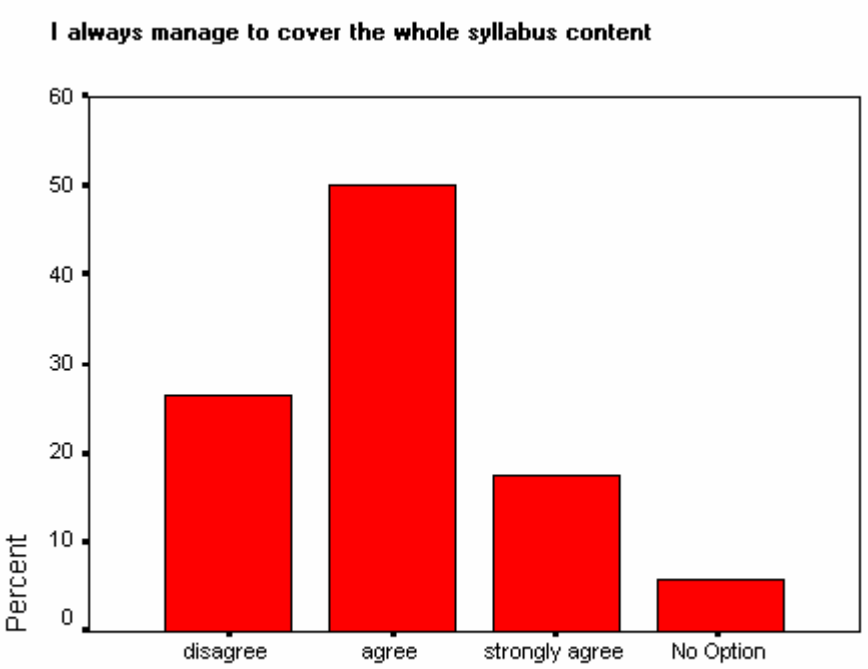

Fig 4

As to whether teachers are able to cover a wide syllabus content teachers said they always manage to cover the whole syllabus content. Whether teachers rush through the syllabus or not, it cannot be known at this point. Fig 4 above shows the response of teachers to that question.

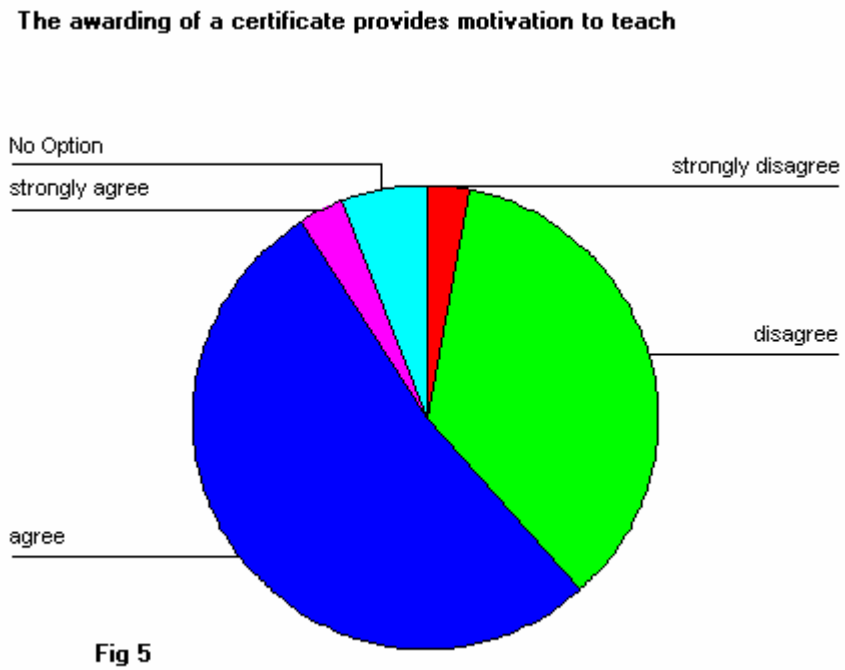

Fig 5

Certification has been cited as being important in the learning process. In figure 5, a sizeable number of teachers acknowledge the importance of certification as an influencing tool for both teaching and learning. The teachers argue that students' hard work should be rewarded with a certificate since it is the certificate that shows one's academic abilities. The certificate is also important for admission purposes into tertiary education and therefore it must be used as a yardstick to measure their capabilities.

WHAT TEACHERS SEE AS PROBLEMS IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS

Among the problems caused by the examinations in the learning process, teachers identified pressure as the main hindrance to learning. Both teachers and students have to work under immense pressure to cover the syllabus content, some teachers report to have resorted to examinations oriented skills. Among other things, this promotes drilling and consequently spoon-feeding. Such skills encourage students to listen to the teacher most of the time instead of students finding out things for themselves. Teachers argue that there is a lot of pressure on the students to perform, the pressure is from both the system and parents. The result is that students who not do well end up giving up and the end result is students who are depressed.

SUGGESTIONS FROM TEACHERS AS TO WHAT COULD BE DONE TO SOLVE PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN THE TEACHING

To stop unnecessary pressure being exerted on both the teacher and the learner, teachers suggested that continuous assessments be part of the final mark. Teachers argue that examinations end up making them a slave to past examination papers. They further pointed out that since they teach for the examinations students end up not being given skills that they can use outside school. Students cram for examinations rather than internalise and apply knowledge. With continuous assessment, in place the student performance is not just based on one final mark.

STUDENTS, RESPONSE TO THE SURVEY

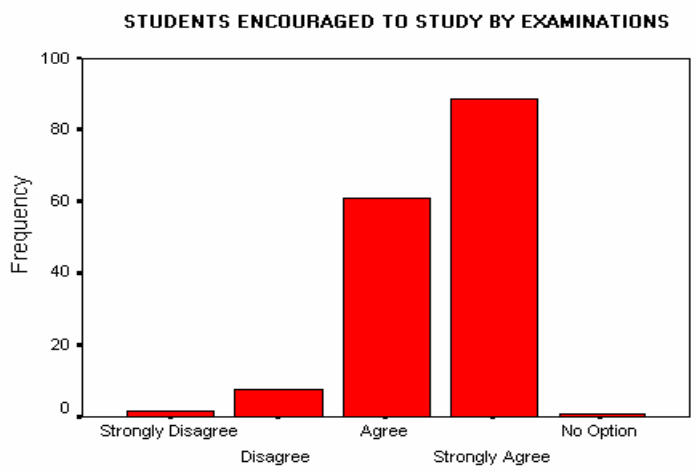

Fig 6

Figure 6 shows the students' response as to whether examinations encourage them to study. 94 % of the students report that examinations encourage them to study. Only a negligible percentage (5.4%) does not hold the same view. 75 % report the value of examinations on the learning. On the issue of whether examinations help students judge their performance against other students, those who agree and strongly agree make 74%. This is an indicator that the students welcome the competition given by other students during examinations. Can we say it is this competition that prepares the students for competition in real life?

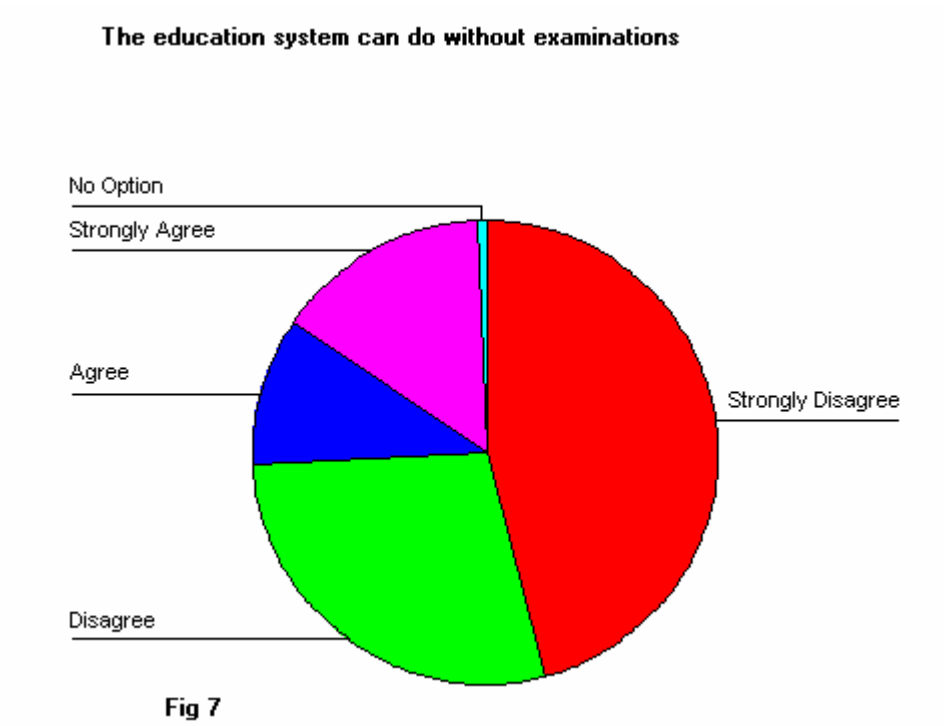

Fig 7

74 % of the respondents state that the education system cannot do without examinations. Thus, the students acknowledge the importance of testing in the learning process. The above figure shows that students disagree that the education system can do without examinations. This shows how important the students see assessment in their learning.

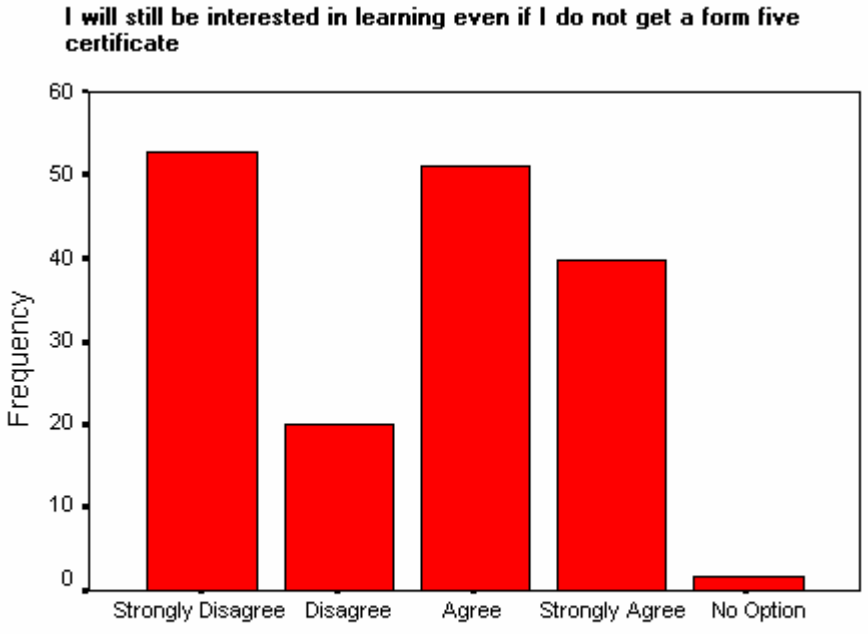

Fig 8

To the question statement that says I will still be interested in learning even if I do not get a certificate, both agree and strongly agree have high frequencies, the students are saying even without getting a certificate they will still want to learn. Here I am not sure if we could say the students were confused in their response or not. I am saying this because the general picture that emerges from the students responses show that examinations are important in the learning process. Maybe examinations are a reward for learning, since it is through, the examination that students get feedback on the learning that has taken place and also it is through the examination that students get a certificate, which is a token for the academic abilities of the student.
The question statement that says the certificate shows that I have acquired skills, the agree and strongly agree have high responses, the students agree that the certificate is a document that shows the skills that they have acquired from the learning. The general picture that emerges here is that examinations are important to the learning process.

SUGGESTIONS FROM STUDENTS AS TO WHAT COULD BE DONE TO SOLVE PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN THE LEARNING

The study wanted to find out, how examinations could be improved to further help students. Some of the things that students came up with are that the English used in the examinations is difficult; as a result students end up not understanding the question because of difficult words in the paper. Students advocate for simple English being used. Also that they should be more time between examinations, that if examinations are scheduled too close to each other it puts too much pressure on them. Students also say that they should be questions from all topics in the syllabus, so that there is a wide choice.

The students further say that the examination timetable should be out early so that they organise their study strategies. To the question that says what could be done to stop learning from being driven by exams more students suggested continuous assessment. Students say marks from school tests should be part of the final assessment. Some suggest that maybe the examination could be spread throughout the years for example that they be tested in form 4 and form 5. Some even further suggest that the testing should be done on term basis and in the end these marks could form part of final assessment. One is tempted to think that the idea of the testing

being spread over the years is not a bad one. There is too much pressure in high school because students are tested on a lot of material going back over two years. Maybe it will be better if the testing was like at university where students are tested at the end of every semester or at the end of each year. Maybe the students have a point when they say the form of testing in place, which is at the end of the course after two years, puts too much pressure on them since they are expected to remember a lot of information. Some students even suggest that they should be supplementary examination, so that there is a safety net for those who do not do well in the examination. Presently what the system has is retaking of subjects that students did not do well in to improve the grade. Maybe this method is not good enough because a student has to wait for a whole year to do that, with supplementary exams writing is done after a short period of time, while everything is still fresh in their minds

Some students are calling for an open book examinations, so that examinations do not put too much pressure on them. Can we say our students are ready for such exams at this early stage of learning? What are the advantages and disadvantages of such a method of testing? The method may clash with the intents and purposes of the Assessment system in place. Since the examinations are a selection examination maybe an open book exam is not the best option.

CONCLUSION

Broadfoot, 1993; and Gipps, 1994 Assessment in Education have demonstrated that the form of assessment that students consciously or unconsciously anticipate at the time of learning has a marked influence on what and how they learn. The type of assessment that students expect determines their learning strategies. The students have pointed out that examinations are important in their learning. But they have also pointed out that the type of learning in place has its problems Teachers have pointed out the assessment in place gives them pressure. Because of pressure to cover the teaching syllabus content, they resort to examinations oriented skills. Teachers say that if they resort to examinations oriented skills, students are drilled for the coming examination and in the process practical sills are ignored. The students also feel the same way that examinations exert a lot of pressure on the learner. One is tempted to agree with the authors because we see the teacher and the learner resorting to examinations oriented skills.

In conclusion, both the students and teachers think examinations are important in the learning process but they have pointed that testing can have its weaknesses and end up not serving its purpose if tools are not designed well. In the final analysis, research has proved that the education system cannot do without terminal examinations since in life there are decisions to be made concerning who should go to tertiary education and who should work where. Examinations have proved to be an instrument that has minimal errors and it is the most objective (Kubisyzyn Borich Educational Testing And measurement page *4)* Pressure should be taken out of examinations so that teachers have time to impart necessary skills to students that can prepare them not only for tertiary but also for life. There are subjects in the curriculum, which are designed for that for example Guidance and Counselling. (Claxton, Assessment in Education 1990, 1996,) that the ability to engage calmly and creatively with a whole range of real world uncertainties is centrally what the 21st century education should be geared towards. There are some measures that need to be put in place, if our examinations are to prepare students for life in the 21st century like maybe making some parts of the curriculum optional and also continuous assessment being part of the final examinations marks. By so doing pressure will be relieved from both the students and teachers.

Such a system exists at most universities where part of the student grades come from continuous assessment. The weighting of the marks could be 40:60, Continuous assessment being given 40% and the final examination 60%. I believe this could work if it is handled well. If it is working for the university it can also work for secondary student provide teachers are trained in the design of measuring instruments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the study it is clear that both teachers and students are saying examinations give them too much pressure. The system could look into introducing continuous assessment. The Division of Examinations Research and Testing is thinking of introducing Course Work. Maybe this could be an answer to problems that are posed by assessment in the learning.

APPENDIX

The Division of Examinations Research And Testing Division administers this Questionnaire.

THE IMPACT OF ASSESSMENT AND CERTIFICATION ON THE LEARNER

Student Questionnaire

Assessment, Certification, Versus, Teaching and Learning Process Botswana Context.

This survey aims to find out information about how examinations, affect teaching and learning Processes Feedback from you is very valuable. Any information that you give will be treated as confidential.

Impact of assessment on the learner.
Section A

For **Section A** put a tick in the box that has the response that that you want

1.Final Examinations make me value the learning process	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
2. The knowledge of coming Examinations encourage me to study	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
3.Examinations help me judge my performance against other students	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
4.The education system can do without examinations	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Certification and Learning

5 I will still be interested in learning even if I don't get a form Five certificate	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
6 Certificate show that I have knowledge and skills	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
7 By the time I leave school I will be ready for tertiary education or the job market	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Section B

8 How can final Examinations be improved to further help you?

1_____

2_____

3_____

4_____

5_____

9. What do you suggest could be done to stop learning from being controlled by examinations?

1_____

2_____

3_____

4_____

5_____

SECTION C
PERSONAL INFORMATION
GENDER Male Female
FORM
SCHOOL

The Division of Examinations Research and Testing conducts this questionnaire

Teacher Questionnaire

Assessment and Certification, Versus Teaching and Learning Process, Botswana Context

This survey aims to find out information about examinations, teaching and learning. Feed back from you is very valuable. Any information that you give will be treated as confidential

Section A

Put a tick in the box that has the response that you want

1. The knowledge of impending examinations provide a conducive teaching environment	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
2. Students will still be interested in learning if there were no terminal examinations	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
3. Terminal assessment puts pressure on the teacher	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. I am free to use any teaching methods I find appropriate	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
5. Even with assessment in place Students of different abilities learn at their own pace	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
6The assessment syllabus impacts more than the teaching syllabus in my teaching	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

7.I always manage to cover the whole syllabus content	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
8.By the time students complete Botswana General Certificate of Education (BGCSE) Or International General Certificate of Education they are ready for tertiary institutions and work	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
9.The awarding of a certificate does provide motivation to teach	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

10.I believe a teacher can use Exams to ensure a complete coverage of the curriculum content	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

Section B

Suggest ways in which the teacher can use examinations to improve learning

1_____

2_____

3_____

4_____

5_____

Personal Information

Gender Male Female

Subject Taught

FOOTNOTE

1. Kubisyzyn Borich Educational Testing And measurement Harper Collins Publishers, USA page *4*

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