



Enhancing the quality of performance assessment in agriculture in Botswana schools

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Abstract:

The quality of education in Botswana is not yet up to standard as there has been emphasis on attainment of Universal Basic Education. Quality in education encompasses a number of factors such as the development of the relevant curriculum, improvement of teacher preparation, development of appropriate learning materials, and improving the methods of assessing pupils (Grisay&Mahlck, 1991, cited in Kellaghan&Geaney, 2003). The quality of what is going on in the classroom is judged by the processes and outcomes that are defined qualitatively. Assessment in Agriculture in Botswana senior schools comprises performance assessment and standardised paper-and-pencil tests. Performance assessment contributes only 20% (M&S50, 2001:p.6) yet it is allocated more time than paper-and-pencil tests. The aim of the study therefore was to understand and explore the characteristics and quality processes needed in the performance assessment of Agriculture Form Four students to ensure valid and reliable examinations in Botswana. The study was guided by two research questions. The first research question was: How valid and reliable are the performance assessment processes in Botswana schools? This research question sought to understand how performance assessment was conducted in Botswana schools, and how it compared with the international practice. The second research question was: How can quality assurance processes be developed in order to produce valid and reliable marks for BGCE Agriculture performance assessment? The intention was to develop quality processes for performance assessment in the context of Form Four Agriculture in Botswana, to ensure valid and reliable marks for certification. A design research was employed in this study in which a baseline survey was conducted and based on the outcome, a quality assurance process was designed which included the development of standard tasks and assessment materials. During the baseline survey, teachers and school administrators completed a questionnaire and were also interviewed. Subsequently, prototypes of exemplar materials were developed iteratively in collaboration with practitioners and formatively evaluated. Feedback from evaluation was incorporated into the redesign and development of successive prototypes. Findings from baseline survey revealed that the conduct of performance assessment in schools was not standardised, primarily due to the absence of assessment policy and procedures to guide its conduct. Implementation of performance assessment was done by teachers who had insufficient training, in large classes with inadequate resources and received very little support from supervisors both internally and externally. Despite all these, insufficient time was allocated for conducting performance assessment, resulting in teachers forming groups most of the time during the conduct of tasks and assigning a single mark for the group based on the quality of the group's product. However, findings from

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