The Quality of School-Based Practices in Enhancing Secondary School Students' National Examination Achievement in Ethiopia

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Abstract

This research dealt with identifying the predictive quality of secondary school students' classroom achievement on national examination results. A correlation survey design with a concurrent mixed approach to data was used. Data were obtained from existing school archives through careful identification of subjects where the 25 top achievers in each one of the four sampled schools were considered (n=100). Moreover, references were made to key-informant principals (n=2), officers (n=2) and secondary school teachers (n=40) for complementary purposes. The findings revealed that students' school-based achievements were strong predictors of the national examination results in some schools (r^2=.82) whereas they were weak predictors in others (r^2=.29). In that, there was a significant difference between public and private schools on the level of prediction. There was also a significant difference in the level of prediction among private schools themselves. Findings showed a shortage in classroom arrangements and facilities, weak experiential exchanges and guidance services, and a shortage in identifying model skills among teachers and students to have been the bottleneck issues in enhancing the quality of school-based preparation for the national examination.

Keywords: quality; school-based; practices; enhancing; national examination; results

Introduction

In the formal education system, students are required to undergo different forms of practice and assessments in order to be legible for higher education. At the general primary school level, they are prepared to get overall knowledge, skills and dispositions

that mark the attainment of learning goals in terms of fundamental skills. In secondary school learning, they are required to pass a national examination which could help them join colleges and universities as per their success standards. According to Kellaghan and Greaney (2019), school-based assessment can be the base for ascertaining students' improvement in performance on a progressive basis.

Throughout the school process, however, several factors affect students' learning and academic achievement. Among these, student's readiness and motivation, teachers' professional competencies, motivation and commitment, and conduciveness of the school atmosphere for learning achievement can be traced as the leading factors (Day and Summons 2016). Learning readiness is the leading factor as a prerequisite condition for the effective learning process and academic achievement (Dangol and Strestha 2019).

Learning readiness is also an intensifier of the degree of concentration and eagerness students show which is initiated by mindedness and excitement to do something (UNICEE 2012). Learning readiness is indicated, by the overall students' active roles, support from family members, care and follow-ups made by schools (Williamson 2006). Moreover, teachers' qualifications and experience play significant roles in realising students' achievement (Hong, Ivy and Gonzalez 2007). Supporting this, Podungge, Rahayu, Setiawan and Sudiro (2020) held a study on teacher competence as a factor for students' academic achievement and found that, teachers' competence had little significance on students' extrinsic motivation—rather, on the intrinsic motivation. Related research works assert that, students' achievement has had a reciprocally intrinsic effect on teachers' motivation to teach with their full synergies (Abarro 2018).

Secondary schools in Ethiopia prepare students for the national examination after completion of grade 12 through classroom tests and model practices so that, the students could be able to manage their tasks during the national examination. The predictive quality of classroom or in-school preparatory practices and achievements for the national entrance examination results has not been researched in-depth in the way it can ensure relevance and timeliness.

For instance, Tesema (2015) held that the validity of university entrance examinations and high school grade point average for predicting first-year university students' achievement underlined that university entrance exam scores have higher predictive power for all first-year programs except for Geology, in which high school grade point average GPA predicted more. This work did not, however, clarify the predictive validity of classroom tests for university entrance results.

Hassen (2022) also studied the relative goal achievement of national examination items of the English language with respect to discriminating power and found that many of the examination items were not functioning as expected. The study did not, however,

indicate the predictive aspect of the earlier practices and achievements for the university entrance results.

This research investigated the predictive quality of classroom achievement for the national entrance examination in the light of students' preparation, teachers' supportive roles and conduciveness of the teaching and learning environment. Key questions of the study were the following:

- How far do classroom achievement results qualify for predicting national examination results?
- What are the professional and ecological determinants of students' preparation for national examination?
- What are the challenges in preparing students for the university entry national examinations?

2. Review of Related Literature

This section assesses basics, forms, values, theories, empirical dimensions and factors affecting assessment-based decisions in teaching and learning.

Basics of Learning Assessment

Different writers define assessment in diverse forms. Some of them present it as an input for entry decision whereas others consider it to be a signifier of process and progress decision. Yambi (2018), for instance, defines assessment as

> a related series of measures (tools) used to determine a complex attribute of an individual or group of individuals, which involves gathering and interpreting information about students' level of attainment of learning goals.

In this definition, *a series of measures* are required *to determine individual or group attributes* in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to the grand. Through the process of assessment, *information* must *carefully be gathered and interpreted* about students' performances as intensifiers of *goal attainment* in due accord. Not just a measure, an attribute or goals are taken into consideration, but also multiple dimensions are worth considering in assessment. Assessment as a tool, however, fails to be sufficient since what is measured cannot cover all learning attributes, especially when it comes to attitude.

Kizlik (2014) indicates assessment as a process by which information is obtained relative to some known objectives or goals and a broad term that includes testing. Here, assessment is said to be based on information gathered and interpreted on predetermined or intended learning objectives. In the beginning, there are objectives which guide learning activities, and information comes in the mid of the way to decision-making about learning. However, to measure learning attributes through assessment, there is a

need to use tests, which could be *norm-referenced* or *criterion-referenced* in purpose (Sireci and Greiff 2020). In that, the former is used to measure learning standards against preset criteria (Wikstrom 2005, 14) whereas the latter is used to measure learning performances in relation to the existing norm among learners in the classroom (Shafat, Tessema and Sumeiya 2015). So, decisions are made as per the purpose met. That form of assessment is inclined towards behaviourist principle of teaching where students are prepared for the test as the only and best means of verifying learning.

According to Brown (1990), classroom assessment focuses on *measuring* learning improvement over time, *motivating* students to study, *evaluating* the teaching methods and *ranking* the students' capabilities in relation to the whole group evaluation. Here again, there are stressed quantitative assertions that are complemented by qualitative assertions which finally lead to value-based decisions. This purpose-oriented definition also marks the *formative* aspect of the assessment.

In relation to the context of assessing learning in Ethiopian schools, the point of view is to assess the extent to which the norm-referenced testing process (school-based) determines students' success in the criterion-referenced national examination (standard-based) process.

Forms of Assessment and Their Implications for Students' Learning

There are different forms or styles of assessment in education which could be the basis for the research underway. Assessment is held at different levels for different purposes. One of the assessment types is entry or placement assessment which deals with the identification of students' readiness to enter a new program (Saxon and Morante 2014). The other is a formative assessment which deals with checking students' progressive achievements (Cullinane 2010). Diagnostic assessment is also the other form of assessment which deals with the identification of learning problems for possible remedial or tutorial to be conducted. Summative assessment, as the concerned focus of this research, is one used to make termination decisions on students' overall performances to be promoted from one level to the other (Banta and Palomba 2015).

Factors Affecting the Planning and Use of Assessment in Education

Several factors are worth considering in relation to planning and effecting assessment. For instance, Crossman (2014) pinpoints students' personal motivation and readiness, producers' know-how and skills and test-delivery situation to affect the successfulness of evaluation and assessment. Matovu and Zubairi (2014) also supplement the preceding assertion stating that teachers' academic levels and assessment-based training inputs could significantly affect the success of assessment practices.

Farooq, Chaudhury, Shafiq and Behanu (2011) assert that parents' socioeconomic status, education and overall attention to secondary school students' readiness and motivation to learn, have effects on the latter's academic performances at grade 12.

Appropriateness of gender orientation among boys and girls is also stated as essential as an internal factor. Dikgale (2012) also stresses learners' motivation, continuous attendance, educators' commitment, managers' monitoring and support, equitability of funding for rural and urban schools, and educators' training and qualification to have remarkable effects on students' secondary school achievement. To Sosilowati and Sukidjo (2020), students' early skills and motivation, teachers' competences, breadth and depth of initial ability or readiness to work rigorously, supportiveness of the school environment, family support, and integrative use of support from internal and external sources all affect students' success at secondary school levels. Muyoyeta (2018) identified learners' indiscipline, teachers' low expectations and heavy workload, teachers' low proficiency and professional qualification, scarcity of teaching-learning resources, bulky curriculum contents for some subject areas, and lack of commitment on the part of the school management as challenging conditions to students' success at secondary school level.

Charlton (2017) held a study on factors affecting assessment practices at first-year university level and found the characteristics of first-year students cohort. Resources, institutional policies and regulations have had more pressing effects than collegial support and program-level planning, as well as opportunities for professional development in assessment. Harpster (1999) identified, among other factors, proper training on assessment techniques and classroom support systems to have significant effects on teachers' testing of higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills. Kimbell and Huzinec (2019) earmark comprehensively that, the physical and behavioural conditions of the students, home situation, school-based institutional conditions, and caregivers' and teachers' standards in skills and motivation stringently affect assessment success.

In the Ethiopian context, there are certain factors that affect students' assessment results. In this regard, Birhan (2018) held a study on factors affecting students' academic performances in Ahuntegen General Secondary School of North Wollo Zone, Ethiopia, and came up with the findings which revealed teachers' educational level, experience, subject matter knowledge, students' interest towards education, attendance, parents educational level, parents income, distance of the school from the students home, the availability of materials, textbook and language skill of students to have had notable influence on students' academic success.

According to this research (Birhan 2018, 206), individual, institutional and supportive guidance were issues of deep concern. The individual concern was about students' personal readiness and motivation, which was found to be positive to some degree. The other was school conditions as formal institutions, which showed certain manageable flaws. Perhaps. More pressing to that level was the absence of school guidance and counselling, and family conditions with respect to economic and educational status.

Suleyman (2016), emphasised the formal classroom situation in studying factors affecting education quality across the Afder Zone of the Somali Regional State and found sufficiency of materials, the school schedule and the child boom to have had a big impact on the quality of education and assessment results.

In his study, Buom (2018), held that the quality of secondary education in Gambella Town, had a non-condusie school environment such as a lack of toilets, no cafeteria, a lack of classrooms, a shortage of learning and teaching materials, a large number of students in a class and low motivation of teachers and principals, because of lack of incentives and lack of stakeholders' participation to have been pressing factors on education and assessment results.

Dangura (2016) also held a study on factors affecting performance of the secondary school principals in Sidama Zone and came up with findings which identified pupils' low pass rates, high dropout and repetition rates, low academic standards, inadequate disciplinary practices at school, high levels of disruptions and violence, high rates of staff and student absenteeism and staff turnover, inadequate use of instructional technology, poor communication, cooperation collaboration approaches, poor school-community relationship, miss-use of school resources, poor leadership and inadequate school facilities as leading challenges to students' success.

Beyene (2017) held a study on factors affecting students' learning performances in Hinde Preparatory School and came up with the findings which revealed parents' occupation, parents' educational level, having tutors at home and at school, caregivers and sex to have the most significant effect. A similar reflection is also made by Asrat (2017) underlines students' lack of role orientation at government school level, pedagogic and professional shortages on the part of teachers (especially at government schools), and weak operational ties among internal and external stakeholders to have pressingly negative effects on secondary school student's achievements.

On the basis of the empirical evidence reviewed as well as the theoretical reflections, the use of assessment in schools to make terminal decisions requires consideration not only of a portion coverage but also the condition and context in which learning takes place. Hence, the current study took two alarming sides of assessment: The viability of school-based assessment as a predictive way to national school-leaving assessment, so termed "entrance", and the workability of decisions just solely on national examination results save the *pedagogical, psychological and moral inputs* so far in place in Ethiopian schools.

3. Methods

This research dealt with investigating the predictive quality of school-based practices (test results, facility use and experiential resources) at a secondary school level on national examination results in Asella Town of Arsi Zone, Ethiopia. The purpose was

to indicate the functional effect of classroom practices on students' national examination results by analysing conditions related to the preparation process for the national examination. A correlation survey design with concurrent mixed methods of data processing (Quan-Qual) was used in the study.

The schools taken as sample areas of study were selected through stratified random sampling. Accordingly, four secondary schools (57%) were taken as target data basis from each school, and achievement results of 25 top-ranking students (n=100) on school-based and national examinations were set for predictive analysis.

A record registry rubric was prepared to collect the achievement and experiential data. Data related to teachers' experiences and the teaching-learning atmosphere (n=40) were also collected with the help of a binary-mode questionnaire enclosing closed and open-ended questionnaires. A key informant interview guide of semi-structured mode was also used to collect qualitative data from selected principals and officers, in order to complement the archival and the questionnaire-based data through triangulation of data (Turner, Cardinal and Burton 2015; Creswell 2014).

Achievement-related data were carefully recorded from the school registry and online sources of the National Agency for Examinations with data ethics secured through preset coding and reservation of access. Experiential data were also collected with the help of a rubric prepared on issues of in-service training, experiential exchange at schools, facility arrangement and the use of in-school and out-of-school practices. *Pearson Correlation-coefficient and One-way Anova* (SPSS, version 20) were employed in analysing the quantitative data whereas thematic narration and reflection were used as concurrent data for the study.

Results

Data for this research were systematically organised and analysed using SPSS Version 20. Before the onset of the analysis, the national examination results were converted into a percentage score, because, the students' average scores at school (classroom achievement and model test results) were in percentage average. Both correlation and regression analysis techniques were employed. The analysis followed the order of key research questions and presented as under:

The Predictive Quality of School-Based Achievement

In order to check the predictive effect of school-based achievement on national examination results, correlation and regression values were looked into based on the selected data index. The succeeding table denotes the co-efficient of correlation and regression subsequently computed for emphasis at public and private schools:

Table 4.1: The Predictive Effect of School-Based Achievement on National Examination Achievement Result

No.	School Code	Correlation Coefficient (R)	Regression Coefficient (R^2)
1.	0001Pub.	0.39	0.55
2.	0001Priv.	0.91	0.82
3.	0002Pub.	0.42	0.57
4.	0002Priv.	0.54	0.29

According to the data obtained from sample schools (Table 4.1), students' school-based achievements stood as strong predictors of the national examination results in some of the private and public schools whereas, in others, they were weak predictors. For instance, in the case of school 0001Pub, the level of prediction was almost moderate (R^2=.55); which implies that 55% of the results on the national examination could be attributable to the independent variable—that is, school-based achievements. In the case of the other school (0001Private), a strong causative level was observed as per the data (R^2=0.82), which indicated 82% of the change in the dependent variable (NER) to be attributed to the independent variable (SBA).

The third school case indicated that there was a moderate correlation between school-based achievement and national examination results. The same indicated the possible attribution of the effect on national examination to be moderate (R^2=57). The fourth case (0002Private) brought forth a lower coefficient of determination (R^2=0.29), which indicated that only 29% of the prediction in the national examination result could be attributable to students' school-based achievement.

Overall, other predictors lying outside students' achievements could be given attention since the sole attribution of results in national examinations to students' school-based achievements could be misleading. Hence, the succeeding in-school and out-of-school factors were necessitated to be considered for the realisation of the study.

Classroom Quality

The quality of a certain teaching and learning classroom is judged in terms of its brightness, aeration, free movement and nature of facilities. This necessity is evidenced by researchers with respect to the physical school environment and pedagogy, organisation, and internal atmosphere, allowing systematic changes in learning activities and classroom space management. In this regard, an interview protocol with one of the school principals evidenced the succeeding testimony:

> The classrooms are sufficient though conditionally tight with an increasing number of students each academic year. The student-section ratio is 65 per section, which makes aeration difficult and suffocation inevitable. Sufficient light is allowed through the windows, and at times, we use electric lights when it is cloudy and dark. Chalkboards

are sufficiently available and maintained when there is wear. There are no whiteboards though and no projectors either (P-1, 0002Pub).

From the set of reactions given by the key-informant participant on the interview protocol, the classroom setup had a traditional mode where desks and tables were arranged in a linear mode such that, all provisions were made by the teacher. The classroom atmosphere was also very tight with student-boom which could make both the physical and psychological access and interaction very difficult. In short, students are not free to move and act in a stringently linear atmosphere. In this regard, both classroom space and facility conditions need attention, should schools be deemed essential to strengthen students' achievements (Ford 2016; Brukstate 2019).

Library and Related Facilities

School libraries exist for the formality of accommodating readers but they are not extensively serving the students with well-established schedules and service follow-ups. On average libraries were said to accommodate 65 students for an hour. That could have implications for the likely provision of library services for 260 students per day, which could account for 1300 students to be accommodated per week. In a school where more than 3000 students are taught, having a library accommodating a very small number of students with scarce resources would mean jeopardising the very lesson-delivery system.

Moreover, data from the principals showed the following, "There are no references kept or reserved by teachers in the library for students' ease of handling notes. Handouts are occasionally provided only where conditions dictated" (Parti. Princ.1, 2023).

This interview shows the idea that teachers had no practice in reserving their notes for the students. The implication is that, in the absence of the teacher, there cannot be any essential notes provided. The other point of concern is that where the same course or subject is provided by different teachers and practice exercises are developed variably, students could be immersed in divisive provisions, which could expose them to a disparity in understanding.

Researches denote that bearing the significant and remarkable relationship between library usage and the student's academic performance and success, it would be advisable to conduct information literacy programmes for the students to promote awareness about the resources, services and facilities available in the library so that the students can take maximum advantage of the benefits provided by the library (Rodrigues and Mandreker 2020; Thorpe et al. 2016).

Portion Coverage Across the Schools

The extent to which teachers equitably covered given subject portions was the third point of concern in this research. According to an officer in charge of school

supervision, follow-ups on portion coverage were made through the collaborative effort of the school departments and the town-school supervision experts.

The succeeding account was secured from the interview held with the officer:

> Portion coverage is followed up in line with the *course syllabus*. This is *normally programmed* and held every quarter after the onset of classes. But there are some *conditions* pulling back portion coverage with respect to teachers' personal-social encounters, moonlighting and circumstances such as insecurity due to conflicts and the pandemic (Part.2, ATEO*[1], 2023).

In line with the reflection given above, school-based course portion coverage is followed up in a centralised manner with the help of aligning the course provision system with the holistic syllabus. The syllabus can be a good guide for the teacher but it cannot be a good follow-up tool for school-based provision.

This premise is supported by Altman and Cashin (2003) asserting the purpose of the syllabus is to be communicating to the students the nature of the course, purposes to be met, methods, learning progress, and actions required of the students to complete the course with a passing grade. It is not a good indicator of how far the syllabus has been taught and learned.

The other point reflected in the practicum was the existence of encounters on an individual and social basis which created disruption and discontinuity to course coverage. In that case, there may have prevailed an inconsistency in portion coverage and a lack of time to recap the missing parts, either by considering such encounters as normal or due to an indifference to the issue. Such indifference could create inhibit students' success. So, the study went on to verify if there were duly planned and executed training and capacity-building means.

Training and Capacity-Building for Teachers

Data obtained from officers and school principals denoted that, there existed occasional training and induction sessions for selected department heads and teachers. Teachers' experiential notifications on professional training denoted that, in-staff training was absent in most cases (60%). Though a considerable number of responses showed the existence of in-staff training (40%), evidence kept behind the given training was rarely traced. Interschool experiential exchanges were also minimal (28, 70%) though some teachers among the respondents denoted the existence of practices (12, 30%). School-based action research was also non-existent in most of the cases concerned (36, 90%). The qualitative data are organised and set as hereunder:

> Teachers' capacity-building is provided on occasion in the form of methodological induction, assessment methods and techniques, and self-regulatory teaching. In-staff training is not well-organized. It is not adapted to practices in our school either.

Experiential multiplier effects are not weighed as important as well. By far, subject-area pivots on capacitating are left to the departments. (Part.2, ATEO, 2023).

From the experiential reflection above, it could be noted that teachers' capacity-building was held on occasion. Though the reflection did not clarify what initiated the occasion, the very focus limit was a signifier that teacher training went around pedagogic provisions of a very broad and general scope. Only selected teachers were allowed to participate, and the focus at in-staff level was very narrow. There were no rooms for teacher-to-teacher and intra-school experiential exchange on a programmed basis.

A school principal from one of the sample schools also had the underlined points to add:

There is no training at school. There are no planned experiential exchanges as teachers run for part-time work to win their life needs. There is also heavy workload on most teachers, especially on those teaching above grade eleven. By and large, the tradition of intraschool and interschool experiential exchange, training and professional competition has pitfalls. (Part. Principal 2, 2023).

From this assertion, it could be noted that the non-existence of short-term professional training and induction on an overall pedagogic and subject methodology remains to be a daunting case for schools to see success in teaching and improvement in the students' achievements. In line with Goodwin (2010), at least three new norms are currently influencing the education system such as classrooms that are more and more diverse regardless of where they are; teachers who expect to work alongside colleagues who are not only recruited locally but also respond to regional international searches to fill teaching shortages, and teachers who will be instructing children who are not only diverse but also enter the classroom with very unique and challenging needs. In this regard, fixed practices and shallower provisions in teachers' professional capacity-building may not guarantee success on examinations.

Guidance and Counselling Supports

The alarming rise of student enrolment in most schools coupled with inadequate resources to cope with the ever-increasing demand for educational provision makes school management in Africa much more complex and difficult (Salgong, Ngum and Chege 2016). With the need to underscore the role of guidance and counselling in schools in the target study as well as in other areas, this research looked into practices of school guidance and counselling in enhancing students' performances and achievements. Data from the questionnaire based on teachers' responses from the sample schools denoted most of the teaching roles to have dealt with conventional lesson provision (20, 50%), though there were also experiences in guiding students on study skills. Evidence of occasional support was traced on the part of teachers (12, 30%) and principals in a considerable manner as well. The following assertions were given by school principals and officers alike:

> Guidance and counselling in schools focus on student encounters such as misbehaviours and, at times, love affairs. Perhaps, there is general support given to students on how they should act and benefit in schools. Technically armed guidance and counselling support are far off to materialise owing to a lack of professionally well-qualified and committed staff across schools. (Part. Principal 1, 2023)

According to the qualitative reflection above, the role played by school guidance and counselling providers was limited if not below standard. Moreover, teachers' counselling roles as well as instructional and managerial, if existent, were not traced. General support seldom sufficed to enable students to face the rigours of studying with deep enthusiasm. In this regard, a confounding situation was observed around the schools, as one of the officers reflected:

> Students are accustomed to a cheating tradition as a normal practice. Absenteeism, political infringement, parents' lack of cooperation and weak school-society ties are paramount. Moreover, school guidance and counselling exist as a formality; otherwise, it seldom functions as an entity bearing its own autonomous plans and performance indexes. (Officer, ATEB, 2023)

This account briefs the wide-range *cheating practice* in which students are snared. Behind the cheating practice, however, the teachers' test-preparation skills to identify prepared and unprepared students, invigilators' skills, commitment to control the test session, and overall regulatory mechanisms in and around the school to correct the situation are essential but not worked on. Not only practices of cheating but also sensing cheating as a normal practice is a chaotic situation across all schools.

The other reflection was on absenteeism, which the informant interviewee stressed. Absenteeism could be initiated by students' preoccupation with other businesses rather than lessons which take up most of their time and attention; such that, they lack sufficient time to complete homework. Absenteeism may also be initiated by parents' tendency to use their children's labour at home, for which reason the students become hopeless as they are torn between their home duties and schoolwork. There may also be in-school conditions which may appear as push factors which drive students out of class— such as teachers' forcible action, lack of proper lesson provision, lack of proper guidance or peer pressure to malpractice.

The participant traced some of the causes to have been in-school, and the remaining to be out-of-school. For instance, political infringement or students' involvement in political movements in schools where some students provoke others to join them. It could also have its footing in the nearby atmosphere where some interest groups strike conditions which easily draw children into uprisings. Parents' lack of cooperation and weak school-community ties all add up to aggravate the situation. Lack and shortage in school guidance and counselling adds fuel to the fire. This ends in incomplete lessons, unpreparedness for examinations and lower achievement rates.

Discussion

From the overall results of the study, it is clear that the school-based results were strong predictors of national examination results in some cases whereas they were weak predictors in others. In that case, the level of predictability varied from school to school. Moreover, school-based results more strongly predicted the national examination results in private schools (R^2) than in public schools.

The predictive quality of school-based performances on national examination results was the highest in one of the sampled secondary schools but lower and the lowest in the other cases. That signified achievement experience has been highly dependent on the variation among schools. Besides gross variation in students' achievement among the target schools, there were differences in classroom context, teachers' capacity-building, possibilities for experiential exchanges, and the use of school-based action research to use objectively obtained findings for the betterment of teaching and learning were highly scarce.

The research data also showed that teachers used conventional mode of lesson delivery owing to heavy demand from the subject coverage. Lack of experience, heavy workload and teachers' preoccupation by extra duties were among the antecedent challenges. Perhaps, research works held by Okodeso (2022) and Rose and Sike (2019) assert the existence of a significant relationship between teachers' instructional loads and students' academic performance. The effect of teacher's professional capacity on students' success in learning is also underlined as an essential condition (Zakaria, Nor and Alias 2021), the former having a great impact on the latter.

On the whole, attribution of national examination results solely to school-based students' results without considering other physical, mental and dispositional factors can lead to a misleading deduction. since student learning and achievement does not take place in a vacuum.

Conclusions

Regarding the predictive quality of school-based achievements for national examination achievements, the results showed diverse predictive status across public and private schools. Against the overall assumption airing private schools to have been inundated by the tradition of cheating, the current research excavated the highest rate of predictive values ($r^2 = 0.8$) to have been recorded in private schools. The results were hardly conclusive though.

Regarding ways of preparing students for examination, the results denoted classroom portion coverage to have been negatively affected by students' reluctance and teachers' failure to arrange for timely completion of courses owing to circumstances such as heavy workload and political infringements on the part of students. Performance

improvement through academic forums and experience exchanges was also minimal. *Conventional lesson delivery* over won other practices and research was not adapted to the improvement of students' achievements.

There were also challenges plainly identified behind guidance and counselling services, discussion on academic issues at different units, experiential exchange sessions and shortage in in-staff training.

Recommendations

Cognisant of the need to concord school-based performances and national examination results, school teachers, principals, supervisors and education office experts should develop a consistent network to make due follow up on the appropriateness of course coverage across the board.

Schools and education office units should arrange for in-staff training, in-depth students' preparation through experiential exchanges, action research and provision of probing practices at large. School guidance and counselling centres should also work far beyond reacting to very minor issues and devote time to supporting students through study-skills induction and moderation. As much effort as possible need to be made to create a holistic academic consortium of private and public schools based on which skills could be networked to support students' achievements. The latter solution must be worked on by all internal and external stakeholders based on a clearly set school policy to guide the school support systems.

Further research could be held in other schools and related educational settings on issues of urban-rural disparity, students' preparation and results on national examination, the gender gap in achievement with antecedent factors, and the overall contributions of the school community for better achievements.

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