

School-Based Assessment: Facilitation or Inhibition of Effective Science Teaching

S. Karunaratne

Science Education Unit, Faculty of Science, University of Peradeniya

School-based assessment (SBA) was introduced to the Sri Lankan education system in 1997 along with proposals of education reforms to produce a "total child." SBA was implemented in the whole island since 1998 with the expectation of developing many skills and attitudes with the knowledge component. Although, SBA helps both the learner as well as the teacher, this anticipated objective was not met, because teachers have used SBA as an alternative way of testing. This study explores how SBA is implemented in Science classrooms.

Two schools from all educational zones were selected to cover all types of schools (except type-3, elementary schools), urban/semi-urban/rural and unisex/mixed schools. The total sample consisted of 175 schools. Data were gathered by administering questionnaires for education officers, principals, sectional heads, teachers, students and parents. They were also interviewed. Science teaching in grades 8, 9 and 10 was observed. Data gathered from questionnaires were analysed quantitatively and observations and interviews were analysed qualitatively.

Responses of the questionnaires revealed that all education officers, principals and teachers believed that SBA facilitates teaching and learning Science. All education officers stated that they monitor the SBA programme in schools frequently. All teachers have stated that they do SBA in their Science classrooms very frequently. Students also mentioned that they were doing assessments frequently. However, observations of doing Science and assessments in classrooms gave a different picture. It was not observed that teachers were doing SBA by following the guidelines given to them and failed to produce their records of assessments. Student portfolios enable a teacher to identify strengths and weaknesses of students and provide positive feedback to students for their development. The most common practice of an assessment was to give a quiz with 2-3 questions.

Teachers did not have a clear idea about the modalities of assessments. According to the teachers they have not received training on how to do SBA. In all the provinces there were in-service sessions for subject teaching and others but not for SBA. Although there was internal and external supervision, interviews with teachers revealed that they have not received feedback to improve their practice of doing SBA. Education officers who come for annual inspection collect SBA records of candidates of G.C.E. ordinary level examination. Students mentioned they do assessments referring to activities that they had to do, but those activities were not assessed. Parents did not have a clear idea about SBA. They were happy to see the term test marks. There was no significant difference in implementing SBA by teachers with different qualifications, years of service, type of school or gender of the school. Although SBA facilitates teaching and learning Science, the way it is implemented at present inhibits the effectiveness of Science teaching.

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