

EVALUATING THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT IN FOSTERING DEMOCRATIC VALUES FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: EVIDENCE FROM PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN BAYELSA STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined educational assessment as a determinant of democratic value orientation for national development among students in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State. The study adopted a descriptive survey design, with a population comprising teachers and students in public secondary schools. A sample of 420 respondents was selected using stratified and purposive sampling techniques. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Educational Assessment and Democratic Values Questionnaire (EADVQ). The instrument was validated by experts in measurement and evaluation, curriculum studies, and civic education, while reliability testing yielded a satisfactory Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.82. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that educational assessment practices have a moderate positive influence on students democratic value orientation, particularly in promoting fairness, accountability, critical thinking, respect for rules, and responsible conduct. However, the influence was less pronounced in fostering participatory values such as inclusiveness, collaboration, peer deliberation, and active civic engagement. The study also found that inconsistencies in assessment methods, overemphasis on summative evaluation, limited use of formative feedback, inadequate teacher training, and weak alignment between assessment tasks and civic learning outcomes significantly affect the promotion of democratic values. The study concluded that while educational assessment plays a vital role in fostering democratic values necessary for national development, its effectiveness is limited by traditional assessment practices and implementation challenges. It recommended that schools adopt learner-centered and participatory assessment strategies and that educational authorities provide sustained teacher training, assessment resources, and monitoring frameworks that support democratic value orientation.

Keywords: Educational assessment, democratic value orientation, national development, public secondary schools, Bayelsa State

Introduction

Education is one of the most strategic social institutions through which a society transmits knowledge, values, dispositions, and civic habits needed for collective survival. In a democratic society, schools are not only expected to produce candidates who can pass examinations; they are also expected to produce citizens who can reason independently, respect rules, tolerate opposing opinions, participate responsibly in public life, and demand accountability from institutions. This expectation is consistent with the Nigerian philosophy of education, which recognizes education as an instrument for national development and emphasizes the formation of citizens who can contribute meaningfully to the political, social, and economic life of the nation (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). It also aligns with global citizenship education frameworks that regard fairness, participation, respect for diversity, civic responsibility, and critical consciousness as core learning outcomes of modern schooling (UNESCO, 2015, 2021).

Within this broad educational mandate, assessment occupies a critical but often underestimated position. Assessment determines what teachers emphasize, what learners take seriously, how schools define success, and how learners come to understand justice, merit, accountability, and responsibility. When assessment is transparent, criterion-referenced, feedback-rich, inclusive, and learner-centered, it can function as a democratic practice because it teaches students that rules should be clear, performance should be judged fairly, mistakes can lead to improvement, and every learner deserves the opportunity to participate and grow. Conversely, when assessment is dominated by secrecy, rote recall, punitive grading, examination anxiety, favoritism, and narrow summative testing, it may reproduce undemocratic habits such as passivity, fear, competition without cooperation, and distrust of institutional procedures (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Brookhart, 2017; Sadler, 1989).

The relationship between assessment and democratic values is therefore not accidental; it is structural. Students learn democracy not only from civic education textbooks but also from the daily routines of school life. A classroom in which students receive constructive feedback, understand assessment criteria, participate in peer review, ask questions without intimidation, and see teachers apply rules consistently becomes a practical site of democratic socialization. In contrast, a classroom in which assessment is reduced to memorization and high-stakes ranking

may weaken the same democratic dispositions that the curriculum claims to promote. This is why contemporary assessment literature increasingly emphasizes assessment for learning and assessment as learning, rather than assessment merely of learning (Earl, 2013; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Wiliam, 2018).

The issue is particularly important in Nigeria, where public schools remain central to nation-building, social mobility, value re-orientation, and democratic consolidation. Nigeria has experienced persistent concerns about corruption, weak institutional trust, youth disengagement, examination malpractice, political intolerance, and limited civic participation. These problems cannot be addressed by political institutions alone; they require educational practices that build democratic character from the school level. Civic Education and National Values curricula provide formal content for teaching citizenship, but the effectiveness of such curricula depends partly on whether school assessment practices reinforce or contradict the values being taught (NERDC, 2012; Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013).

In Bayelsa State, public secondary schools serve learners from diverse social, linguistic, economic, and community backgrounds. The schools are expected to prepare students not only for academic progression but also for responsible participation in state and national development. However, where assessment practices remain largely examination-driven, teacher-centered, and inadequately supported by formative feedback, their capacity to foster democratic values may be constrained. The problem is not that assessment is absent in schools; rather, the concern is whether the dominant forms of assessment are educationally broad enough to develop fairness, accountability, critical thinking, respect for rules, cooperation, and civic participation. This study therefore evaluated the role of educational assessment in fostering democratic values for national development using evidence from public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to evaluate the role of educational assessment in fostering democratic values for national development among students in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Determine the extent to which educational assessment practices foster democratic value orientation among students in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State;
2. Examine the assessment-related factors that affect the promotion of democratic values among students in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do educational assessment practices foster democratic value orientation among students in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State?
2. What assessment-related factors affect the promotion of democratic values among students in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State?

Hypotheses

H01: There is no significant relationship between educational assessment practices and students democratic value orientation in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.

H02: There is no significant relationship between assessment-related implementation challenges and the promotion of democratic values among students in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.

Research Methods

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was considered appropriate because the study sought to obtain the opinions of teachers and students on the extent to which educational assessment practices foster democratic value orientation in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State. Survey design was also suitable because the variables of interest were studied as they occurred in the school setting without manipulation by the researcher.

The population of the study comprised teachers and students in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State. The sample consisted of 420 respondents selected through stratified and purposive sampling techniques. Stratification was used to ensure representation across relevant school categories and respondent groups, while purposive sampling was used to include respondents who had direct experience with classroom assessment practices and civic-related school activities.

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled Educational Assessment and Democratic Values Questionnaire (EADVQ). The questionnaire was organized into sections covering demographic information, assessment practices, democratic value orientation, and assessment-related implementation challenges. The response format was based on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The criterion mean was 2.50; therefore, item means of 2.50 and above were accepted, while item means below 2.50 were rejected.

The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by experts in measurement and evaluation, curriculum studies, and civic education. Their comments were used to improve the clarity, relevance, and coverage of the items. A pilot test was conducted outside the study sample, and the reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.82. This value was considered adequate for the study because it indicated acceptable internal consistency among the questionnaire items.

Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. The hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation. The interpretation of the results was guided by the direction and magnitude of the correlation coefficient, the p-value, and the decision rule that a null hypothesis would be rejected when the p-value was less than 0.05.

Results

Research Question One: To what extent do educational assessment practices foster democratic value orientation among students in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation on the extent educational assessment practices foster democratic value orientation

S/N	Item	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Assessment rules and grading criteria are clearly explained to students before tasks are given.	420	3.08	0.73	Accepted
2	Classroom assessment promotes fairness and equal treatment among students.	420	2.94	0.78	Accepted
3	Assessment practices encourage students to respect rules and due process.	420	3.01	0.76	Accepted
4	Feedback from assessment helps students take responsibility for their learning.	420	2.79	0.82	Accepted
5	Assessment tasks encourage critical thinking and independent judgment.	420	2.83	0.8	Accepted
6	Teachers use assessment to promote accountability and honest academic conduct.	420	2.96	0.77	Accepted
7	Students are actively involved in peer assessment, self-assessment, or classroom deliberation.	420	2.42	0.91	Rejected
8	Assessment practices promote collaboration, inclusiveness, and active civic engagement.	420	2.45	0.88	Rejected
	Aggregate mean	420	2.81	0.81	Accepted

Table 1 shows that six out of the eight items had mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, while two items were below the criterion mean. The aggregate mean of 2.81 indicates that educational assessment practices foster democratic value orientation among students to a moderate extent. The highest rated areas were clarity of assessment criteria, respect for rules, accountability, and fairness. However, the lower mean scores for peer assessment, self-assessment, deliberation, collaboration, and inclusiveness show that assessment practices are still weak in promoting participatory democratic values.

Research Question Two: What assessment-related factors affect the promotion of democratic values among students in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation on assessment-related factors affecting the promotion of democratic values

S/N	Item	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Overemphasis on summative examinations limits the use of assessment for democratic learning.	420	3.23	0.69	Accepted
2	Inconsistency in assessment methods affects students perception of fairness.	420	3.11	0.74	Accepted
3	Limited formative feedback reduces students opportunity for reflection and improvement.	420	3.06	0.77	Accepted
4	Inadequate teacher training in modern assessment practices affects value-oriented assessment.	420	3.17	0.71	Accepted
5	Large class size makes participatory assessment difficult to implement.	420	3.02	0.83	Accepted
6	Insufficient assessment resources affect the use of learner-centered assessment strategies.	420	2.98	0.79	Accepted
7	Weak alignment between assessment tasks and civic learning outcomes affects democratic value formation.	420	3.09	0.72	Accepted
8	Examination malpractice and fear of failure weaken students trust in assessment processes.	420	2.91	0.86	Accepted
	Aggregate mean	420	3.07	0.76	Accepted

Table 2 reveals that all the listed assessment-related factors had mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. The aggregate mean of 3.07 indicates that assessment-related implementation challenges affect the promotion of democratic values to a high extent. The major challenges identified were overemphasis on summative examinations, inadequate teacher training, inconsistency in assessment methods, limited formative feedback, and weak alignment between assessment tasks and civic learning outcomes.

Hypothesis One

H01: There is no significant relationship between educational assessment practices and students democratic value orientation in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.

Table 3: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between educational assessment practices and students democratic value orientation

Variables	N	r	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Educational assessment practices and democratic value orientation	420	.467	.000	Significant; reject H01

Table 3 shows a moderate positive relationship between educational assessment practices and students democratic value orientation, $r = .467$, $p = .000$. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that educational assessment practices are significantly related to the development of democratic values among students in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.

Hypothesis Two

H02: There is no significant relationship between assessment-related implementation challenges and the promotion of democratic values among students in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.

Table 4: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between assessment-related implementation challenges and promotion of democratic values

Variables	N	r	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Assessment-related implementation challenges and promotion of democratic values	420	-.438	.000	Significant; reject H02

Table 4 shows a moderate negative relationship between assessment-related implementation challenges and the promotion of democratic values, $r = -.438$, $p = .000$. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that as assessment-related challenges increase, the capacity of assessment to promote democratic values decreases significantly.

Discussion of Findings

The finding of research question one showed that educational assessment practices foster democratic value orientation among students to a moderate extent. The corresponding hypothesis confirmed a significant positive relationship between educational assessment practices and

democratic value orientation. This finding implies that assessment can serve as a practical instrument for democratic socialization when it is transparent, rule-based, feedback-oriented, and fairly implemented. Students who experience clear criteria, fair grading, constructive feedback, and consistent assessment procedures are more likely to internalize values such as fairness, accountability, respect for rules, honesty, and responsibility. This supports the argument of Black and Wiliam (1998) that assessment becomes educationally powerful when it is used to improve learning rather than merely classify learners. It also aligns with Brookhart (2017) and Hattie and Timperley (2007), who emphasized that feedback helps learners understand performance expectations, regulate their learning, and develop responsibility for improvement.

However, the moderate level of influence also indicates that the democratic potential of assessment is not fully realized in the schools studied. The weak ratings for peer assessment, self-assessment, collaboration, inclusiveness, and active civic engagement suggest that assessment remains more teacher-centered and examination-driven than participatory. This is a critical issue because democratic values are not adequately developed through passive reception of rules; they are strengthened through participation, dialogue, reflection, shared responsibility, and respect for diverse perspectives. The finding is consistent with Earl (2013) and Wiliam (2018), who argued that assessment should help students become active agents in their own learning. It also agrees with UNESCO (2015, 2021), which emphasized that citizenship-oriented education should move beyond knowledge transmission to participatory learning experiences that build agency, solidarity, and responsible action.

The finding of research question two revealed that assessment-related implementation challenges affect the promotion of democratic values to a high extent. The second hypothesis further showed a significant negative relationship between assessment-related challenges and the promotion of democratic values. This means that the more schools experience overreliance on summative examinations, inconsistency in assessment methods, limited formative feedback, inadequate teacher training, and weak alignment between assessment and civic outcomes, the weaker the democratic influence of assessment becomes. This finding is important because it demonstrates that assessment is not automatically democratic; it becomes democratic only when its design, administration, interpretation, and feedback processes are aligned with fairness, inclusion, participation, and improvement.

The finding further suggests that assessment reform is central to value-oriented education in Nigeria. Where assessment is used mainly for ranking, promotion, certification, and examination preparation, teachers may give less attention to the formative and civic dimensions of learning. Large class sizes, limited resources, and inadequate teacher professional development can also make participatory assessment difficult. This agrees with DeLuca et al. (2016), who maintained that assessment literacy is essential for teachers to design and use assessment in ways that support learning. It also reflects the concern of Shepard (2000) and Sadler (1989) that assessment loses its developmental value when it is detached from feedback, criteria, and learner improvement. In the context of Bayelsa State, the finding implies that strengthening democratic values through assessment requires not only policy statements but also practical classroom support, teacher retraining, and school-level monitoring.

Conclusion

The study concluded that educational assessment plays a significant role in fostering democratic values for national development among students in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State, especially in the areas of fairness, accountability, respect for rules, critical thinking, and responsible conduct; however, its full democratic potential is limited by excessive dependence on summative examinations, inadequate formative feedback, weak participatory assessment practices, insufficient teacher training, and poor alignment between assessment tasks and civic learning outcomes.

Recommendations

1. Public secondary schools should adopt learner-centered assessment strategies such as formative feedback, self-assessment, peer assessment, project work, debate-based tasks, and reflective journals to promote fairness, participation, accountability, and critical thinking among students.
2. Educational authorities in Bayelsa State should organize regular capacity-building programmes for teachers on democratic, inclusive, and formative assessment practices that align assessment tasks with civic and national development outcomes.

3. School administrators should monitor assessment practices to ensure transparency, consistency, fairness, and the use of clear criteria that build students trust in institutional rules and procedures.
4. The Ministry of Education should provide adequate assessment resources and reduce structural constraints such as large class size so that teachers can implement participatory assessment methods effectively.
5. Civic Education and National Values curricula should be assessed through practical, collaborative, and problem-solving activities rather than relying mainly on written examinations.

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