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# Anecdotal records as tools for assessing learners' progress in the universal basic schools in Ekiti and Oyo States, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** The study assessed teachers' knowledge and the use of anecdotal records as tool for assessing pupils' progress in basic schools in Ekiti and Oyo States of Nigeria. Participants were 200 teachers selected from 100 schools in Ekiti and Oyo State using stratified random sampling technique (Ekiti, N=100, Oyo, N=100) and (lower basic, N=100, upper basic, N=100). The instrument for collecting data was a self-constructed questionnaire on knowledge and use of anecdotal records with reliability coefficient estimated at 0.92 using test-retest method and Pearson Product Moment Correlation formula. Data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, chi square and t-test statistics, tested at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that most teachers lacked the knowledge and do not use anecdotal records for the assessment of the learners in basic schools, there was significant association between the knowledge and use of anecdotal records for assessment. Significance difference existed between lower and upper basic school teachers in the use of anecdotal records in favour of upper basic teachers. It was recommended that teachers in Basic schools should be sensitized on the importance of anecdotal records as effective tools for assessing pupils' progress in the schools.

**Keywords:** Assessment, Anecdotal Records, Tools, Teachers, Pupils/Students, Basic Schools

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## 1. Introduction

Observation, without gainsaying is a potent assessment tool for various aspects of human endeavors. It is everyday activity [1]. It is the major tool used consciously or unconsciously in all apprentices to assess the people learning trades or vocations. The master or the senior practitioner (the assessor) observes the skills, abilities and knowledge of the learner on the trade or vocation for a period of time and on these certifies an apprentice's competence to stand alone and practice the trade or vocation. The potency of observation as assessment means makes it indispensable in the education industry.

Among many observation tools is anecdotal record keeping. According to the American Association of School Administrators [2], an anecdotal record is a written record kept in a positive tone of a child's progress based on milestones peculiar to that child's social, economic,

physical aesthetic and cognitive development. When the recording is carried out overtime, anecdotal records provide a longitudinal qualitative picture of the behavioural changes in the life of each student [3], records about individual needs and can later form basis for decision making by aiding human memory [4]. Anecdotal records are used to record the observed behaviours, skills and attitudes of individual learners as they relate to the outcomes in the programme of studies. Anecdotes possess the advantage of being used to assess learners in the classroom lessons as well as outside the classroom activities. The record can be the description of the performance or events or activities going on in the class during the lessons and also it can be written in response to a product or performance that a learner has completed [4].

The recording is informal and based on notes or

checklists with space for writing comments. Notes taken during or immediately after the occurrence of an activity are generally the most accurate. This removes causes of error due to memory loss, poor recall, and perceptions affected by experiences after the original experience. A good anecdote is a factual description of a specific behavior / event / trait and the conditions under which it occurred. The specific behavior / incident / event recorded should be significant to the growth and development of the students observed. Previous work [5] gave a variety of situations where anecdotal records can be employed such as observing social adjustment of students, personal and social development. Others include identifying unintended learning outcomes, identifying difficulties with students' experience in learning projects and learning activities, identifying interests and work habits [5]. They can also capture observation of significant behaviors that might otherwise be lost.

It has been observed that the use of observations as assessment tools is not common [6] whereas paper and pencil tests have been the major means of assessing learning outcomes in schools. Examination system is an objective and effective method of assessing cognitive domains but for other aspects such as work skills or habits, performing laboratory experiment, use of equipment, use of time, use of resources, initiative, creativity, willingness to suspend judgment or inquiry mind, examination is inadequate ([3], [7], [8]). The problem of this is that well-rounded and functioning products are not emerging from the schools but half-baked ones. This is in line with the observation of Thompson [9] that the existing examination system places a premium upon the accumulation of knowledge at the neglect of teaching pupils how to use their knowledge other than in examination. This is probably the reason why the products of these schools cannot function well outside the four walls of the school [6].

Anecdotal records are capable of assessing cognitive as well as these areas the paper and pencil tests cannot measure effectively or adequately. Anecdotal report records both proper behaviours (e. g. participating well in group activity) and improper behaviours (e. g. hostile attitude towards classmates. Anecdotal record emphasized what a child can do and his or her achievements, and not what he/she cannot do [2]. Anecdotes collected and not used to help the children would only accomplish little, hence, artful and skillful interpretation of records and comments are inevitable for accurate reports.

It is a truism that not all information about the behaviours of students can be understood from tests [10]. It is also a fact that anecdotes are used in parent and staff conferences and are of great value in discussing a child's behavior with school psychologists, social workers and other specialists. Data obtained from anecdotes can be used to diagnose problems and hence ways of combating such problems. They can be used to develop behavioural norms. They are capable of enabling teachers write valid and reliable reports or references about the pupils. This can be

achieved through records of important episodes such as fight, quarrels, crying, failure to attempt or complete assignment, refusals to participate in games or other activities. Also truancy, cheating, shyness, fearfulness, suspiciousness, withdrawal, and other signs of emotional problems could be recorded as they occur [7].

The use of anecdotal records are not amendable to time sampling techniques as such, much time is spent observing, summarizing the anecdotes and recording the summary of events ([5], [7]). Hence, at the secondary level, time sampling techniques are almost impossible due to class loads and as such anecdotes are usually written only for serious episodes. In interpreting anecdotes teacher's personal values, biases and expectations can cause undesirable effect in assessment. The bias may be in favor or against some individual, group activity or institution. This is due to the fact that biases are highly emotional and they tend to direct observation and facts. Hence, teachers are expected to keep unbiased records of behaviours or traits manifested by learners.

Most reports or references written by teachers on their pupils are affected by "halo effect" [11]. Teacher exhibits the tendency to rate individual's behaviors based on the influence of his general impression of the person to be rated than the specific trait under consideration. The writer is unduly influenced by his favorable or unfavorable impression of the person on whom the report is being written. This can be attributed to the fact that teachers are not well prepared in the areas of assessment of the learners [12]. This calls for staff development programmes that encompass those activities (including assessment techniques) to be pursued by teachers. This is to enhance their capability as professionals after they have obtained licensure and begun professional practices [13].

### ***1.1. Statement of the Problem***

It is a common phenomenon that when pupils/students have completed the required number of years in primary or secondary schools testimonials, reports or references are usually issued in respect of cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of the individual pupils / students. The matter of concern is that the content of these testimonials, reports or references are not congruent to the actual behaviors, capabilities or attributes manifested or displayed in the practical situations at work place, home, school or in the community the pupils / students find themselves later in life. This is traceable to the poor quality of the assessment techniques employed while in the school and consequently the testimonials, reports or references issued do not portray the true picture of their abilities, capabilities and achievements. The use of anecdotal records as assessment tools is very effective in the preparation of the testimonials, reports or references. Hence, this study assessed the use of anecdotal records as assessment tools in schools with the view to improving the validity, reliability and usability of the certificates, testimonials, reports and references issued to UBE

pupils/students as at when required.

### 1.2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to assess teachers' knowledge and use of anecdotal records keeping as tool for assessing pupils' progress in Basic Schools in Ekiti and Oyo State of Nigeria as well as finding out whether there would be any difference in the use of the tool between the Lower Basic and Upper Basic teachers.

### 1.3. Research Questions

The following research questions were raised for the study.

Do the teachers have the knowledge of anecdotal records for assessing pupils/students in primary and junior secondary sections of the Universal Basic Education Schools?

Do the teachers emphasize or use anecdotal records as tool for assessing the pupils/students in the schools?

### 1.4. Research Hypotheses

*Ho<sub>1</sub>*. There is no significant association between teachers' knowledge of anecdotal records and the use as assessment tools in the schools.

*Ho<sub>2</sub>*. There is no significant difference in the use of anecdotal records as tool for assessing pupils/students between Lower and Upper Basic teachers.

## 2. Methodology

The study was a survey design in order to describe teachers' knowledge and the use of anecdotal records in Basic Schools in Ekiti and Oyo States of Nigeria. The population of the study consisted of all teachers of Basic Schools in Ekiti and Oyo states of Nigeria. Participants were 200 teachers selected from 100 public schools in Ekiti and Oyo States using stratified random sampling technique. The strata recognized States (Ekiti=100 participants, Oyo=100

participants) and Level of schools (Lower Basic=100 participants, Upper Basic=100 participants). The instrument for collecting data was a self-constructed questionnaire with items based on knowledge and use of anecdotal records, each item rated dichotomously as Yes or No. Table of specification was employed to draw out the items to ensure content validity. Copies of the instrument were also given to three expert judges who are lecturers of Tests, Measurement and Evaluation in the Faculty of Education, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti to scrutinize and judge the face, content and construct validities of the items. Thus, the use of table of specification and the comments of the judges ensured the validity of the instrument for the purpose of assessing the use of anecdotal records in schools. The reliability of the items of the instrument was established by administering the questionnaire on a group of 50 teachers who were not included in the sample for the study twice at interval of two weeks. The two sets of data gathered were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient method and 0.92 was obtained. The result showed that the instrument is reliable. Copies of the instrument were administered on respondents. For the purpose of analysis, YES response to an item is assigned 1 point, while NO response to an item is assigned 0 point. The data obtained were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, chi square and t-test statistics, tested at 0.05 level of significance.

## 3. Results/Findings

*Question 1:* Do the teachers have the knowledge of anecdotal records for assessing pupils/students in primary and junior secondary sections of the Universal Basic Education Schools?

Data were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages as presented in table 1.

*Table 1. The proportion of the teachers having the knowledge of the anecdotal records as assessment tools.*

Item	Question	Yes	%	No	%	Total	%
1	Do you have the knowledge of the use of anecdotal records for assessing pupils/students	63	31.7	137	68.3	200	100
2	Do you know how to use it to record the occurrence of certain behavior/trait/event of the learners	60	30	140	70	200	100
3	Do you know how to analyse the recorded behaviours/traits	44	22	156	78	200	100
4	Have you used it to assess your pupils/students	56	28	144	72	200	100
5	Do you consider anecdotal record a good assessment technique	97	48.3	103	51.7	200	100

Table 1 showed that 31.7% of the participants had the knowledge of anecdotal records, while 68.3% had no knowledge. The proportion of the respondents that knows how to use anecdotal records to record the behaviors of the learners was 30%, while 70% did not. Only 22% had knowledge of how to analyze the recorded behaviours, while 78% did not. Also, only 28% had ever used anecdotal records to assess their pupils/students while 72% had never

used it. The proportion that considered anecdotal records a good assessment technique was 48.3%, while 51.7% did not consider it as being good. These results show that greater proportion of the teachers do not possess knowledge of anecdotal records for assessing pupils/students in primary and junior secondary sections of UBE programme.

*Question 2:* Do the teachers emphasize or use anecdotal

records as tool for assessing pupils/students in the schools?  
Data were analyzed using frequency counts and

percentages as presented in table 2.

**Table 2.** The proportion of teachers that use anecdotal records for assessing pupils/students in Basic schools.

Item	Question	Yes	%	No	%	Total	%
1	Have you employed anecdotal records to assess cognitive domains of your pupils/ students	40	20	160	80	200	100
2	Have you employed it to assess affective domain	40	20	160	80	200	100
3	Have you use it to assess psychomotor domains of your pupils/students	54	27	143	71.5	197	98.5
4	Do you regularly use anecdotal records	20	10	177	88.5	197	98.5
5	Are there copies of anecdotal records forms in your school	23	11.5	174	87	197	98.5
6	Are the available copies of the anecdotal records sufficient for all the pupils in the school	20	10	157	78.5	177	88.5

Table 2 showed that 20% of the respondents have ever employed anecdotal records to assess cognitive and affective domains of their pupils/students while 80 per cent have not. Only 27% have used anecdotal records to assess psychomotor domains and 71.5% have not used it. The proportion of the respondents that regularly use anecdotal records to assess learners is only 10%, while 88.5% were not using it regularly. The percentage of the respondents that affirmed that Anecdotal records forms are available in the schools was 11.5%. While 10% asserted that the copies of Anecdotal records forms available in the schools are sufficient for all the pupils and 78.5% indicated that there are insufficient anecdotal records forms in the schools. There were 23 (11.5%) respondents who did not respond to the item- meaning that they did not know whether there are copies of the forms in the school or not. The results showed that the majority of the teachers do not employ anecdotal records for the assessment of their pupils/students' progress in the schools.

### 3.1. Hypothesis One

$H_{01}$ . There is no significant association between the teachers' knowledge of anecdotal records and the use as assessment tools in the schools.

Data were analyzed using chi square statistics as presented in table3.

**Table 3.** Chi square comparison of the teachers' knowledge of anecdotal records and the use as assessment tools in the schools.

Variables	Df	$\chi^2_{cal}$	$\chi^2_{tab}$
Trs' knowledge of anecdotal records	1	6.92	3.84
The use of anecdotal records as tools			

$P < 0.05$  (result significant)

Table 3 shows that  $\chi^2$ -calculated was 6.92, while its corresponding table value at 0.05 level of significance was 3.84. Since  $\chi^2_{cal} > \chi^2_{tab}$ , there was significant association between the teachers' Knowledge of anecdotal records and the use as assessment tools in the schools.

### 3.2. Hypothesis Two

$H_{02}$ . There is no significant difference in the use of anecdotal records as tool for assessing pupils/students between lower and upper basic teachers.

Data were analyzed using t-test statistics as presented in table 4.

**Table 4.** t-test comparison between the lower and upper basic teachers' use of anecdotal records as assessment tools.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	$t_{cal}$	$t_{crit}$
Lower Basic	100	11.7	8.97	198	5.33	1.96
Upper Basic	100	41.4	29.2			

$P < 0.05$  (result significant)

Table 4 showed that the mean scores of the Lower and Upper Basic teachers were 11.7 and 41.4 respectively. Also their corresponding standard deviations were 8.97 and 29.2 respectively. The t-calculated value was 5.33, while t-table value was 1.96. Since t-calculated  $>$  t-table at 0.05 level of significance, the hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference in the use of anecdotal records as tool for assessing pupils/ students between the lower and upper basic teachers was not accepted. The results imply that there was significant difference in the use of anecdotal records as tool for assessing the pupils/students between the Lower Basic (primary) and Upper Basic (junior secondary) teachers.

## 4. Discussion

The study revealed that greater proportion of teachers in primary schools and junior secondary schools (which constitute nine years Universal Basic Education (UBE) system) had no knowledge of anecdotal records as tool for assessing their pupils/students. Even though a fair number of the teachers acknowledged anecdotal records a good assessment instrument, the analysis showed that many teachers do not have the knowledge of its use for assessing the learners, do not know how to use it to record the occurrence of behaviours / events / traits of the learners and cannot analyze the recorded events or behaviours. The result can be explained in the line of the assertion of Okpala, Onocha and Oyedeji [5] that observational technique is a specialty in educational evaluation, but the normal methods courses in teachers' preparation programmes do not equip pre-service teachers with skills on observation. If the appropriate training of personnel and appropriate methodology of teaching [14] combined with

appropriate assessment techniques are inadequate (on the part of the teachers), the whole education system will be in shamble. Consequently, the much desired quality may not be achieved. Other explanation for the result is that observation instruments are difficult to construct [15]; there are challenges of validity and reliability to contend with.

The assessment revealed that both the lower basic and upper basic teachers scored low in the use of anecdotal records as assessment tools. The result is worse among the teachers in the lower basic section of the UBE as the occurrence of the use was significantly less than what was obtained in the upper basic section. This is contrary to the expected result because there are more class loads (which militate against time sampling techniques) in secondary level than in primary section. The results implied that most teachers do not usually employ anecdotal records to assess their pupils/students, despite the worth accorded it as a good, potent and effective means of assessing affective and psychomotor domains of learning [8].

The findings corroborated the assertion of Bandele and Omodara [6] that the use of observations as assessment tools is not common in Nigerian schools. The results do not augur well for all round development of the learners since according to various authors the use of observation techniques depict actual behavior in natural situations ([16], [17]). If behaviors of the learners are not assessed in the natural settings over time valid and reliable testimonials, reports and references cannot be written in respect of the learners when required.

The study revealed that many of the teachers who use anecdotal records for the assessment of the pupils/students do not use it regularly/adequately in the schools. Neglecting the use of anecdotal records may cause some areas of pupils' / students' developments to suffer neglect. These areas, according to Okpala, Onocha and Oyedeji [5] include: social adjustment of the child, personal and social development, identifying unintended learning outcomes, identifying difficulties with students' experience in learning projects and learning activities, identifying interest and work habits to mention but a few. The observation of some *vita* behaviours may not be captured.

Anecdotal records are very useful in the assessment of some areas of school curriculum which examination system cannot effectively evaluate. Dines [18] enumerated these areas to include: practical work in science, oral work in languages, and field work in geography or history to mention but a few. These parts of the school curriculum are liable to suffer neglect where other assessment tools such as anecdotal records are not used to compliment examination system of assessment.

Furthermore, the study revealed that there existed significant association between the teachers' knowledge of anecdotal records and the use for the assessment of the learners in the basic schools. This is in line with the assertion which said that knowledge does not exist apart from application. Mc Gourty, Bester field-Sacre and Shuman [19] opined that knowledge must not only be

acquired but must also be applied in relevant situations. Knowledge and application are tightly coupled. If all the teachers had gotten the knowledge of anecdotal records, they would have been employing it to assess their students.

It was revealed that there was significant difference in the use of anecdotal records as assessment tools between lower and upper basic teachers of the Universal Basic Education system. Although the scores of the teachers of UBE programme on the use of anecdotal records is low, a few number of the upper basic teachers acknowledged that they have the knowledge of the use of anecdotal records and that they regularly use it to assess their students. While all the lower basic teachers scored very low, indicating that they have shallow knowledge of the use of the tool and hence, rarely use it to assess their pupils. These results account for the observed low validity, reliability and usability of the certificates, testimonials, reports and references issued to learners as at when required. It can also be asserted that teachers of the basic schools were not given adequate knowledge in the areas of the assessment of their pupils/students while in training.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the analyses of the data and the interpretation of the results the following conclusions were drawn for the study. The study revealed that greater number of basic teachers do not possess the knowledge and hence do not use anecdotal records to assess the learners. Anecdotal records are not commonly employed to assess the learners. There was significant association between the teachers' knowledge of anecdotal records and the use as assessment tools. There was significant difference in the use of anecdotal records as assessment tool between the primary (lower basic) and the junior secondary (upper basic) teachers of the UBE programme with lower basic teachers fewer. These results might have accounted for the observed low validity, reliability and usability of the certificates, testimonials, reports and references issue to the learners at various stages of the UBE programme.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations were made:

The teachers of UBE programme, particularly the primary section, should be sensitized on the importance of anecdotal records as effective tool for assessing learners' progress in the schools.

The concept of observation as assessment techniques should be incorporated into the curriculum of teachers' preparation programme so as to expose pre-service teachers to the use of observation in assessing the learners.

Seminars, lectures and workshops should regularly be organized for the in-service teachers on the use of anecdotal records and other observation techniques so as to update their knowledge in the areas of the assessment of

their pupils/students.

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