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Instructional and Assessment Techniques Employed by Teachers of Life Skills Education in Secondary Schools in Eldoret East District, Kenya

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Abstract:

Instructional methods are defined as modes of delivery systems or teaching and learning methods employed in an educational process with the view of facilitating the attainment of the set goals or objectives. Some of the instructional methods used in teaching life skills include: discussion, problem solving, role playing, life approach, group work, question and answer and use of resource persons. The study that informed the writing of this paper sought to establish the type of instructional and assessment methods that are used by teachers of life skills education in Eldoret East District in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The techniques used to select the research sample were stratified, purposive and simple random sampling. Samples of 240 students, 45 teachers and 15 heads of humanities department were selected to participate in the study. To collect data, questionnaire and interview schedule were used. Data collected were coded and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSSv 13.5) and analysed by non-parametric Chi-square (χ^2) test, descriptive statistics and frequency distribution. The findings were presented in form of tables, charts and graphs. The study revealed that teachers of LSE used teacher-centred instructional techniques that did not arouse students' interest in the subject. Assessment was done using oral and written exercises. In the light of the above findings, it is recommended that teachers of LSE should emphasize on student-centred techniques of instruction which are more interactive and which arouse students' interest. The teachers should employ evaluation techniques that elicit immediate feedback based on Bloom's taxonomy.

Keywords: instructional, assessment techniques, teachers, life skills education, secondary schools, Kenya

1. Introduction

Education is increasingly being seen not just as a means of providing learners with literacy and numeracy skills, but also as a means of empowering people to live a holistic life. It is not enough, therefore, merely to get all children into schools and ensure that they complete their education. Young people need to graduate from school empowered with life skills to enable them take charge of their own lives in a world beset by many challenges. Life skills go beyond the mere provision of knowledge and information. It provides the skills that will help young people to overcome obstacles avoid risky situations and develop and sustain positive behaviour throughout their life time (Gachuhi, 1999).

1.1. Instructional and Assessment Methods

Instructional methods are defined as modes of delivery systems or teaching and learning methods employed in an educational process with the view of facilitating the attainment of the set goals or objectives. Kochar (1990) explains that the best curriculum and the most perfect syllabus remain dead unless quickened into life by the right methods of teaching and the right kind of teachers. Some of the instructional methods used in teaching life skills include: discussion, problem solving, role playing, life approach, group work, question and answer and use of resource persons. The teacher chooses the instructional method to be used when teaching different topics.

The importance of a good teaching method is summed up by Kochar (1990) in characteristics of a good teaching method, paraphrased; a good teaching method should produce certain changes in terms of knowledge, understanding and habits of students. It should also arouse interests in students rather than passing on facts and figures. It should shift emphasis from verbalism and memorization to learning through purposeful concrete and realistic situations (Kochar, 1990). A life skills teacher should be conversant with different instructional methods. This is because as Rungu (2009) says, "No model of teaching is designed to accomplish all types of learning or to work for all learning styles". This means that no single method of teaching is the best for all situations and with all teacher and pupils. She adds that the method the teacher adopts should emerge out of the abundance of information and skill of the teacher.

From the above information, one realizes that instructional methods are necessary for effective teaching of life skills education. Prinsloo (2007) and Rooth (2005) highlight the following as some of the methods of teaching life skills: class discussion, problem solving and role play and life approach. They say that these methods are appropriate because they:

- Made learning become student centred while the teacher acts as a facilitator.
- Enabled learners to develop action plan to improve their attitude and skills.
- Encouraged reflection on the knowledge of a subject.
- Helped embed concepts and deeper knowledge of a subject.

Teachers of life skills should be familiar with different methods of teaching and use them for effective teaching. Students have to be exposed to a variety of learning experiences for comprehensive objectives of teaching life skills to be realized. Prinsloo (2007) and Rooth (2005) conclude that the life skills teachers did relatively well for recall of information but were unable to teach higher order skills. They also observe that life skills teachers in secondary schools in South Africa rely on rote memorization as their major teaching method. In Kenya, studies have produced similar results; there seems to be a situation where life skills education teachers are glued to only one method of teaching; lecturing and giving notes.

Mondo (2006) has examined problems relating to the teaching of life skills in primary school in Kenya and found that life skills was perceived by learners to be dull, boring and uninteresting. Upon further investigation, it was found that the attitude of students had come up due to the poor quality of the teacher's inappropriate teaching techniques and inadequate use of varied learning materials. This paper focuses on the materials and methods of teaching life skills education in the secondary schools. Other studies that have been undertaken mainly in the teaching of life skills in schools are those by Rungu (2009), Ngugi (2006), Korir (2008) and Otieno (2009). Their findings attested to the fact that there still exists a gap in the information concerning teaching methods and use of available materials in life skills in schools. This paper attempts to bridge this gap by examining instructional methods used in teaching and evaluating life skills in secondary schools in Kenya.

Teachers use a variety of teaching approaches and techniques in their daily practice. According to Borich (2000), learning has to do with the individual for whom the instructional activities are designed. Borich (2000) states that when a teacher goes to the classroom to teach, there are various things that he/she has to bear in mind: among them, the learners age, what the learner knows prior to instruction, the goals that instruction aims at accomplishing, and the relevant stimuli to expose to the learner, in order to achieve his/her goal. For Borich, learning will take place, if the learners' condition after being exposed to the stimuli shows that he/she has acquired more knowledge. Standa (1980) asserts that the teachers' role is to gain control of the external environment of the learner in order to produce change in the learners' internal conditions, in other words, to stimulate learning to occur.

In order to attain this, teachers need to employ a variety of student-centred instructional methods. While such teaching methods such as class practical (demonstration), discussion and fieldwork are more student-centred; others like the lecture method involve less pupil participation. A Chinese proverb by the educationist, Confucius, gives support to the value of student-centred learning as: "When I hear, I forget when I see I remember and when I do, I understand" (Wadsworth, as cited in Koross, 2009). This indicates that what the student sees and does lasts more than what they hear.

The Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC, 2008) report asserts that teachers should combine both the discovery method and didactic exposition when teaching. The report suggests sometimes using one and sometimes the other, taking the best of both. This advice is based on the successful experience of 'skilful' teachers who have realized that shortage of time does not allow children to discover everything but have also known that most children do not learn to think scientifically or with understanding unless they plan to carry out some investigation experiments themselves. Using both approaches ensures that the pupils are introduced to all the materials relevant to the syllabus while also developing the other skills and abilities associated with both theory and practical work (KNEC, 2008).

Rice (2003) asserts that "... a teacher would have to combine such methods as lecture and demonstration with class practical, discussion and field trips". The choice of the methods would vary from one teaching situation to another depending on teaching facilities and teacher competency in the topic at hand. Wayne and Young (2003) have also studied teaching methods as influencing factors that affect students' achievement. They report that allowing students to be involved in practical activities, giving assignments and less teacher talk are considered as evidence of modern teaching methods.

Generally, it appears that there are a lot of good intentions with the implementation of life skills as set forth in the National Curriculum statement and by other authors (Ngwena, 2003). Ngwena points out the teacher's presentation, his/her constructive criticism of the learner and his/her use of various teaching techniques was consistently related to the students' achievement.

The disturbing level of anti-social behaviours displayed by children and adolescents has always been associated with poor methods of instruction. For example, Christian (2005) states that anti-social behaviour such as drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, sexual abuse are on the increase owing to poor methods of instruction used in secondary schools. Similar sentiments have been echoed by Rooth (2005), that most teachers of life skills dwell on old training methods of teaching due to their inability to adapt research findings on teaching. He asserts that unless teachers were helped to adopt modern teaching trends towards risk behaviours, anti-social behaviour would persist.

The World Health Organization (2000) recommends that life skills should be taught using an interactive, problem-solving approach that arranges activities in a series of steps. First, the students identify the problem, and then they brainstorm all possible solutions. They then examine the advantages and disadvantages of each solution, and the best solution is agreed upon. Students then devise plans for carrying out selected solutions. Based on these fundamental problem-solving and negotiation skills, more specific abilities can be developed, such as ability to manage peer pressure or media influence. Rooth (2005) has interviewed a number of students in South Africa, who claimed that the teaching of life skills was done poorly. Some complained that hardly any teaching was taking place, while others said that the teacher was boring. This confirms that there is a problem regarding the teaching of life skills.

The National Curriculum Statement Department of Education (2003) clearly envisions a learner who will acquire actual skills, attitudes, knowledge and values in life skills to be able to develop his or her full potential in a holistic manner also with the aim of making 'good' decisions regarding his or her own health environment. The ideals concerning the envisaged learners as described in the National Curriculum statement appear divorced from the type of learners that actually emerged from the results of the research conducted by Rooth (2005).

Life skills education has been defined as an interactive process of teaching and learning, which enables the learners to acquire knowledge aimed at enabling them to develop attitudes and skills that support adoption of healthy behaviour (Ministry of Education, 2004). Korir (2008) describes life skills as programmes aimed at fostering positive behaviours across a range of psychosocial and changing behaviours at a larger stage of life. Korir suggests that a skill such as creative thinking should be developed to foster positive behaviour. He also notes that such skills are best learned through experiential activities which are learner centred and designed to help young people gain information, examine attitudes and practice skills. However, Korir (2008) does not explain how creative skill can be developed. As such, this paper seeks to highlight the importance of employing problem solving method in developing creative thinking skill. By using problem solving technique, the teacher will instil the skill in learners by giving them challenging situations which requires them to solve.

Rooth (2005) asserts that challenges are difficult situations or problems that one encounters in life. He lists some of the life challenges learners face as:

- Peer pressure
- Fear of failure
- Family problem
- Pressure to perform well academically.

The skill of coping with challenges refers to the skill that enables one to deal with challenges in a positive way. Rooth (2005) recommends that learners be equipped with this skill. This is because, if the learner is able to deal with the challenges positively and in good time, then he or she is able to concentrate in class and on other matters. It also ensures the learner does not suffer stress due to inability to overcome the challenges. However, although Rooth (2005) in his study touches on coping with challenges as a skill which learners should be equipped with, he does not mention nor does he explain the technique to be employed by teachers to achieve the skill. This paper goes further to suggest life approach as an enabling technique to achieve coping with challenges skill. By using life approach technique, the teacher will encourage open communication among learners and with the learners. The approach also encourages learners to build up their confidence and to practice assertive responses.

Prinsloo (2007) states that a student can avoid engaging in anti-social behaviour by being assertive. Assertiveness is the ability to express one's opinion, feelings, desires and opinions in a firm but respectful manner. It is about standing up for one's rights, values and beliefs without violating those of others or being offensive. Prinsloo, however, does not explain how this skill can be achieved. This paper looks at discussions as a technique which can be employed by teachers to achieve the skill. This skill can be developed in learners by the teacher engaging in open discussion with the learners and respecting individual opinion.

Ngugi (2006) advices learners to analyse, evaluate issues and ideas from various angles in an objective manner. This will require critical thinking skill. Ngugi, however, like other authors, does not explain how this skill could be developed to enhance positive thinking in learners. This paper proposes questioning issues as the technique which can develop critical thinking skills. The skill involves testing options by asking various questions whose answers will inform the final decision that one make (Kenya Institute of Education [KIE], 2008).

According to Reddy (2010), life skills cannot solely be blamed for the fact that many young people today do not conform to this ideal. This does not only raise questions about life skills education but more specifically the competence of teachers in their class delivery. The sentiments expressed by the above investigators on teaching methods are vital. However, the study that formed the basis for this paper went further to investigate the use of various interactive, problem solving and participatory technique by teachers of life skills education. The researcher also used these techniques as a means of determining teacher effectiveness in teaching life skills. Such methods present learners with scenarios that demand individual analysis and problem solving, fosters small group discussions and sharing thoughts, opinions and experiences with the whole class and the teacher (KIE, 2008).

More so, assessment is a crucial aspect to the learners learning and the teachers' teaching in that it enables the teacher to assess the set objectives and enables learners to attain the objectives. Assessment is done for accountability purposes. It can be done in form of continuous assessment tests, quizzes or internal and external exams including national examinations.

Monteque (2008) points out that assessments are used for a variety of reasons ranging from educational ones like measuring the students' attainment at the end of course to societal roles like the maintenance of educational standards. The teaching process is incomplete without thoughts and plans on how assessment will be done. Some of the guidelines proposed by Monteque that could help the teacher come up with effective assessments are:

- Planning ways of providing regular meaningful feedback to students.
- Preparing a detailed statement of assessment procedures for example timing, type of assessment, criteria for assessment, marking scheme and relating of assessment to objectives.
- Considering how the teaching and assessment approaches might affect students learning approaches and outcomes.
- The teacher should try to plan assessment times that will allow students to show their understanding of the subject, rather than how many facts they can remember.
- Considering using peer or self assessment processes to encourage students to become critical of their own work.
- Considering students overall workload.

 Considering the approaches students might take to the proposed assessment tasks. Does the assessment encourage students to understand, extend the learning or relate the subject to real world situation?

According to Nolan and Hoover (2005), assessment results can be used to guide professional development plans and improve teacher practice. Using assessment results to inform professional development empowers teachers to self-direct their growth and encourages learning embedded in daily classroom practice.

Research indicates that when certain instructional strategies are implemented appropriately, they can increase student achievement. Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) add that teachers also have consistently reported the desire for feedback on how well or poorly they are implementing instructional strategies and delivering critical content. As such, it seems logical to assume that teacher assessment results can provide teachers with the first step towards improving their instructional practices. Once communicated, the assessment results should drive the individualized professional development opportunities that are made available to each teacher.

The study focused on the teaching and learning of life skills education. Thus there was need to establish through research and find out if the methods of instruction and assessment are a challenge to the learning and teaching of life skills at secondary school level in Kenya.

2. Materials and Methods

The study area covered secondary schools in Eldoret East District. It is located in the North Rift Region of the greater Rift Valley Province of Kenya. Marakwet District borders Eldoret East District to the north, Keiyo District to the east, Koibatek District to the south and Wareng District to the west. The District is divided into twenty locations. It lies along the latitude 0^040^0 north and longitude 45^0 02` east at an altitude of 3,075 metres above sea level.

A pragmatic philosophical stance informed the current study on the factors affecting the teaching and learning of life skills education. On this platform, the focus is on the research problem and finding practical solutions to it. The study therefore adopted a mixed methods approach using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The study also employed a descriptive survey research design.

The target population comprised secondary schools in Eldoret East District. According to the Ministry of Education data bank, there are forty-five schools in the District. The target population for the study consisted of all the 45 heads of department, 135 teachers in the District who teach life skills and 800 Form Four students from the 45 public secondary schools in Eldoret East District. The Form Four students were chosen to participate because they had been taught life skills since Form One. Therefore, they were best placed to comment on the entire instruction process. The target population comprised 980 respondents drawn from 45 secondary schools in Eldoret East District.

The sampling techniques used for the study were stratified random sampling technique, purposive sampling technique and simple random technique. Schools were selected using stratified random sampling technique. The basis of stratification was school type (boys, girls and mixed schools). Forty-five (45) of the target secondary schools were sampled for the study. Therefore, 15 schools formed the sample for this study. The study purposively sampled fifteen (15) heads of humanities department from the fifteen sampled schools. Simple random sampling was used to select 3 teachers in each of the selected schools to fill in the questionnaire, making a total of forty five (45) teachers of LSE. While simple random sampling technique was used to select sixteen (16) students in each of the sample schools to fill in the questionnaires. A total of two hundred and forty (240) students from the selected schools participated in the study.

The instruments used to collect data were the questionnaires and interview schedule. The questionnaires were the most convenient tool for collecting data because they are easier to administer because each item was followed by alternative answers. They are also easier to analyse since they are in an immediate useable form and finally, they are economical to use in terms of time and money. After data collection, responses from all items were cross-checked to facilitate coding and processing for analysis using statistical Programme for Social Sciences (SPSS v.13.5) computer package. Statistical analyses of data were done by inferential statistic (Chi-square) (χ^2) test, descriptive statistics employing the measures of central tendencies, frequency distributions and cross tabulations. The research yielded both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data was analysed using content analysis based on analysis of meanings and implications emanating from respondents information.

3. Results

3.1. Instructional Methods employed by teachers of LSE

The research sought to find out the instructional methods used by teachers who teach life skills. To determine this, the teachers were asked to fill in the questionnaire on how often they used the methods. Their responses were as shown in Table 1 below.

Instructional method	Number and percentage									
	Very often		Often		Rarely		Never		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Role-play	3	7	3	7	15	33	24	53	45	100
Dramatization	3	7	5	11	17	38	20	44	45	100
Life approach	7	16	8	18	10	22	20	44	45	100
Discussion	4	9	8	18	8	18	25	55	45	100
Lecture	40	89	5	11	0	0	0	0	45	100

Story-telling	40	89	5	11	00	0	0	0	45	100
Question and answer	8	18	9	20	10	22	18	40	45	100
Problem solving	5	11	5	11	30	67	5	11	45	100

Table 1: Teachers' responses on Instructional Techniques

The findings indicate that a high percentage of teachers employed lecture and story-telling instructional techniques. These instructional techniques are teacher-centred. Hence the idea that teacher is the knower of all is characteristic of the traditional learning environment, which has proven to impede learning. In teaching life skills, therefore, students should be allowed to give their experiences and possible solutions to various challenges they encounter. This concurs with the findings of Rungu (2009) who noted that life skills should be taught through interactive and problem solving techniques. Rooth (2005) adds that, any exercise that stimulates the student to participate is an interactive approach. Such activities include role-play, drama, life approach and problem solving, discussion, question and answer method. These activities help to generate ideas, encourage free flow of thought and help students discover various challenges and how to overcome them.

Variables N=45	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Role play	1.800	1	0.011
Dramatization	3.756	1	.025
Life approach	3.625	1	.015
Lecture	5.000	1	.212
Problem solving	3.234	1	.012
Story telling	5.234	1	.232
Question and answer method	2.567	1	.013
Discussion	3.623	1	.014

Table 2: Chi-square test on Instructional Method

Table 1 shows that 3(7%) of the teachers used role-play very often while 24(53%) of the teachers stated that they did not use it. From Table 2, it is observed that the calculated Chi-square value is 1.800, while the critical value is 3.841. Since the calculated value was less than the critical value, it was concluded that majority of the teachers do not use role play as an instructional method.

As it is shown on Table 2, the calculated Chi-square value on dramatization is 3.756 while the critical value is 3.841. Since the calculated value was less than the critical value, it was therefore established that few teachers regularly used dramatization.

From Table 1, 7(16%) of teachers regularly used the life approach while 20(44%) of the teachers stated that they never use life approach method. As shown in Table 2, when this variable was subjected to Chi-square test, the calculated value was 3.625 which is less than the tabled value at 5% significance level. The study, therefore, concluded that teachers do not use life approach as an instructional method.

From Table 2, it is observed that the calculated Chi-square value for lecture method was 5.000 which is greater than the table value at 5% significance level. The research thus concluded that majority of the teachers used story-telling regularly than other methods of teaching.

As shown on Table 2, the χ^2 calculated for question and answer method was 2.567, while the critical value was 3.841. Since the calculated value was less than the critical value, it was concluded that teachers do not use question and answer method regularly. From Table 2, it is observed that the calculated Chi-square for discussion method was 3.623 while the critical value was 3.841 at 5% significance level. The study therefore concluded that teachers rarely used discussion method.

3.2. Assessment Techniques Employed by Teachers in Evaluating Students

The research further sought to find out the assessment techniques employed by the teachers in evaluating students. To determine this, the teachers were asked to fill in the questionnaire on how often they used the identified techniques to assess the students. The results were as shown on Table 3 below.

Assessment Techniques	Number and percentages of respondents						
	Often used	Rarely used	Never used	Total			
	No(%)	No(%)	No(%)	No(%)			
Continuous Assessment Tests (CATs)	30(67)	15(33)	00(0)	45(100)			
Examinations	34(76)	11(24)	00(0)	45(100)			
Assignments	35(78)	10(22)	00(0)	45(100)			
Oral exercises	40(89)	5(11)	00(0)	45(100)			
Written	40(89)	5(11)	00(0)	45(100)			
Presentations	30(67)	10(22)	5(11)	45(100)			

Table 3: Responses from Teachers on the Assessment Methods

The findings of the study indicate that oral and written exercises were more often used by teachers to assess life skills education. Teachers indicated the reason for preferring the techniques was that, they are student-centred and they give instant feedback. According to Monteque (2008), the advantage of immediate feedback is that the task is still fresh in students' minds making it possible to have useful discussions. It also allows the teacher to take advantage of the students' interest before it dies off.

4. Discussion

4.1. Instructional Techniques

First the study established that a high percentage of the teachers used lecture and story-telling methods of instruction. The study also revealed that the respondents rarely used life approach, problem solving, discussion, drama, role-play, and question and answer method. Wayne and Young (2003) hold that teacher-centred methods do not enable learners to retain more information. Participation of learners in the learning process creates interest and motivation, thus leading them into more learning. It is important, therefore, for life skills education teachers to utilize methods and activities that appeal to learners' senses and enhance high retention of what is learnt. To motivate learners, teachers also need to vary their teaching methods, ranging from discussion to debate, drama, use of resource persons to watching and listening to audio visual tapes on life skills education. This would sustain students' interest in the learning process (Rice, 2003).

Other investigators, including Ngugi (2006), Kochar (1990), Rungu (2009) and Rooth (2005), have similarly mentioned the importance of interactive, participatory methods in the teaching of life skills. The importance of a good teaching method is summed up by Kochar (1990) in characteristic of a good teaching method; a good teaching method would produce certain changes in terms of knowledge, understanding and habits of students. It should also arouse interests in students rather than passing on facts and figures. It should shift emphasis from verbalism and memorization to learning through purposeful concrete and realistic situations.

A life skill teacher should be conversant with different interactive methods in order to cover the life skills syllabus properly. This concurs with the findings of Standa (1980) who asserts that the teachers' role is to gain control of the external environment of the learner in order to produce change in the learner's internal conditions, in other words, to stimulate learning to occur. It is against this background that the study proposes the use of participatory, interactive methods like life approach, problem solving, discussion, question and answer methods in the teaching of life skills. Majority of the heads of department who were interviewed supported the view that lecture and story-telling methods were the most preferred methods of teaching life skills education. These are teacher-centred methods and deny students chance to participate (Rooth, 2005).

4.2. Assessment Methods

Education is like any other investment project that requires stock-taking at the end of a given time. Stock-taking is vital in education and can only be achieved with the administration of standardized examinations, which reflect a real picture of what is learned. The study identified six main assessment techniques that were employed by teachers of life skills. However, these techniques were employed in varying frequencies. These results revealed that most teachers used oral and written exercises. The highest number of the heads of department interviewed also agreed that teachers use oral and written exercises more than other assessment methods. Written exercises are useful for examining the application of knowledge and skills. It also allows freedom of response, creativity and improves writing skills and logical organization of thought (Nolan & Hoover, 2005).

Oral exercises provide immediate feedback. According to Monteque (2008), the advantage of immediate feedback is that the task is still fresh in the students mind making it possible to have a useful discussion. It allows the teacher to take advantage of the students' interest before it dies off. Marzano, Pickering and Pollock (2001) add that teachers also have consistently reported the desire for immediate feedback on how well or poorly they are implementing instructional strategies and delivering critical content. Few investigations have linked oral exercises to the teaching and learning of life skills. By using oral exercises, a teacher is able to get immediate feedback. This would enable the teacher to help students with problems, making comments that can encourage a student to avoid anti-social behaviour or suggest what the students would do to overcome the challenges they encounter in school and in the society (Prinsloo, 2007).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

From the findings of the study, it was noted that most teachers use lecture and story-telling techniques in teaching life skills. These are expository techniques which pass on facts and figures instead of arousing student's interest. On the assessment methods used to evaluate the students, the results revealed that most teachers used oral and written exercises quite often than other methods of assessment.

From the findings of the study and the conclusions drawn above, it is recommended that teachers of LSE should emphasize on student-centred techniques of instruction which are more interactive, participatory and problem solving. These will create activities for students during their lessons, arouse students' interest in LSE and therefore positively influence their attitude towards the teaching and learning of LSE. Teachers should strive to use more interactive learning methods such as life approach; problem solving and role play among others to develop the skills.

In addition, teachers of LSE should employ evaluation techniques that elicit immediate feedback from students and those which can enable the teacher to gauge the level of students' comprehension of the subject content. Besides, teachers should adhere to Bloom's taxonomy in their choice of students' assessment techniques to ensure that all aspects of the subject content are adequately covered.

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