

Assessment in Geography

Assessment has always been a vital part of teaching and learning and serves several purposes including:

- **Formative** so that a student's achievement can be recognised and so further steps planned
- **Diagnostic** through which learning difficulties can be identified and appropriate measures can be taken
- **Summative** through recording students' achievement in a systematic way
- **Evaluative** in enabling the school's work to be assessed.

However, we would all accept that the 'educational' purpose of assessment is to give feedback to students to help them progress in their learning. Formative assessment or **Assessment for Learning** in contrast to assessment of learning is concerned with helping teachers and students monitor and make judgments about their progress identifying the next small steps necessary for improvement. In other words assessment for learning helps both parties (students and teachers) realize what has been learned, what problems there are in the current learning process and which areas of study may need further work. It is something that should be on-going in order to provide feedback to teachers and their students to make the necessary changes in their teaching and learning activities to promote improvement thus making learning more effective. By introducing Assessment for Learning strategies, teachers can help students to critically analyse the quality of their work and how this can be improved. In this way assessment is used to raise attainment levels widening opportunities for learning rather than to grade the levels of students' attainments.

In everyday geography lessons, assessment for learning can be implemented through a number of tried and tested practices namely;

- expected learning outcomes and goals shared and discussed at the beginning of each lesson
- teachers share the learning requirements with their students helping them know and recognise the standards they are aiming for and what success looks like
- provide opportunities for self- and peer assessment
- improved feedback, focused on the value of what has been achieved
- improved feedback so that the students know what should be done next for improvement
- a collaborative approach to learning with a strong emphasis on analysis, discussion and reflection
- an atmosphere that ensures students do not feel bad if they make a mistake.

Assessment Strategies

Assessment in geography must assess the student's understanding and application of the main geographical concepts and knowledge, the acquisition of basic geographical skills and the development of attitudes and values contributing to sustainable development. A range of assessment techniques will be necessary and all of these approaches should arise as naturally as possible for students to perform to their true ability.

Much of the most valuable information about students' achievements comes from day-to-day observations, especially through effective questioning and discussions as the students work. Such information is necessary to make judgments of what they know, what are their strengths, weaknesses and misconceptions; thus adjusting the pace and choosing the most

appropriate teaching strategies to reach the learning objectives. This can be achieved through observation and listening to students as they work; the responses the students make to questions set; participation of the student in class discussions; marking and providing quality feedback to student's work; reflecting on and critically evaluating their own work as well as through the involvement of students in peer assessment processes.

Valuable information about students' attainment can also be observed and assessed while students are engaged in a range of classroom situations. These activities may include: collecting information from primary and secondary sources; direct observation in the field; predicting outcomes after conducting simple experiments; recognizing patterns; completing work cards or handouts; oral presentations; written work or class tests; drawing and analyzing maps; using and interpreting graphs; collecting information from electronic media; carrying out independently geographical research and recording and presenting results in project work. The use of a range of tasks incorporating different levels of difficulty and in diverse modes will enable the teacher to assess more accurately the level of geographical understanding of students with different aptitudes and abilities.

These types of formative assessment procedures give teachers the most valuable information about students' attainments and have the most impact on their progress. However, summative assessments such as half-yearly exams produced by schools and colleges and yearly examinations set by the Education Assessment Unit should not be used simply to rank students' performance or perhaps to inform parents about students' attainment. Such examinations can also have a formative element by encouraging students to reflect on their performance, and at the same time helping teachers evaluate the success of their teaching and setting targets for improvements.

Students' progress can be documented and assessed through the collection of a range of samples of their work in geography portfolios. It may contain a small sample of evidence which exemplifies student's efforts and may include map work, photographs of models constructed, write ups and images of places visited, record sheets from experiments, together with student's written work in the form of handouts or research work from secondary sources such as the internet. Although portfolios are particularly suited to the assessment of geography there is still no statutory requirement for schools to produce portfolios of any kind.

Assessment Strategies and Practices	
Classroom Observation	<p>Effective Questioning</p> <p>Whole class discussion</p> <p>Interaction of students in group work</p>
Feedback by marking	<p>Prompt and regular constructive feedback/comments to students providing suggestions about the ways students can improve their work.</p>
Objective Tests	<p>Completion tests, true/false questions, matching questions, multiple choice questions, cloze (fill in the blanks) questions.</p>
Extended Writing	<p>Short questions and essay questions</p> <p>Research based essays</p>
Structured Questions	<p>Data response questions – the student has a clear idea of what is required of him/her. In such questions, stimulus material, providing information to the student has to be analysed and interpreted. It is advisable to incorporate a wide range of pictorial and graphical material in such questions.</p>
Enquiring	<p>Using primary sources – usually involving simple experiments and fieldwork activities.</p> <p>Using secondary sources – a teacher planned enquiry-based exercise.</p>
Oral assessment	<p>Presentation: student prepares and delivers a verbal report to an audience.</p> <p>Discussion work: students interact within a group</p>
Self assessment	<p>Involving students in critically analyzing their own work, reflecting on their learning process, in particular the difficulties encountered, outcomes reached and the identification of targets in need of further development.</p>
Peer assessment	<p>Peer assessment enables students to give each other valuable feedback so they learn from and support each other. It promotes independent learning, helping students to take increasing responsibility for their own progress.</p>
Success Criteria	<p>Giving students goalposts to aim at is clearly important and extremely useful. Progress is very often accelerated when students are provided with clear success criteria for the intended outcomes.</p>

