

A Comparative Analysis of Assessment Practices in Burkina Faso and Japanese Primary Schools

Fernand KOUNIKORGO*, Kazuyuki TAMURA**

*Global Education Course, Graduate School, Naruto University of Education

**Basic Human Science for Integrated Study Course, Graduate School, Naruto University of Education

Abstract

Burkina Faso has implemented many educational reforms until today, but the quality of learning remains as a challenge. Research suggests that methods of assessing students are one of the most significant influences on their learning. Therefore, our study focuses on continuous assessment and analyze the issue of low performance, from the perspective of assessment policies and practices in Burkina Faso primary schools.

Since the Japanese education system ranks among the best in the world, the study compares the assessment systems in both countries and highlights differences and similarities and suggests that there is much for Burkina Faso to learn from Japan.

This paper aims at investigating policies and practices of classroom assessment and identifying related issues in Burkina Faso by presenting and discussing the result of literature reviews conducted in both countries.

Keywords: Continuous Assessment, Evaluative Practices, Educational Reforms, Students' Performance

1. Introduction

Improving the level of learning achieved in the school system is an important national priority. The Ministry of National Education, Literacy and Promotion of National Languages (MENAPLN) in Burkina Faso has been conducting reforms for years in pursuit of this goal. In accordance with this ambition of quality, the Education Orientation Law adopted in 2007 proposed a revision of the curricula as well as the adoption of a new teaching method called Integrative Pedagogical Approach (API), which combines Objective-Based Pedagogy and the Competency-Based Approach (Burkina Faso

Assemblée Nationale, 2007). One feature of this teaching method is that it relies on constructivist and socio-constructivist theories, with a clear emphasis on the learner. Therefore, this choice of learner-centeredness gives an important place to formative assessment. As a consequence, teachers in Burkina Faso are now required to practice assessment that respects the orientations of the new curriculum, stipulated as follows (COC)¹:

- Appreciate the result as much as the approach, the knowledge as much as the attitudes, and the process as much as the product.
- Combine the monitoring of progress with the final

¹ COC means in French "Cadre d'Orientation du Curriculum". It is the document of reference issued by the Ministry of Education along with the curriculum reform process in Burkina Faso.

judgment.

- Evaluate in authentic situations, using concrete situations that make sense for the learner.
- Integrate evaluation into learning.

The issue of evaluation is of great interest because in the context of the reform of the education system in Burkina Faso, it was identified as one of the most critical areas for improvement. Furthermore, and in a broader sense, assessment, which takes nowadays the form of explicit support for learning rather than punishment, offers possibilities for improving and correcting learning processes, according to several experts (Allal & Mortier Lopez, 2005; Black & William, 2006; Cizek, 2010; Scallon, 2000, 2004). Then, the topic of assessment of learning takes on its full importance in the current context where reforms are being implemented in several countries including Burkina Faso, in an effort to improve academic performance.

This relevance about assessment, especially classroom assessment, is highlighted by Stiggins (1991) who suggests that a great attention should be paid to the improvement of classroom assessment for maximizing student's achievement. In fact, there is a wide consensus in the literature on this issue, implying that the methods used to assess students are some of the most critical of all influences on their learning (e.g., Makia, 2008; Shihab, 2011).

However, there are still some arguments whether we can claim that all assessment practices lead to an improvement in learning as well as whether teachers' practices of evaluation might contradict with the principles contained in the official directives.

These arguments obviously call for a closer look at teachers' current assessment practices, as curriculum, instruction and assessment are the three fundamental components of education. Milton & George (2010) who refers to them as the "three legs of the classroom stool," warns teachers that each leg must be equally strong in order for the "stool" to function properly, balanced, and supportive. However, curriculum and instruction usually weigh heavier on an instructor's mind than assessment.

As a result, it is frequently the case, according to Milton & George, that the assessment leg of the classroom stool is the weakest, the least understood and the least effectively implemented of the three legs.

On this issue of assessment, Forgette-Giroux et al. (1996), agreed with Crooks (1988) and Wiggins (1993) that while the way we teach has greatly changed, evaluation still often involves rituals that are not consistent with the pedagogy used in current curricula. In the light of these authors' warnings, it appears necessary to examine the assessment practices of primary school teachers to identify possible weaknesses and suggest improvements in Burkina Faso.

In this study, to find out some benchmarks for resolving the issues, we will study Japanese system since the country's education system has also undergone tremendous reforms in its history. Indeed, with its long tradition as a country of "knowledge" since the Edo era (1603-1868) and the Meiji restoration (1871), combined with the influences of the Western countries, particularly the United States, after World War II, the Japanese education system continues to fascinate researchers around the world (Tanaka, 2016). Therefore, it is evident that Burkina Faso has much to learn from Japan.

This paper aims to identify the strengths and weaknesses of assessment policies and practices in Burkina Faso and Japan, and to summarize the implications of such practices on students' performance.

2. Educational Assessment: A Brief Review of its Origins

One of the most efficient ways to investigate a field such as educational assessment is to review the history of its development. As Ebel (1972, p.3) argued, the methods we use today were certainly developed in the past. So, no need to mention that we will better understand their functions and limitations, if we know how they were devised. Tracing the history of educational assessment is however challenging due to the diversity of the sources. According to Brink (2011), the history of assessment of students began when the doors of schools were first opened. This implies that teachers have always evaluated their students. McArthur (1987) evokes a tradition of oral examinations slowly built up over several centuries. Though the evidence is ambiguous, he indicated that the earliest written exam may have been in place around 1510.

Other references in the literature support the same idea. Indeed, Elman (2000) revealed that the

earliest records of assessment date back to medieval era and they were administered orally or by simple observation. He shows that first written assessments occurred in China in 2357 B.C., through the Civil Service Exam introduced by Emperor Shun. Based on the Chinese model, written assessments were introduced in the British Empire and the United States in the nineteenth century.

But it was during the twentieth century that modern approaches to learning assessment began to appear with publications such as those of Thorndike (1969) and Binet & Simon (1905).

During the period 1930-1945, experts focused their efforts on broadening their approaches to the assessment of learning outcomes by considering all aspects of learning objectives rather than just measuring certain academic competencies.

However, the major revolution in the field was Bloom's work on the Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (Bloom et al., 1956). But while Bloom's work continues to have implications for experts in the field, it is worth to be noted that the introduction of Criterion-Referenced Testing concept respectively in 1965 and 1967, by American and later Canadian researchers (Boyd, Teteruck, & Thompson, 1980) was considered as a major shift. Criterion-Referenced Assessment (CRA) is referred to as the process of evaluating (and grading) the learning of students against a set of pre-specified qualities or criteria, without reference to the achievement of others (Brown, 2010).

The following table summarizes the historical perspectives of Educational Assessment.

Table 1. Major Changes in Assessment

Year	Approach	Characteristics
1920	Norm Referenced Tests	Comparing students to students
1970	Criterion Referenced Tests	Student's learning is compared to the criteria or standards
1980	Authentic Assessment	Students need to demonstrate what they learned

Constructed by the author

As it can be noticed, from the antiquity to more

recent years, educational assessment was mostly driven by the imperative of sorting and classifying students. Guimard, (2010) argued that the logic was to select students who could not adapt to the normal school curriculum so that this function of sorting individuals according to their intelligence characterized the evaluation tools of that era. As a matter of fact, exams were almost exclusively made of essay questions emphasizing factual recall (McArthur, 1987)

Considering the ideas that were prevailing at that era, one can understand that the introduction of the concept of criterion-referenced assessment was an important shift of paradigm that will open later the doors to learning-oriented approaches known as Formative Assessment or Assessment for Learning.

3. New Perspective in School Assessment: Current Trends

The new perspective in the educational assessment cannot be understood without referring to the context of its emergence. The first thing to be kept in mind is that the end of the 1960s was marked by a worldwide movement of protest which was openly expressed in May 1968 and spread widely in the following years, and this did not spare the school systems, which were judged to be too archaic but also too unfair (Guimard, 2010). As a matter of fact, it was found in various studies that the traditional system of assessment was biased in favor of children with wealthy background to the detriment of the socially disadvantaged ones who were more likely to have academic failures.

In France, as well as in many other countries, the socio-cultural handicap theories² grew during the 1970s into a merciless criticism of the school (Perrenoud, 1998). Likewise, in the United States, Bourdieu & Passeron (1970) have argued that school reproduces inequalities by legitimizing them.

As these studies highlight the responsibility of the "School" itself in the academic failure of students, they also raise some questions about the systems of assessment and challenge the collective awareness of teachers and educational leaders. Indeed, for many researchers, the guilty party is the assessment system. The criticism of the traditional assessment

² Terms used in the field of sociology of education to designate educational inequalities that would be explained by the cultural disparities that exist between social groups

methods is then generally focused on its role in school failure. For example, Perrenoud (1998), furthering sociological studies, considers that academic success or failure does not exist by itself. He believes that it is a matter of perceptions made by the school based on the evaluation practices, which are also based on arbitrary standards of excellence or incompetence. In his view, school evaluation that is guided by these standards cannot but yields its own effects. Thus, “the good students” and those who adopt the expected behaviors benefit from it. Conversely, it leads to self-deprecation, shame, and feeling of guilt, and then contributes ultimately to transforming real differences into inequalities.

As a conclusion to this point, from a historical point of view, we agree with Prost (2004) that the controversy surrounding schooling itself during the end of the 1960s, because of the social inequities it generates, forced education systems to reduce “selection” and engage in the democratization of success. And that was one of the turning point for the introduction of the concepts of Formative Assessment. So how exactly can the concept of Formative Assessment be defined?

The term Formative Assessment has the longest history in the educational literature, usually being attributed to Scriven (1967) and was well-known before the recent rise to prominence of assessment for learning. The definition of formative assessment proposed by Sadler (1989) is very widely used and accepted as a basis for good practice. Sadler states that formative assessment must enable students to understand the goals or standards to be achieved and their own current level of performance and then guide them in taking action to close the gap.

That definition does not differ from the one proposed by Black & Williams (2006). For them, Assessment refers to all activities undertaken by teachers, and by their students in assessing themselves, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged.

They insist that for assessment to function formatively, results must be used to adjust teaching and learning. In this study, even though we use the term “Continuous Assessment”, we will always refer to the latter definition that widely recognizes the improvement of teaching and learning as the prime

purpose of assessment.

However, if the current trend in most countries is to implement a formative assessment regarding its contribution to the improvement of learning, it is obvious that practices may differ from one country to another. Furthermore, and as Hattori & Saba (2008) have written, having glowing curriculum philosophy and recommended assessment practices is one thing and their implementation in the classroom is another.

Considering the possible gap between the intended assessment and implemented or attained one, we are going to take a closer look on assessments policies and practices both in Japan and Burkina Faso in the next section.

4. Assessment Policies and Practices in Japan and Burkina Faso

4.1 Japanese experience in educational assessment

On the following lines, we are going to explore the Japanese experience in educational assessment. But prior to that, we need to retrace the steps of the past to better understand the current practices.

4.1.1. Historical overview of educational assessment in Japan

The topic of assessment of school learnings has long been of special interest to Japanese researchers. Inspired by their American colleagues, debates on the model of evaluation that is likely to give the best account of students’ learning, and above all, help them improve their achievements, began in the post-war years. As a matter of fact, the “Eight Year Research” of Tyler (1934) who, according to Tanaka (2016), is an advocate of the concept of evaluation, was translated into Japanese and then used.

As we can learn from Tanaka, at that time, the Japanese Ministry of Education had already designed assessment according to five essential points. (1) Evaluation considers the entire lifestyle of the student and promotes his development. (2) Evaluation considers not only the results of the education, but its importance is in the process. (3) In addition to evaluation conducted by the teacher, self-evaluation of the student must also be picked up as an important aspect. (4) Evaluation and its results are also conducted for the selection of more appropriate teaching materials and for the improvement of teaching

methods. (5) Evaluation is necessary for effective learning activities.

However, in the light of practice, this concept, which could be described as promising, lost its quintessence to the point of becoming a simple grading activity exclusively devoted to the classroom teacher. Tanaka, in his attempt to explain this shift in assessment perspective, believes that it may have been caused by a misinterpretation of the American literature on the subject. Thus, the so-called relative assessment has been introduced into school learnings assessment practices in Japan.

4.1.2. The relative assessment

Relative Assessment is a kind of evaluation system that uses the grade of the best student in the class to determine the grades of others. It consists of comparison between learners, so that students' grades fluctuate depending on how they performed, compared to others in the classroom. But, as one can even see from its very definition, this system of evaluation is carrying inconsistencies and therefore will be strongly criticized.

The first problem with this approach, according to Tanaka, is that it was based on an assumption totally wrong. In fact, before the works of psychologists who led to a better knowledge of "child", and who later affirmed the "principle of educability", it was thought for a long time that there exists on the one hand "*intelligent*" children and on the other hand, the "*unintelligent*". Based on this misconception, the "unintelligent" could not learn no matter how hard the teacher tried.

The second aspect that raised controversy is obviously the emphasis on emulation, or rather, excessive competition. The assessment, in this case, is not focused on achievement, but rather on the student himself, and this is a source of frustration. Therefore, Tanaka very accurately pointed out that the relative assessment forces an unnatural and exclusive competition and forms the mood "the unhappiness of others is the happiness of oneself".

Last but not the least, relative assessment failed in fulfilling the main purpose of school evaluation, that is providing evidence about student's achievements, and even less, contributing to the improvement of these achievements. On the contrary, this assessment method has not only been ineffective, but has also

been, we would say, harmful to the teaching-learning process, since it contradicts one of the characteristics of the Japanese mindset, which is the basis of the Japanese educational system, and which can be summarized in the famous phrase "*only one is better than number one*".

with so many pitfalls, relative assessment had no chance to prevail in the Japanese education system. It was therefore reformed by introducing the inter-individual assessment.

4.1.3. The inter-individual assessment

Unlike relative assessment, intra-individual assessment does not simply compare learners. Instead, it looks for the least evidence of progress in each learner compared to his or her previous performance. This approach values and encourages the student to make extra efforts to improve. That is the reason why Tanaka (2016) said that it added value to the effort that was not being rewarded and began to function as a means for revitalization. Then, by highlighting individual progress, it is said that intra-individual assessment is alleviating the pain caused by relative assessment. Yet, it still does not fully fulfill the functions of an effective assessment, and hence the need to introduce in Japan, objective-referenced assessment.

4.1.4. The objective-referenced assessment

Emerged in Japan in the mid-1970s, under the influence of Bloom's findings (Bloom et al., 1956), it is also known as attainment assessment or achievement assessment, and his opinion leader was Toshio Nakauchi (Tanaka, 2016). Objective-based assessment assumes that the learning objective is the observable attainment that a learner must achieve. This approach intends to check the threshold of achievement of this objective. The interesting point here is that assessment in this perspective reveals its full meaning, namely providing indications on the degree of achievement of learning objectives so that the teacher can take more accurate decisions in terms of guidance. In other words, objective-referenced assessment is designed to support students' learning. No need to mention that it came along with that widespread idea of the 1970s, claiming the "right to learn" for children.

Moreover, we could even say that this shift in the paradigm of school evaluation will serve as a

foundation for the development of revolutionary ideas, supporting that learning is fundamental to the very existence of a child and that it provides the potential for development, so that, when they do not understand something, children have the right to be taught in a way they can understand (Tanaka, 2016).

4.1.5. Current Assessment Practices in Japan

The revision of the cumulative guidance record in 2001 adopted objective referenced as assessment theory in Japan. However, it will not be exempted of any criticism. For instance, it has been reproached for being a mere check of whether the student achieved the objectives the teacher conceived. Furthermore, the approach was supposed to be encouraging the crushing of objectives and cramming knowledge into students' heads (Tanaka, 2016). So, in response to these criticisms, and with the introduction of integrated study adopted under the National Course of Study review, the portfolio assessment was implemented (Nishioka, 2016).

4.1.6. The Portfolio assessment

The portfolio assessment, also known under the name of One Page Portfolio Assessment (OPPA), was a brainchild of Tetsuo Hori (Tanaka, 2016). According to his inventor, it is a method where students record their class achievements before, during and after class on one sheet as a learning record, causing students to evaluate themselves. Thus, teachers can refer to it to review the learning progress before, during and after the lesson, and also, to organize and prepare what students record on the sheet of paper to utilize the results in their teaching.

As students are actively involved in this assessment method, it is believed that it reinforces their learning ability and critical thinking. But there still exists a room for improvement, because 2004s PISA results revealed issues related to educational assessment in Japan. That is why authentic assessment theory was introduced in the country after what has been called the PISA Shock.

4.1.7. The authentic assessment theory

There are several meanings of the concept of authentic assessment in the literature, but they all overlap. In the sense of Mueller (2005), authentic assessment is a form of assessment in which students

are asked to perform real-world tasks that demonstrate meaningful application of essential knowledge and skills. Wiggins (1993) considers it as an “engaging and worthy problems or questions, in which students must use knowledge to fashion performances effectively and creatively. He mentions that to be authentic, the tasks students have to complete are either replicas of or analogous to the kinds of problems faced by adult citizens and consumers or professionals in the field.” As far as Stiggins (1991), he refers to it as a “Performance assessments” that require examinee to demonstrate specific skills and competencies they have mastered.

This approach gained importance in Japan after the PISA shock of 2004 and aimed at improving learners' ability to think, judge and express themselves by using acquired knowledge and skills. It has been designed to complement traditional assessment because it is in line with the new challenges of school education, intended to develop creative and productive citizens. The underlying idea is that, as schools must ensure that students become proficient at performing the tasks they will encounter when they graduate, they should then be asked to perform meaningful tasks that replicate real world challenges, to make sure they are able of doing so.

In fact, authentic assessment helps students see themselves as active participants who are working on a task of relevance, rather than passive recipients of obscure facts. It helps teachers by encouraging them to reflect on the relevance of what they teach and provides results that are useful for improving instruction. But even though the significance of employing that assessment method for fostering students' abilities to think, judge and express themselves is gaining attention in Japan, it must be recognized, however, that some constraints still remain.

In conclusion, this brief historical review of the Japanese experience of assessment helps understand the various reforms undertaken so as to make of assessment the center of all policies and strategies for the improvement of the quality of education. For this reason, Japanese education system has enough references, both in terms of theories and practices of evaluation, to inspire Burkina Faso in its quest for quality education.

But which of these experiences could be relevant

for the case of Burkina Faso, which is struggling to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of its assessment system for learning and student achievement? That question could be answered only after we have examined at first the assessment policy and practices in Burkina Faso and the related issues.

4.2. Assessment Policies and Practices in Burkina Faso

4.2.1. Methods of assessment in Burkina Faso

In the preceding section, we provided an overview of the assessment system and practices in Japan. Now, we are going to look on the current evaluation system and practices in Burkina Faso, with a particular focus on the issues that exist. These elements will help us understand and formulate orientations and recommendations on the issue of daily assignments. But the first step is to define more precisely the subject of the study, which is daily assignments.

- **The daily assignments**

The French word “devoir” is generally translated as “homework”, and this can be confusing. For instance, Legendre (1993, p.393) defines homework while specifying its location and purpose: “Work that the student must perform outside the regular school schedule, usually at home, in order to deepen and consolidate recent learning”. Assignments are thus understood to be tasks given to students by their teacher, to be completed outside of class time, and whose purpose is to deepen and consolidate learning done in the classroom or to prepare students for future learning activities.

In contrary to this definition, daily assignments are for us tasks given to students by their teacher, to be carried out in addition to the lessons given and whose objective is to check on the one hand the attainment of the pedagogical objectives and to detect on the other hand weaknesses of the learners so as to provide remediation. These tasks are implemented in each class following actual teaching sequences. Daily assignments are also referred to by teachers as “test”, “control activity” or “written work”, in the context of Burkina Faso.

- **Implementation of daily assignments**

Teachers are responsible for the designing,

correction, and interpretation of the results of continuous assessment. They are guided by School Principals and the education advisors that supervise the implementation (Burkina Faso Assemblée Nationale, 2007).

At different levels of study and for different subjects, the number of assessments to be carried out each year by subject area and the weight of each assessment is defined by the Ministry of Education. For the specific case of elementary school, the official guidelines stipulate that at least two daily assignments are required. However, they neither specify the time slot nor the disciplines concerned. It is therefore up to the teachers to take the initiative, and they certainly refer to the subjects of the day in the timetable.

Yet, there is no overall reference framework or national standards for daily assignments. Only a few fragments of information can be found in the PDSEB (Plan de Développement Stratégique de l'Éducation de Base) document. Indeed, its objective 6 suggests that an effective mechanism for evaluating learning achievements should be introduced. It states that:

Harmonized system of continuous assessment in each class and at the end of each cycle should be implemented at the regional and/or provincial level. The principle of harmonized evaluation which aims at reducing subjectivity in evaluation and bringing teachers to be themselves standards of quality in their work will be adopted.

As a result, assessment between classes and schools becomes highly variable due to lack of solid standards.

Generally, teachers keep a record of the date of each continuous assessment exercises in their “class notebooks”. Assignments are written by students in a specific notebook called “*daily assignments notebook*”. Most of the time, these “Evaluation Notebook” are not accessible to parents. Only Evaluation Notebooks for quarterly assessments are communicated directly to parents each semester.

As part of their class visits to assist teachers, Education Inspectors review the continuous monitoring to make sure that the directives are respected, and different taxonomy levels covered. But teachers still face with various difficulties in classroom assessment.

4.2.2. Issues Related to Educational Assessment in Burkina Faso

- **An administrative chore rather than a pedagogical act**

From my own experience as education Inspector, I have the feeling that for many teachers, assessment is much more an administrative chore than an important pedagogical act. In fact, it is not uncommon to meet during supervision, teachers who do not respect the ratio of two assignments at least per day, as recommended by the Official Instructions.

For some of them, only the supervisor's visit compels them to do the strict minimum so as not to expose themselves to sanctions. This means, in other words, that the act of evaluating in this case simply meets the need to satisfy one's professional obligations rather than to improve teaching by constantly adapting one's practice.

- **The challenge of overcrowded classrooms**

In addition to the above difficulty that could be related to a misconceived role for evaluation in the teaching-learning process, there exists a more objective challenge, namely the phenomenon of large numbers of students in one class. Indeed, with the improvement in the enrollment rate resulted by educational reforms, one of the direct consequences is the increase of students' ratio per class. According to official instructions, the maximum number of students per class should be 65 in primary school. However, despite these provisions, and due to the high demand for education cumulated with the shortage of resources both in terms of teaching staff and school infrastructures, overcrowded classes are becoming one of the major features of Burkina Faso post PDDEB and PDSEB³ primary schools.

As Malgoubri (2021, p.36) asserted, overcrowded classes pose challenges to classroom management pedagogical issues. Therefore, one can agree with the teachers that it is indeed not comfortable to administer two assignments per day in a class of about one hundred students, considering that the correction of the productions can be tedious. It is worth to be noticed that in the Burkinabe system, there is no extra time allocated to classroom assessment activities.

- **The correction of daily homework**

The observation we have made as a pedagogical supervisor during class visits is that a large number of teachers do not immediately correct the homework they have administered or do not correct it at all. In the best of cases, the teacher sanctions the students' productions by either underlining errors or writing correct answers in the margin of the copy. In addition, other teachers ask for a new draft of the assignment or copying the parts where the student has made mistakes. That seems to us far from the good practices in evaluation. Actually, Astolfi thinks that this attitude towards the error is counter-productive since it only consists in "materializing" it on the notebook or the copy. It doesn't mean that it will be useful for instructional purposes (Astolfi, 2011, p.11).

- **The shortage of time**

Daily assignments also have implications for the workload of teachers. Therefore, teachers so often complain about the lack of time to implement daily assignments. Perhaps they are not so wrong, since, as mentioned above, there is no time slot in the daily schedule dedicated to the administration and correction of homework. And that situation is particularly unfortunate, since, for inexperienced teachers, the fact that the timetable does not mention daily assignment may even be confusing. They may not even know exactly when to plan and carry out this activity.

- **lack of mastery of evaluation skills**

The quality of assessment depends to a large extent on the instruments of measurement that are used. That means both the question items and the tests must be developed in strict compliance with the rules and criteria that govern them to make the evaluations more objective and effective. For example, there should be a strong correlation between instruction objectives and the assessment questions to make sure that teaching and assessment are integrated.

However, in the case of Burkina Faso, it seems that teachers do not have enough skills in this domain. They are facing difficulties in designing assessment items and questions. As a matter of fact, the diagnostic

³ PDDEB and PDSEB are ten year-programs implemented to enhance access and education quality in Burkina Faso.

survey conducted in the context of the reform of the curriculum revealed that “assessment was limited to taxonomic levels rarely above the level of comprehension of the Bloom’s taxonomy.”

Moreover, Ouedraogo (2013) reported that the assessment practices are currently the cause of the many failures of the Burkinabe education system. Indeed, the research she conducted has revealed not only some discrepancies between course content and assessment tasks, but also inconsistencies in the thresholds and conditions set for their completion.

5. Conclusion

This paper was intended to identify strengths and weaknesses of assessment policies and practices in Burkina Faso and Japan, and to summarize the implications of such practices on students’ performance. First of all, we described the major changes in assessment that evolved from Norm Referenced Tests to Criterion Referenced Tests and then to the current trends of Authentic Assessment.

Secondly, we have shown that both in Japan and Burkina Faso, assessment practices have followed the same itinerary. However, it should be noted that in Japan, teachers are more aware of this shift of paradigm, and this has a positive impact on their practices.

Moreover, they seem to be well informed about the Ministry of Education’s intentions regarding daily assessments. This suggests that there exists a guidance and monitoring system for assessments to which teachers adhere.

By contrast, in Burkina Faso, there is no overall reference framework or national standards for daily assignments, and it can be said that assessing is simply like an effort to satisfy one’s professional obligations rather than to improve teaching by constantly adjusting one’s practice.

Therefore, for the case of Burkina Faso, considerable efforts are needed not only to build educators’ awareness but also to equip them with relevant skills and strategies that suit for the process of effective assessment. For this purpose, we think we can be inspired by the Japanese long experience in evaluation.

We definitively came to the conclusion that any attempt of making of assessment a tool for learning is

an arduous task that requires teachers to master not only the content but also to have a solid knowledge of pedagogical content.

Furthermore, the analysis shows that setting up an authentic assessment system remains a challenge for both Japan and Burkina Faso. Therefore, further studies should focus on the issue of authentic assessment strategies.

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