

Comparison of Exit-Level Examinations in Four African Countries

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ABSTRACT Exit-level assessment at the end of schooling determines access to higher education, or employment, or other life chances. This case study compares the demands of the 2004 Biology examination papers in Kenya, Zambia, Ghana and South Africa. The 2004 South African exit-level examinations were differentiated into Higher Grade and Standard Grade. Other countries' examinations were compared with both grades. A major curriculum reform in South Africa in 2008 marked the end of the differentiated system. Post-reform examinations of 2010 were included in this study. Question papers were analysed in terms of a number of factors that contribute to the demands of an examination. Revised Bloom's taxonomy was used to analyse cognitive demand. All of the papers were heavily weighted in the cognitive skills of remembering, understanding and applying, and in factual and conceptual knowledge. Only South Africa examined just the final year of schooling, and omitted a practical examination. The South African examinations were much longer than those of the other countries. Kenyan examinations provided a fair and valid assessment of theory and practical aspects of the subject. This article reveals that the demands of Biology examinations are comparable among the four countries; this comparability is crucial for international recognition of qualifications.