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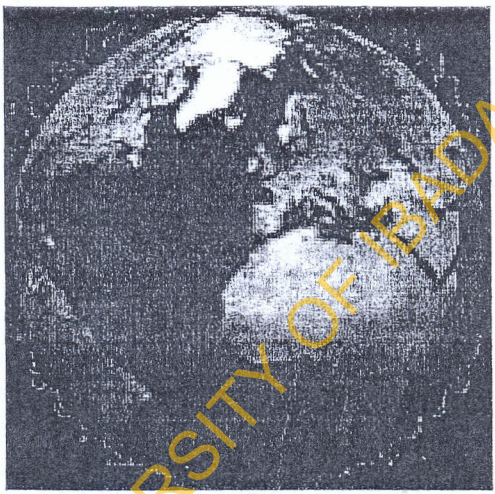

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CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT IMPLEMENTATION IN RURAL SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA: THE TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This study examined some challenges and prospects of implementing Continuous Assessment (CA) in the Nigerian rural schools, using schools in two rural Ibadan Local Government Areas of Egbeda and Lagelu of Oyo State, Nigeria as case study. It utilized survey research procedure while the study data was collected ex post facto. Fifty-six teachers were sampled from five schools and used as subjects in the study. One instrument was used to collect data which were analysed using percentages and chi-square statistic. Findings show that challenges of implementing CA in rural Nigerian schools include: lack of good and enabling environment, dilapidated classes, lack of relevant equipment for its execution, shared interest between farming and devotion to school work on the part of the teachers who are the chief implementers, lack of knowledge and skills of the appropriate evaluation techniques, etc. Respondents suggested that time should be given to implementing CA, teachers should be adequately trained in the techniques of evaluation, relevant modern technology for its conduct and recording should be provided for teachers. It was discovered that these rural Nigerians do not understand the import of CA implementation. It was thus recommended that teachers should be given relevant training on modern evaluation techniques, funds be available for the purchase of relevant equipment for its implementation, and the enabling environment should be provided by way of acquisition of relevant infrastructure and facilities.

Key Words: Challenges, CA Implementation, Rural Schools, Prospects, Evaluation Techniques, Modern Technology.

Introduction

According to Onuka (2008), evaluation of which assessment is a part plays important roles in the educational development of a nation. It is a means by which quality control is carried out and determines the educational systemic accountability exemplified by the various stakeholders in the industry. It is equally the tool used in determining the effectiveness of teaching and learning. It is a vital tool for quality assurance in the education sector. Assessment is said to be continuous when it is regular, cumulative and comprehensive. Onuka and Owolabi (2008) posit that the concept of assessment in Nigeria was officially introduced in 1985 by the then military regime which produced a manual for its implementation consequent upon the commencement of the Nigerian National Policy on Education which was introduced in 1977 and had since been revised three times (FRN, 1977; 1981; 1998; and 2004).

Continuous Assessment uses a variety of instruments in the process of assessing students because it considers all the three domains of learning, namely: cognitive, affective and psychomotor.

However, Onuka (2009) found that implementers of this innovative evaluation paradigm have concentrated only on cognitive domain of learning. According to Onuka and Junaid (2007), it is determined using tests, questionnaires, observational techniques among other tools in order to really determine whether or not there has been comprehensive learning in the system. The result of CA is usually used to advise students and thus such results improve students' learning outcomes.

The reintroduction of the universal basic education and the expansion of its scope from six to nine-year basic education in 1999 brought a new dimension to CA in the form of School Based Assessment (SBA) at the lower, middle and upper basic levels. The practice of the original concept of CA in Nigeria continues at the secondary school level. The main objective of the Nigerian government by introducing CA is: making it to form a substantial percentage of the final certificate examinations. Yet, as at present, only the examining bodies are able to tell what they do with the CA scores collected from secondary school as the schools themselves and the rest of the educational subsystem and society are not sure of what happens to those scores. The reason is that no one seems to trust the implementation of CA in the school system in Nigeria.

There have been some expression of doubts about the validity and reliability of the scores given to examining bodies by schools as results of CA tests conducted by them when it is certain school authorities sometimes connive with students to cheat in the examinations administered by the same examining bodies (Onuka, 2004; Onuka and Owolabi, 2008; Onuka, 2009). Psychometric properties of the tests that produced these scores are subject to doubts as the reliability and validity of the measurement instruments used are not ascertained. The competence and capability of some of the teachers who generated them is in suspect, since many of these teachers were not professionally trained.

It has been, however, observed that implementation of CA in schools has been fraught with some problems which include the fact that teachers are not adequately educated in CA implementation; stakeholders are unaware of the importance of CA as a quality control and assurance tool; and the fact that it assists both teachers and students to improve; and as such little or no importance is attached to its implementation; thus, sufficient funds are not made for its implementation; and CA storage equipment such as computers are not made available for teachers to use (Onuka and Oludipe, 2004; 2006; Onuka, 2007a). They equally suggested that if these problems were frontally confronted, the prospects of CA improving teaching and learning are tremendous. Onuka and Owolabi (2008) report that some scholars had discovered that though CA can make tremendous improvement in student learning and in reducing examination malpractices in schools where it is often practised, yet the operators need to be honest in the discharge of duties, and use the instrument to promote learning among students and enhance teaching by its use in the school system (Onuka, 2004; Adeoye and Okpala, 2005; Frempong, 2005; Oberloher, 2005; Anikweze, 2005). In view of the foregoing observations, it has thus become imperative to investigate the challenges and prospects of CA to verify the factors that account for the unimpressive process of implementation of the continuous assessment component of the 6-3-3-4 education system in rural Nigeria. Therefore, this study evaluated the challenges and prospects of the implementation in the Nigerian rural secondary schools from the perspective of some stakeholders in the Nigerian education industry at the rural set-up.

Research Questions

The following three questions were, thus, addressed:

1. What are the challenges of implementing CA in Ibadan rural schools as perceived by the teachers?
2. What are the prospects of CA implementation in rural Nigeria?
3. What should be done to ensure appropriate implementation of CA in rural schools?
4. Is there any congruence between the perception of the challenges and prospects of continuous implementation of CA by male and female teachers in rural schools?

Procedure

The study adopted the survey research using the ex post facto design. Teachers and students were purposively sampled from five secondary schools in some Ibadan rural settings of Lagelu and Egbeda Local Government Areas. Sixty-six teachers chosen from the selected schools constituted the sample for the study. The five schools were systematically selected from some eleven rural schools in the two Local Government Areas to ensure *ruralness* and representativeness.

Instrumentation

A Checklist was adapted from the similar checklists by Onuka and Owolabi (2008). The teacher checklist on CA implementation was modified and validated using test retest reliability technique producing a co-efficient of 0.87 while factor analysis technique was to obtain validity co-efficient of 0.79 for the instrument. This was after administering the instrument on a sample of 25 rural teachers similar to the main sample used in the study.

Data Collection

The teacher instrument was administered on the 66 teachers from the five schools in the most rural areas. All the questionnaire copies that were administered were retrieved from the respondents.

Data Analysis

The resulting data from this research exercise was analysed using percentages and Chi-square statistics.

Results and Discussion

Presented below are the perceptions of the rural teachers about CA implementations.

Table 1: Summary of the challenges of teachers in implementing CA in rural setting

Perceived challenges of CA by rural teachers	Percentage of the respondents	Rank
Developing valid CA Tests	77.5	(7th)
Lack of motivation to implement CA	81.0	(6th)
Marking and recording of CA	76.4	(10th)
Non-provision of support by the relevant authorities in the conduct of CA	67.6	(14th)
Pooling of test items together very difficult due to unavailability of relevant literature on evaluation techniques	74.8	(12th)
Wastes the teachers' time	75.8	(11th)
Appropriately developing other CA instruments	94.8	(1st)
Too many traits to rate	88.1	(3rd)
Heavy teaching workload	76.9	(8th)
Many assessment tools to be used	76.9	(8th)
Frequency of CA administration/operations	69.8	(13th)
Inadequate knowledge of its importance	83.0	(5th)
Low level of skills in evaluation techniques	92.7	(2nd)
Non-provision of the appropriate technology	83.5	(4th)

The challenges of implementing CA as perceived by the Nigerian rural teachers are hereby presented in descending order of magnitude: developing appropriate CA instrument i.e. the ability to appropriately develop the relevant CA instruments, low level of evaluation skills, marking and recording, low level of teacher motivation, non-provision of the appropriate technology, inadequate knowledge of the import of CA implementation, marking and recording of CA tests, test administration procedures, etc. Furthermore, teachers' response show the issues relating to marking and recording of CA tests in view of the time such exercise takes and the need to follow through the curriculum

implementation. Issues concerning the setting of questions or item writing also bothered the teachers as challenges in CA implementation.

The above findings confirm the fact that implementing in Nigeria is fraught with challenges (Onuka and Obialo, 2004; Onuka and Oludipe, 2004; Onuka and Oludipe, 2004; Onuka, 2007; Yoloye, 2003; Anizekwe, 2005; Wiggins, 1998; Wosanju, 2005). This is in tandem with the fact that the Nigerian government, whether federal or state, does not often make fund available for implementing laudable educational programmes (Onuka, 2004; 2007b). These conclusions are in conformity with the views of Wosanju (2005) and Wiggins (1998) and the finding of Onuka and Obialo (2004) that effective implementation of CA can consume much of the teachers' time and its administration can be cumbersome as well as inadequate funding of the system leading to poor execution of noble innovation in educational evaluation.

Presented in table 2 is the rural teachers' perception on how CA implementation in the Nigerian rural schools can be improved:

Table 2: Expected prospects of CA implementation in the Nigerian rural schools

S/No	Description	Percentage	Rank
1	Reduces examination malpractices	94.4	(3rd)
2	Improves learning	98	(1st)
3	Improves teaching	98	(1st)
4	Affects early correction	89	(4th)
5	Engenders hardwork by both teachers and students alike	76	(6th)
6	Creates positive attitude/self-confidence in the student	81	(5th)

Table 3 presents what respondents believe are the expected prospects of a well-implemented CA in Nigeria. Thus the data shows that 94.4% of the respondents agree that faithful implementation of CA in Nigeria can help in curbing the malaise of examination malpractices. 98% states that it improves learning while another 98% feels that it also improves teaching. Again, 76% opines that CA implementation engenders hardwork by both the teachers and the students alike and 81% believes that it builds up the students' character. These results in table 3 clearly

show that properly executed CA possesses the prospects of promoting learning if appropriately carried out and its results adequately utilized (Onuka and Oludipe, 2004). The results also corroborate the finding of Onuka and Obialo (2004) that examination malpractices have been cankerworm which must be dealt with frontally and that of Onuka and Junaid (2007) which discovered that consistent administration of CA can reduce examination malpractices as the students become used to examination system and also because the CA system improves the study habit of the student. Therefore, it is pertinent that all machinery for effectively implementing CA in Nigerian schools should be put in place, since it has been proven that the CA system can improve students' performance.

Table 3: Summary table of steps suggested by teachers for ensuring successful implementation of CA

Suggested steps	Percentage of the respondents	Rank
Improving invigilation and CA administration	97.98	(1st)
Develop/Promote healthy study habit among students	96.90	(2nd)
Decongest/Reduce students population per class	96.49	(3rd)
Improve record keeping	95.86	(4th)
Training of teachers in relevant evaluation techniques	79.04	(5th)
Improve commitment/motivation of teachers	77.04	(6th)
Raise the proportion of CA test component	74.23	(7th)
Include assessment of non cognitive variables	74.23	(7th)
Ensure CA tests represent instructional coverage	72.82	(9th)
Give enough time to students	61.41	(10th)
Provision of appropriate technology	59.02	(11th)

As depicted in table 3 above, teachers believe that the success of CA implementation depends essentially on effective test administration

and the promotion of healthy study habits among students. This gives the impression that teachers have little or no control over the administration of CA in schools, just as Onuka and Junaid (2007) did find that some schools in Kogi State, Nigeria were not effectively implementing CA. The nature of questions to use, the timing of the tests and the time table given for administration as well as invigilation, when left at the mercy of the system rather than under the control of teachers, could lead to a lot of problems. Yet, as Onuka and Junaid (2007) suggested, CA implementation should be done co-operatively.

The issue of decongesting classrooms is closely tied to test administration. Improving record keeping, re-training of teachers and ensuring commitment of teachers also go together and among them is the possibility of creating the conditions that could make for successful implementation of CA in schools. The lack of thoroughness of invigilation could promote cheating and this shows that the teachers may have to take the CA tests seriously as a vital component of school learning by remediating students' poor performance (Wiggins, 1998; Onuka and Oludipe, 2004; Wosanju, 2005).

Table 4: Summary table of differences between perceived challenges and perceived prospects and envisaged challenges and envisaged CA implementation

Variable	X^2 Value	Critical Value	Cramer's V	Level of Significance
Challenges	132.09	34.50	0.77	0.05
Prospects	234.70	44.76	0.76	0.05

The results presented in table 4 show that significance difference exists between what in the rural teacher's perception is on ground in terms of challenges and prospects of continuous assessment implementation on the one hand and the envisaged challenges and prospects respectively at 0.05 alpha level.

This implies that the envisaged and perceived challenges as well as those of the prospects, in terms of continuous assessment implementation in the rural areas of Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, are significantly congruent. That is, there is no significant difference between what is perceived and what is envisaged in terms of both the challenges facing the implementation of CA in rural Ibadan schools and

those of the prospects of using the implementation of continuous assessment to improve students' achievement in the rural communities. These findings conform to the findings of Onuka, 2004; Onuka and Oludipe, 2006; Onuka and Owolabi, 2008 that continuous assessment is a tool for improving students' cognitive learning in particular and learning in general. Thus a carefPully and honestly implemented continuous assessment in rural school as in urban schools can contribute significantly to students' achievement and learning. This is so because the outcome of CA implementation provides immediate feedback to the student for improvement even as it does also assist the teacher to improving his teaching (Onuka and Oludipe, 2004; Onuka and Junaid, 2007; Onuka, 2009), since immediate feedback which comes from CA positions the student and even the teacher for immediate corrective measure or remediation (Onuka and Oludipe, 2004).

By implication, therefore, CA should be honestly and carefully implemented, if it were to achieve the objectives which it was introduced into the school system. Thus, the relevant authorities should ensure that the enabling environment for its implementation should be created by way of providing adequate training for teachers on developing and effectively using the appropriate evaluation techniques. By extension, fund should be specifically made available for the implementation of CA in the entire school system.

Conclusion

The foregoing presentations and discussion have shown very clearly and convincingly that there are critical challenges facing the implementation of CA in Nigerian rural schools, yet these challenges which are not insurmountable do not prevent CA with some prospects from improving the education system. These challenges include: lack of quality enabling environment, non-provision of the relevant equipment, most teachers do not possess the requisite training, heavy teaching workload and large classes, among others. The study shows that if these problems are solved, then CA implementation has the potentials of improving teaching and learning and thus the entire education system. It can assist in building self-confidence in students as well as reducing the rate of examination malpractices. It could also assist students to cultivate good study habit.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are hereby made as follows:

1. All stakeholders must support the implementation of CA in the rural school system by providing the enabling environment for its effective meaning and comprehensive implementation.
2. CA timetable should be pasted on the notice board for students to see and prepare adequately for the CA tests.
3. The outcome of CA tests and other CA measures should be given as feedback to students, their parents and other stakeholders for the improvement of the education system.
4. Appropriate training on evaluation methods should be given to all teachers in the rural school system in order to engender total implementation.
5. Government and proprietors of schools must encourage the implementation of CA in the schools and the results appropriately utilized.

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