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**A PILOT STUDY OF THE CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF
CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT IMPLEMENTATION IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This study obtained basic information from teachers and students on the challenges and prospects of implementing continuous assessment in the Nigerian school system. Secondary Schools in Ilorin, the capital city of Kwara State, located in the central region of Nigeria were sampled for use in the study. It employed survey research design executed through the collection of ex post facto data. Two hundred and forty respondents comprising one hundred and twenty teachers and one hundred and twenty students were respectively sampled and used as subjects in the study. Two questionnaires, one for teachers and one for students, were developed and used to collect data which were analyzed using mainly percentages. Findings show that the greatest challenges of implementing CA in Nigerian secondary schools include poor level of preparedness for tests on the part of students, poor test administration procedures, poor handling of scores and feedback to students, poor coverage of instructional contents by test contents, large classes, inadequate time for tests and lack of knowledge and skills of the appropriate evaluation techniques. 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 Nigerians know that CA possesses some prospects if properly implemented. These include reducing examination malpractices, engendering quality study habit in the student, improving educational and learning outcomes attainment among others. It was thus recommended that teachers should be given relevant training on modern evaluation techniques and schools provided the enabling environment for CA to work.

Introduction

Assessment plays a significant role in the educational development of a person and, of course, a nation. It is a means of quality control, of determining the level of accountability displayed by stakeholders in the industry and also of determining the effectiveness of teaching and learning as well as in finding out student achievement. It is a vital tool for educational evaluation, thus its importance as a quality assurance tool cannot be overemphasized. Assessment is said to be continuous when it is regular, cumulative and comprehensive. The concept of assessment in the Nigerian context became officially operative since 1985 consequent upon the production of a manual for its implementation as a result of the implementation of the Nigerian National Policy on Education which was introduced in 1977 (FRN, 1977; 1981; 1998; and 2004). Continuous Assessment (CA) was thus introduced alongside the 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria.

Continuous Assessment uses a variety of techniques for assessing the student because it considers all the three domains of learning, namely cognitive, affective and psychomotor. According to Onuka and Junaid (2007), CA uses tests, questionnaires, observation techniques and other tools to really determine whether or not comprehensive learning has taken place. The result thereof is normally used to help students improve their learning.

With the launching of the nine-year basic education in 1999, the School Based Assessment (SBA) was also introduced at the lower, middle and upper basic levels of Nigerian education. The practice of CA continues at the secondary school level. The objectives of the Nigerian government in instituting CA include making students' scores in it a substantial percentage of the final certificate examinations. Up till now, only the

examining bodies are able to tell what they do with the CA scores collected from secondary schools. Neither the schools themselves, the rest of the educational subsystem nor society are sure of what happens to those scores.

None of the examining bodies in Nigeria bothers itself about the CA performance of learners in our schools. They seem to be interested in obtaining the scores and merging them with the final one shot test administered by them which they suspect have been doctored. Issues of benchmarking learners through the use of standardized tests for which experts in the universities and the examining bodies are strategically equipped had been sidelined while publishing houses do not direct investment in this venture apparently for fear of loosing out. Benchmarking and quality control, which would have removed the burden of developing every test for use by the school teacher, is an area of our educational development that is yet to be attended to.

Experts have course to suspect the validity and reliability of the scores submitted by schools to the examination bodies as results of CA tests. Psychometric properties of the tests that produced these scores could not be ascertained. The training and ability of some of the teachers who generated them are in doubt as many of them lack professional training. In view of these, it is necessary to investigate the challenges and prospects of CA in order to be able to identify the factors responsible for the poor implementation of this component of the 6-3-3-4 system. It has become necessary to embark on studies taking a perspective on the implementation at the school level with a focus on secondary teachers and students as the most important link in the implementation chain.

Implementation of CA in Nigeria has been fraught with such problems as poor assessment skills of teachers, poor attention of stakeholders to the use of CA as a quality

control and assurance tool and care free attitude of both teachers and students. Sufficient funds are not allocated for its implementation and CA scores storage equipment such as computers are not made available for teachers to use (Onuka and Oludipe, 2004; 2006; Onuka, 2007a). As a result, little has been achieved. Nigerian schools have thus been denied the potentialities that CA for improving student learning and reducing examination malpractice in schools where it is often practiced (Roy-Macauley, 1998; Adeoye and Okpala, 2005; Frempong, 2005; Oberloher, 2005; Anikweze, 2005). This study, therefore, was designed to find out what challenges teachers and students in the Nigerian educational system face in the implementation of CA and how they could be mitigated as well as the prospects of using CA to further enhance teaching and learning in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following questions were, therefore, addressed in this study:

1. What are the major challenges confronting teachers in the implementation of CA?
2. What are the major challenges confronting secondary school students in responding to CA procedures?
3. What should be done to improve CA implementation at the school level?
4. What are the prospects of CA implementation in Nigeria?

Procedure

The study adopted the survey research using the ex post facto design. Teachers and students were purposively sampled from three secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis. A total of two hundred and forty respondents comprising one hundred and

twenty teachers of different school subjects and one hundred and twenty students from these three schools were sampled.

Two questionnaires were developed and validated for use in the study by the researchers. The first questionnaire focused on the challenges teachers face in the implementation of CA while the second was on challenges students face in coping with CA implementation at the secondary school level. Both instruments also required information on the prospects of CA and what could be done to overcome these challenges in the Nigerian school system from teachers and students respectively. The internal consistency of each of the instruments was determined through the use of Cronbach's Alpha. Coefficients of 0.79 and 0.54 were respectively obtained. These indices somehow indicate the construct validity of the questionnaires. The instruments were administered on the 240 respondents within two weeks. All the administered questionnaire copies were retrieved from the respondent.

The resulting data from this research exercise were analyzed by use of percentages.

Results and Discussion

Teachers and students were asked to indicate the challenges they face in implementing and participating in CA. Simple percentages of the frequency of challenges indicated by respondents are presented in the tables below in answer to the research questions. The first research question was on the greatest challenges faced by teachers in implementing CA. Responses by teachers are summarized in Table 1

Table 1: Summary of most critical challenges of teachers in implementing CA

Description of the challenge	Percentage of the respondents
Poor Preparation of students for CA	29.6
Poor test administration procedures	23.9
Marking and recording	17.2
Large student population	7.7

Setting questions/item writing	4.9
Demand on teachers' time	4.9
Use of methods other than tests	4.9
Teachers' level of motivation	4.9
Disruption of work pace	1.0
Number of assessments	1.0
Total	100.0

The most critical challenges faced by teachers in implementing CA were poor preparation on the part of students for continuous assessment, poor test administration procedures and coping with marking of students' scripts and record keeping with 29.5%, 23.8% and 17.1% respectively. Other challenges faced by teachers were large classes which translate to large number of scripts to mark and records to be kept, poor test development skills, demand on teachers' time, problems with measurement of non cognitive variables and poor motivational level of teachers. The least critical problems identified by teachers include the fact that CA exerts a disruptive influence on the pace of work as well as the frequency of assessments.

The above findings confirm the fact that implementing in Nigeria is fraught with challenges (Onuka and Obialo, 2004; Onuka and Oludipe, 2004; Onuka, 2007; Yoloje, 2003; Anizekwe, 2005; Wiggins, 1998; Wosanju, 2005; Owolabi and Olasehinde-Williams, 2007). This is in tandem with the fact that the Nigerian governments whether federal or state do not often make enough funds available for implementing laudable educational programmes (Onuka, 2004; 2007b).

The second research question was on the major challenges confronting secondary school students in responding to CA procedures

Table 2 : Summary of most critical challenges of students

Description of the challenge	Percentage of the respondents
Insufficient time to write the tests	35.7
Poor coverage of instructional content by CA tests	32.2

Poor invigilation/test administration	17.1
Scoring and feedback to students	5.7
Fear of failure	3.8
Insufficient time to prepare for tests	3.8
Inadequate information to students on test time table	1.7
Total	100.0

Students have their greatest challenge in the time given to them for writing CA papers and this being closely followed by poor coverage of instructional content by the CA tests reveal that the teachers seem to be in a rush to conduct their tests as required by authorities rather than to use tests to achieve instructional objectives. The problem of poor invigilation and test administration procedures in regular school tests may be at the root of examination malpractices. If this is considered alongside overpopulation in classrooms pointed out by teachers as part of their challenges, then it is apparent that invigilation may not be as effective in such environments. While students eagerly await their test scores, teachers have voluminous scripts to battle with.

These conclusions are in conformity with the views of Wosanju (2005,); Wiggins (1998) and the finding of Onuka and Obialo (2004) that CA implementation can be very time consuming and its administration can be cumbersome and so may be poorly executed.

The third research question is on what should be done to improve CA implementation at the school level? Data was obtained from both students and teachers on what could be done to solve the problems they had identified. The frequency of each of their suggestions and the percentages are summarized in tables 3 and 4 below:

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

Suggested steps	Percentage of respondents
Improving invigilation and CA administration	30.98
Develop/Promote healthy study habit among students	16.90
Decongest/Reduce students population per class	15.49
Improve record keeping	9.86
Re-training of teachers	7.04
Improve commitment/motivation of teachers	7.04
Raise the proportion of CA test component	4.23
Include assessment of non cognitive variables	4.23
Ensure CA tests represent instructional coverage	2.82
Give enough time to students	1.41
Total	100.00

The three major areas considered by teachers to be critical to the successful implementation of CA effective test administration (30.9%), promotion of healthy study habits among students (16.9%). This gives the impression that teachers have little or no control over the administration of CA in schools, just as Onuka and Junaid (2007) found that some schools in Kogi State, Nigeria were not effectively implementing CA.

Decongestion of classrooms with 15.5% of the respondents is another major step suggested by teachers for improving the implementation of CA. The nature of questions

to use, timing of the tests and the time table given for administration, 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 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 lies the possibility of creating the conditions that could make for successful implementation of CA in schools.

Data from students on the prospects of CA are presented in table 4 below:

Table 4: Summary of steps suggested by students for ensuring successful implementation of CA

Suggested steps	Percentage of the respondents
Giving enough time to write each test	25.78
CA test to represent instructional coverage	18.24
Thorough invigilation/test administration	17.61
Opportunity/Time for students to fully prepare	13.84
Releasing the CA time table in good time	11.95
Feedback/students' access to CA test scores	6.92
Improving the quality of questions/items	3.77
Conducive classroom environment	1.89
Total	100.00

To solve the problems students encounter in the CA implementation, 25.8% of the sampled students suggested that sufficient time should be allocated for the writing of each test while the coverage of instruction and CA tests do not seem to agree. This says much about the validity of the CA tests conducted in schools since teachers present tests

that only conform to official instructions rather than those that represent their instruction.

The students are therefore at a disadvantage. If their preparations had often met with disappointments, the tendency to prepare will in subsequent tests is jeopardized. The lack of thoroughness of invigilation could promote cheating and thus shows that the teachers may have to take the CA tests seriously as a vital component of school learning and as such of high significance in remediating student poor performance (Wiggins, 1998; Onuka and Oludipe, 2004; Wosanju, 2005). The opportunity for preparation begins with the instruction provided by teachers and is complemented by students' efforts and the time at the disposal of students to prepare for CA tests. This is related to the release of time table to students in good time to allow for their preparation. Students' interest in knowing their performances is reflected in their desire for feedback and access to their scores.

Suggestions by teachers on how to integrate CA test scores with performance in the final examinations are presented in table 5 below:

Table 5: Suggestions by teachers on how to integrate CA and final test scores

Suggested steps	Percentage of the respondents
Proper compilation of CA test scores by teachers/schools	50.00
Make examination bodies to add CA test scores to final scores	32.69
Proper coordination of CA by Ministry of Education or other bodies set up for the purpose	17.31
Total	100.00

The above table shows suggestions on how teachers believe CA tests taken by the students should be properly compiled and kept for the purpose of integrating these results into the summative assessment by external/public examining bodies in the country. This process could remove the doubts examining bodies have over the scores submitted by

schools as true records of their students' CA tests. There is the feeling that the final grades of candidates released by the examining bodies do not reflect the CA scores sent in by schools otherwise the percentage of teachers suggesting that the bodies should be made to integrate CA test scores into final grades. Finally, it was suggested that the body coordinating CA, usually a unit of the ministry of education, should ensure proper coordination so as to make CA scores authentic which can be then integrated in the summative assessment conducted by public examining bodies.

Respondents stated that the successful implementation of CA in Nigeria has the prospects helping to curb examination malpractices, improvement of teaching and learning, promotion of hard work among teachers and students and building up students' character. These results clearly show that properly executed CA possesses the prospects of promoting learning if appropriately carried and its results adequately utilized (Onuka and Oludipe, 2004). The results also corroborates the finding of Onuka and Obialo (2004) that examination malpractices have been cankerworm which must be dealt with 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 be proven that the CA system can improve student performance.

Conclusion

The foregoing presentations and discussion have shown very clearly and unambiguously that there are critical challenges facing the implementation of CA in

Nigerian 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 frontally CA implementation has the potentials of improving teaching and learning and thus the entire education system. It can assist in building self-confidence in the student as well as reducing the rate of examination malpractices. It could also assist student to cultivate good study habit.

Recommendations

In view of the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

- The corrective feedback loop should be used to help learners perform optimally rather than wait for them to reach the final year before cumulative scores are processed for ultimate merger with the final tests scores.
- All stakeholders must support the full-blown implementation of CA in the school system by providing the enabling environment for its effective, meaningful and comprehensive implementation.
- Beyond giving of time tables and following them to enable them prepare adequately, there is the aspect of ensuring coverage of instructional content by the teachers.
- The outcome of CA tests should be given as feedback to students, their parents and other stakeholders for education system improvement.

- Appropriate training on evaluation methods should be given to all teachers in the school system in order to engender the full-blown and successful implementation.

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