

# **CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT PRACTICES OF PRIMARY AND JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLTEACHERS IN NIGERIA**

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## **Abstract**

This study examined the status, gaps and challenges of continuous assessment (CA) practices of primary and junior secondary school teachers in Nigeria. A large-scale survey was conducted on a random sample of 3,325 teachers (2,185 primary school teachers and 1,140 junior secondary schools teachers) across the six (6) geo-political zones of the country. The survey sought information from the school teachers on their understanding of the CA as well as the appropriate application of the CA instruments, whether there are uniform CA guidelines across the country and how school teachers engage in CA practices. Results showed that in general school teachers demonstrated poor knowledge of the elementary concept of CA. Many teachers misapplied the CA instruments leading to more of continuous testing of learners instead of continuous assessment. CA guidelines not only varied across states and schools but were also different from the guidelines stipulated in the extant national CA handbook. School teachers are to be mandatorily and formally trained in CA principles and practice both at pre-service and in-service levels.

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## **The Context**

The Nigerian National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1977 & 2004) states that educational assessment and evaluation will be liberalized by basing them in whole or in part on Continuous Assessment of the progress of the individual. The Policy also prescribed the central guidelines that should be adopted by states and schools nation-wide and suggested the type of CA instruments that could be used to achieve the ideals and objectives of CA. Therefore the successful implementation of continuous assessment system requires total adherence to the prescribed guidelines as well as teachers' proper understanding of the concept and practice of continuous assessment. Thus, for continuous assessment to succeed much emphasis must be placed on the professional competence and integrity of school teachers.

Continuous Assessment (CA) was first introduced in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria in 1977 following the adoption of the National Policy on Education. Prior to this time, assessment of learners' performance was purely based on one-shot examinations usually administered at the end of the term or school year. The introduction of CA was to render assessment school-based, improve evaluation of learners' attainment by ensuring that assessment is cumulative, systematic, comprehensive and guidance-oriented (Obioma, 1984; Ojerinde & Falajo, 1984) In spite of this, observations (Okpala, Onocha & Oyedeji 1993) continue to show that there are problems of the effective implementation of CA in Nigeria.

With the commencement of the implementation of the 9-year Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) (NERDC, 2007) in September 2008 in Nigeria, the Nigerian National Council on Education has approved a new National Framework for conducting CA in schools in Nigeria. The structure and implementability of this new framework has been discussed elsewhere (Obioma & Ajagun, 2006). There is a plan also to improve the capacity of teachers on the effective implementation of the new BEC and the new national framework on CA. This is against the backdrop of the policy that school pupils proceeding to the junior secondary school need not take any selective entrance examination any more. There is therefore a need to survey how ready teachers are in implementing CA in the context of the introduction of BEC and the new National Framework of CA.

Previous studies on CA in Nigeria (Obagah, 1996; Eraikhuemen & Eraikhuemen, 2006; Omorogiuwa and Egharevbanighe, 2006) have tended to focus on small populations whose results have little implication for public policy. The present study was thus designed to examine on a national scale the status, gaps and challenges of continuous assessment practices in Nigerian primary and junior secondary schools.

Answers were therefore sought to the following research questions:

1. What is the level of understanding of school teachers on the elementary concept of CA?
2. How appropriate is the application of the CA guidelines in schools?
3. What types of CA instruments are being used by school teachers?

## **Sample**

3,325 teachers (2,185 Primary and 1140 Junior Secondary Schools teachers) were randomly selected from primary and junior secondary schools across the six geo-political zones (South-West, South-East, South-South, North-Central, North-West and North-East) of Nigeria. The primary school teachers were made up of 1,100 males and 1,085 females while their junior secondary school counterparts comprised 580 males and 560 females. These teachers were those that taught the core subjects of English Studies, Mathematics, Primary Science, Social Studies, Hausa/Igbo/Yoruba, Physical and Health Education, Christian Religious Studies/Islamic Studies, Fine Art, French language and Computer Studies.

## **Instrumentation**

A Survey Instrument (SIT) developed by the research team comprised two parts. Part I elicited general background information about the respondents. Part II obtained data on teachers' understanding of the knowledge on the basic concept and procedures of CA, the proper application of CA instruments and teachers' perceived difficulties in conducting CA. Part II items were generally based a 4-point response grid namely; Strongly Agree (SA=4), Agree (A=3), Disagree (D=2) and Strongly Disagree (SD=1). Face and content validity of the SIT was obtained through expert judgment from four specialists in Measurement and Evaluation. Based on this, the revised SIT was pilot-tested in 30 primary schools and 20 junior secondary schools drawn from Abuja the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria. The internal consistency measured through Cronbach Alpha was 0.79. The final version of SIT was administered on the sample of the school teachers. Simple frequency counts, means and standard deviations were used to analyse the main research data.

## RESULTS

Table 1 presents the results on teachers' perception of their understanding of the basic concepts of CA

**Table 1: Frequency, Percentage, Weighted mean Ratings and Standard Deviation of Teachers' Perception of the concept of Continuous Assessment.**

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	$\sigma$
<b>Meaning of Continuous Assessment</b>						
a. Continuous Assessment refers to a system which is carried out at a pre-determined time interval .	826 (25.9)	1471 (46.1)	586 (18.4)	308 (9.7)	2.88	0.90
b. Continuous Assessment is carried out at periodic intervals for the purpose of improving the overall performances of learners and of the teaching/learning process.	1555 (47.9)	876 (27.0)	312 (9.6)	501 (15.4)	3.07	1.09
c. Continuous Assessment involves looking at students in totality.	784 (24.9)	1190 (37.8)	757 (24.1)	416 (13.2)	2.74	0.98
d. Continuous Assessment involves looking at student's intellectual development only.	408 (12.8)	901 (28.4)	1308 (41.2)	559 (17.6)	2.36	0.91
e. Continuous Assessment involves making decisions on student's performance at the end of any programme.	778 (24.5)	1379 (43.3)	678 (21.3)	347 (10.9)	2.81	0.93
f. Continuous Assessment requires taking decisions on students based on all records gathered in the course of a programme.	1117 (35.2)	1134 (35.8)	531 (16.7)	389 (12.3)	2.93	1.00
<b>Scope of Continuous Assessment</b>						
Continuous Assessment Practices involve:						
g. testing students before teaching a new topic.	588 (18.6)	1016 (32.1)	943 (9.8)	620 (19.6)	2.50	1.00
h. testing students after teaching any topic.	947 (29.6)	1338 (41.9)	603 (18.9)	308 (9.0)	2.91	0.93
i. returning examination and test scripts back to students after scoring	631 (19.9)	1299 (41.0)	732 (23.1)	503 (15.9)	2.65	0.97
j. making students test results to be part of students' terminal and annual examination results.	1242 (38.7)	1147 (35.8)	433 (13.5)	384 (12.0)	3.01	1.00
k. basing assessment of progress on students' individual activities.	606 (19.3)	1610 (51.4)	722 (23.0)	197 (6.3)	2.84	0.81
l. basing assessment of students' progress on students' group activities.	278 (9.0)	1263 (41.1)	1209 (39.4)	322 (10.5)	2.49	0.80

- Figures in the parentheses are percentages:  $\bar{X}$  = weighted mean and  $\sigma$  = weighted standard deviation.

Statements in Table 1 expressions of CA. Teachers' mean ratings of their perception of the concept of CA ranged between 2.36 and 3.07 with standard deviations ranging between 0.80 and 1.09. These results show that vast majority of school teachers in Nigerian primary and junior secondary school demonstrate poor knowledge of the basic concept of CA. However in general teachers were unanimous on the understanding that continuous assessment requires taking decision on individual learners based on all records obtained during the course of a programme.

Table 2 presents the results on how teachers assessed themselves on the frequency of administration of CA

**Table 2: Frequency and Percentage Distributions of how often Continuous Assessment is conducted by teachers.**

Testing Period	Frequency	%
Weekly	1269	39.2
Fortnightly	641	19.8
Monthly	947	29.3
Bi-monthly	111	3.4
Termly	265	8.2

The results suggest that there is no uniformity in the number of times CA

instruments are administered in schools. This makes comparability of standards clumsy. Teachers also tended to use more of school tests in CA as shown in Table 3. This finding is in agreement with the report (Obasi, 1995). More teachers use the essay test more than the other forms which one of the fundamental principles that CA should be comprehensive. Teachers hardly use a variety of instruments such as test, class-work, Home work, project, observation, sociometric technique, interview, questionnaire, anecdotal report, checklist, rating scale, inventory and practical work.

**Table 3: Analysis of Teachers' Responses with Respect to the forms of Testing they frequently use.**

Types of Test	Response	
	Yes	No
Essay Test	2062 (64.1)	1154 (35.9)
Objective Test	1984 (61.3)	1250 (38.7)
Matching Item	553 (17.5)	2603 (82.5)
True/False	746 (33.5)	2426 (76.5)
Others	223 (7.1)	2907 (92.9)

Figures in parentheses are percentages.

Table 4 presents the results on the extent of application of CA in schools.

**Table 4: Results on the Extent of Application of CA**

**Guidelines in Schools.**

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<b>STATEMENT</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>X</b>	<b><math>\sigma</math></b>
<b>Teachers informing students at the beginning of the term about:</b>						
i. the number of examination of tests schedule for the term.	559 (17.9)	1165 (37.3)	995 (31.8)	406 (13.0)	2.60	0.93
ii the topics on which examination and tests are to be based	358 (11.4)	1068 (34.0)	1145 (36.4)	571 (18.2)	2.39	0.91
iii the respective dates for each test and examinations.	499 (16.1)	1279 (41.4)	941 (30.5)	371 (12.0)	2.61	0.89
iv the type of instruments to be used in specific tests and examinations (e.g. essay tests, multiple-choice test, projects)	516 (16.6)	1201 (38.5)	984 (31.6)	416 (13.3)	2.58	0.92
<b>Making students' performances in tests and Examination known to:</b>						
i. other students in the school	357 (11.6)	853 (27.8)	1033 (33.7)	825 (26.9)	2.24	0.98
ii. parents of the students	798 (25.4)	1240 (39.5)	684 (21.8)	420 (13.4)	2.77	0.98
iii all the teachers in the school.	321 (10.4)	982 (31.8)	1275 (41.3)	509 (16.5)	2.36	0.88
iv. administrators outside the school.	285 (9.4)	931 (30.6)	1127 (37.0)	703 (23.1)	2.26	0.92
v. auxiliary personnel in the school (e.g. Laboratory Assistant)	289 (9.6)	720 (23.9)	1196 (39.7)	805 (26.7)	2.16	0.93
<b>Use of ICT for Continuous Assessment.</b>						
i. In my school we use computer for students 'records.	506 (16.5)	568 (18.5)	912 (29.8)	1077 (35.2)	2.16	1.08
ii. we don't have computers in my school	752 (24.3)	667 (21.5)	713 (23.0)	968 (31.2)	2.39	1.16
iii. we use computers to prepare and record students' results in my school	532 (17.3)	521 (16.9)	889 (28.9)	1132 (36.8)	2.15	1.10
<b>Feed back mechanisms.</b>						
I use continuous assessment result to						
i. improve my teaching	1298 (41.5)	1005 (32.1)	371 (11.9)	455 (14.5)	3.00	1.06
ii. identify learning needs of the student	1175 (37.0)	1138 (35.9)	470 (14.8)	391 (12.3)	2.98	1.01

iii. punish the students	395 (12.8)	525 (17.0)	984 (31.9)	1183 (38.3)	2.04	1.03
<b>Funding</b>	586 (19.5)	811 (27.0)	856 (28.5)	747 (24.9)	2.41	1.06
The school provides:						
i. adequate funding.						
ii. inadequate funding	545 (18.0)	1014 (33.6)	869 (28.8)	594 (19.7)	2.50	1.00
iii. no funding at all	560 (18.8)	630 (21.2)	799 (26.8)	988 (33.2)	2.26	1.11

Results indicate that over 65% of the teachers are still keeping the pupils' progress report cards manually which makes the task rather very tedious. This, of course, is not surprising since a sizeable number of these teachers (45.8%) claim they did not have computers in their schools. Even when these computers are available teachers claim that they could not operate the computer. Teachers also claim that they use CA to improve on their teaching. However they also say that they use CA as punishment on the learners. The statements that are used to measure the teachers' knowledge of the application of the CA guidelines are not appropriate. Yet teachers tended in general to agree with these statements. This raises cause for concern and demonstrates the lack of teachers' knowledge on the appropriate application of the CA guidelines.

Finally, teachers were requested to list five most important impediments against the smooth implementation of CA in schools. The most occurring challenges are presented below:

- School population explosion with attendant high teacher-pupil ratio.
- Non-availability of CA Guidelines in schools.
- Lack of induction training and refresher courses for teachers on CA.
- Truancy and irregular pupil attendance.
- Low morale
- Incompetence in the operation of Continuous Assessment.
- Lack of regular supervision of schools on the conduct of CA by school inspectors.
- Poor record keeping.
- Shortage of materials for CA.
- Lack of uniformity and standardization in CA practices.
- Teachers' unethical behaviour in the award of CA marks.
- Parents' ignorance on the usefulness of CA.

### **Implications for Public Policy and Conclusion**

The findings of this study reveal a sorry state of CA practices demonstrated by primary and junior secondary schools teachers in Nigeria and have implication for not only Nigeria but other African countries striving to implement the universal basic education programme and school-based assessment policy in their schools. Particularly for Nigeria the survey reveals that CA guidelines varied across schools and were inappropriately applied. Only a monotony of class tests were used at intervals not even regular. Other CA instruments such as practical work, anecdotes, observation and sociometry that could illicit non-cognitive information were hardly applied. There is a dire need to conclude the streamlining and adoption of the draft National CA Framework initiated in 2007. A course on CA should be integrated into the pre-service teacher education programme. Regular capacity strengthening workshops and in

service courses should be mounted for serving teachers. A medium term (3-5 years) initiative of computerizing the operations of CA should be put infused into the Medium Term Sector Strategy. School inspectors should be empowered to monitor the CA programme in schools. A nation wide sensitization and advocacy on the usefulness of CA should be carried out on parents and other significant stakeholders.

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