

**ASSURING FAIRNESS IN THE CONTINUOUS
ASSESSMENT COMPONENT OF SCHOOL BASED
ASSESSMENT PRACTICE IN NIGERIA.**

By

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ABSTRACT

School based assessment (SBA) is mostly used for the upgrading of students between levels and final certification at the completion of a course of study in Nigeria. The continuous assessment (C A) is a component of every semester examination of students and the accumulation of students' semester examination results make up the grade of their certificate. The C A component takes 30 or 40% of every examination score depending on the specification of institutions. Considering that 40% is accepted as pass mark on semester examinations of all institutions, the 30 or 40% allocated to CA alone is significant. Currently C A does not attract the kind of attention accorded to examinations even though globally, attention is being paid on how to ensure equity and fairness in assessment and governments as well as schools have evolved mechanisms to curb examination malpractices. However, without the same attention on C A, the possibility of stakeholders to transfer their malpractice tendencies to C A and get away with it may not be ruled out. This paper therefore aims to highlight on C A and the lapses in existing C A practices with a view for improvement so that the scores emanating from C A would be authentic and the actual reflection of students' achievement.

Introduction.

Assessment for the advancement of learners at all levels of Nigeria's Education system is mostly school based. Every Institution, as guided by its governing body spells out the ratio of the Continuous Assessment (CA). CA is usually either thirty percent (30%) or forty percent (40%) of each semester's total examination score of a hundred percent (100%) taken in each subject, every semester. The scores derived cumulatively from all semester examination results add up to the final grade for the certification of students.

In every institution, there are peculiarities in the exercise of CA. Although, lecturers/ teachers are guided, it is only to some extent and in some aspects. Hence, they may have to comply with school regulation with respect to the period or time to administer the CA but by and large the exact time to administer the exercise, the mode (test/assignment) it takes, conformity with the number of exercises undertaken, the type of questions set or whether or not there is CA at all are at the discretion of Individual teachers. Ordinarily, neither CA question nor scripts are moderated. This situation leaves much to be desired certainly and may not be helping to ensure fairness and equity in the assessment of learners at all levels of education because the current way CA is implemented allows room for malpractice in many ways.

Hence, the preoccupation of this presentation is to highlight the CA component of school based assessment with a view to drawing attention to it as also crucial to the over all result of students and attempt to make it into a more standard practice than it is now. To achieve these, precisely, the paper examines:

- School Based Assessment
- Fairness in School Based Assessment
- Problems with the Implementation of CA
- Conclusion

1.0 School Based Assessment

Assessment and schooling go hand in hand. The assessment of learners and learning is a regular practice in education and are used to determine how far learners have learnt or mastered an educational task or knowledge or how well an educational process has addressed it's set objectives. Anikweze (2005: 2) precisely refers to Assessment as "the process of investigating the status or standard of learners' attainment, with reference to expected outcomes that must have been specified as objectives" when it concerns learners' output. The Assessment of learners is often on going in any school set up. Infact, it is even undertaken as a basis for admitting students into the school in the first place once schooling has already been commenced. Assessment involves the practical

assignment of numbers or figures to describe the quantity, quality or frequency of learning as the basis to interpret knowledge acquired.

Assessment is a broad based concept but this presentation is focused on School Based Assessment (SBA) generally and specifically, the continuous Assessment CA component of it.

School based assessment as cited by Griffith (2005:2) refers to the “process where students, as candidates, undertake specified assignments during the course of the school year under the guidance of the teacher... as part of a subject examination”. It is therefore expected that the school environment in its totality provides a conducive situation to facilitate learning and subsequent assessment procedures. School Based Assessment brings Assessment and teaching together for the benefit of the students and provides the teacher with the opportunity to participate in a unique way in the Assessment process that leads to the final grade obtained by his or her students. For this reason, Njabili, Abedi, Magesse and Kalole (2005:2) add that “The fundamental role of Assessment is to provide authentic and meaningful feedback for improving student learning, instructional practice and educational options” which means that Assessment is not and so should not be seen as an end in itself but a means to a justifiable end of learning”.

On the whole, teachers/lecturers engage themselves in the use of various tools and strategies including tests, take home assignments, projects/term papers and other measurement procedures for the assessment of learners (Anikweze, 2005).

Continuous Assessment is crucial to school based Assessment. It usually forms a substantial component of any School Based Assessment policy as it ranges from thirty to forty percent in a majority of cases. The Continuous Assessment policy according to Njabili et al (2005:4) "is entirely a school based assessment". This claim specifies the tie that exists between the two and which logically leads to the thinking that whatever affects one, affects the other.

The introduction of CA ideally is to enhance better performance of students by creating more avenues for them to earn better grades so that students' performance in each school subject is not determined at one sitting, situation or mode.

2.0 Fairness in School Based Assessment.

Among recent trends around the globe, is the concern on fairness in matters concerning the various issues in education. In some contexts, Fairness and Equity are used synonymously. Fairness or equal opportunity in assessment relates to two issues: "... fairness in . . . comparison: in essence, have the groups ... being tested had the same opportunity to learn?" (Uwakwe, 2005: p4).

Fairness however does not only relate to learning but has to do with the way and manner in which CA procedures are administered.

Fairness has been regarded as a characteristic that must be preserved so that it may be seen that teachers do not have a choice but to comply because they, more than any other stake holder in the education process, are expected to set the pace. Teachers, no matter what it takes should note that “Fairness is a central aspect of ... examination and any inherent unfairness in any examination would be contradictory to the concept” (Griffith, 2005:3). This reminder is considered critical here because, often times, the situation is contrary. Infact, school practices sometimes permit students of different arms of the same class to be taught by different lecturers so that the way they are taught the same course is different as well as the way they are assessed continuously. There is then no gain saying the fact that there are still lingering concerns about the fairness of School Based Assessment as Griffiths further asserts and to confirm the Nigerian Situation, Uwakwe (2005:4) affirms that “the answer to the question: In the Nigerian classroom context can we create an Assessment system that is fair to all learners?” is a categorical NO but urges that we can however make it fairer.

Meanwhile, in the implementation of SBA, Njabili (1999) cited in Njabili et al (2005:4) identify some factors that may pose challenges to the authenticity and dependability of all CA marks. These are:

- Number of CA test/assignments to be given per course.
- Absenteeism/late/non submission of tests/assignments.
- 'Make up' tests/assignment.
- Plagiarism.
- Calculation of final CA marks for each subject.

Permit this presentation to say that the above parameters are given varying attention by different lecturers even within the same school and if such is the case, which often is, the indicators are high that the fairness of CA and consequently SBA is jeopardized.

3.0 Problems with the Implementation of CA

Going by the status quo, this presentation is of the view that there are inherent problems with the derivation of CA scores and the situation deserves the focus of academics. The entire practice of CA is surrounded by laxity. Thus, there is laxity in timing. For instance, in the institution where I work, usually, at the onset of every session, an academic calendar is drawn up, which states the times when the first and second CA exercise for each of the two semesters of the session will hold among other details. However, no one enforces the timing so that individual lecturers decide along with their students when to administer CA. In some cases CA has been taken after the semester examination even though school rules

indicate that CA scores must be compiled and released to students at least two weeks before the commencement of semester examinations.

There is also laxity in terms of the mode that the CA exercise takes. For instance, a school calendar may specify two CA tests, but because there is no enforcement, some lecturers and their students agree on one test and one assignment, one test and two assignments, one test only, two to three tests only and at times, although rarely, there is no test or assignment at all.

Further laxity has been observed in relation to the content of CA. The normal tendency is for lecturers to agree with students over the aspect of the course to be administered CA for which students always request for areas which they consider convenient in terms of their understanding while lecturers think in terms of the convenience of marking. Sometimes, both parties arrive at a compromise otherwise, one party suffers.

Generally, between and within institutions, disparities exist in terms of how CA marks are realized. Some lecturers/Institutions include marks allotted to class attendance or some other areas that they consider relevant while some do not and base their scores only on actual scores earned from the CA.

Griffiths (2005) captures another area of disparity which relates to teacher involvement. He opines that the input of teachers/lecturers in CA may not be fair

because different lecturers may understand their involvement differently. For example, within the same school system, it is possible to have lecturers who treat assignments and tests purely as examination and offer non or very little guidance to the students while some lecturers may be so involved that they may end up doing much of the work for students because of the magnitude of guidance they provide. The consequence of such a situation is that the result of students in the later situation does not reflect the level at which students would be able to perform when asked to undertake a similar task in future. The result of the students would then not be reliable, he concludes. There is also the consequence of unfairness to the students of such lecturers when compared.

Other areas of disparities noticed across the board is that there are lecturers who grant students the opportunity of a make up test when they miss one, while others do not, some lecturers return marked CA scripts and make corrections on them while others do not, some lecturers remark CA scripts while others do not and some disclose CA marks to students while others do not.

The last but not the least matter discussed here relates to the non moderation of CA questions and scripts generally. Except when there is a problem, CA scripts are not called upon by the higher authority.

4.0 Conclusion

Going by the problems that this presentation highlights in relation to CA administration, it may be obvious that current CA practices leave much to be desired. As hard as institutions struggle to make their examination standard, incidents of malpractice abound so, the fate of CA which has little standard is certainly worse.

The disparities and practices that have been discussed here are not healthy to overall learning generally in terms of lacking fairness on the one hand besides the fact that students could earn overall results which they either merited or did not, all of which have further consequences. The question that academics are expected to attempt to answer consequently is: How can we make CA administration a more standard practice than what it is now?

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