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### **Abstract**

One of the functions of a school is the certification of the individual learner under its embrace. To effectively carry out this role, assessment of one kind or the other is a prerequisite. The Nigeria's National Policy on Education (NPE) recommended the use of continuous assessment for taking summative decisions on students' level of attainment at the end of any level of schooling. This qualitative study is an attempt at evaluating continuous assessment practices in selected Nigerian Secondary Schools. The sample consists of 500 stratified randomly selected teachers (age range 30-55 years; male=198; female=302) from ten randomly selected schools within Ilorin metropolis. Data collection was through interviews and focus group discussion which centred around the teachers' continuous assessment practices based on the four basic attributes (systematic, comprehensive, cumulative and guidance-oriented) that characterise continuous assessment. Results show that the continuous assessment practices of most of the teachers were faulty and deviated markedly from policy guidelines. It is recommended, that in-service training be organised for secondary school teachers in Nigeria, to educate them more on continuous assessment guidelines as spelt out in National Policy on Education for the attainment of the overall educational goals.

**Key words:** Continuous assessment; practices; policy guidelines; secondary school teachers; Nigeria.

## **Introduction**

One of the functions of a school is the certification of the individual learner under its embrace (Idowu & Esere, 2009). To effectively carry out this role, assessment of one kind or the other is a prerequisite. Assessment is a means whereby the teacher obtains information about knowledge gains, behavioural changes and other aspects of the development of learners (Oguneye, 2002). It involves the deliberate effort of the teacher to measure the effect of the instructional process as well as the overall effect of school learning on the behaviour of students. Assessment covers all aspects of school experience both within and outside the classroom. It covers the cognitive as well as the affective and psychomotor aspects of learning.

In Nigeria, Educational Planners and Administrators are now more conscious than ever before of their role in the nationwide scheme of curriculum innovation. Not only have new courses been introduced and new contents injected into existing subjects, a fundamental change in the system of assessment of students' performance has also emerged through the formalisation of continuous assessment as a major component of evaluation process (Oyesola, 1986; Idowu & Esere, 2009).

### ***The Concept of Continuous Assessment***

In order to evaluate the new educational system, one policy that cuts across all educational levels through out Nigeria is that on continuous assessment. In section 1 of the National Policy on Education (revised 2004), which deals with the philosophy and goals of education in Nigeria, paragraph 9(g) states that "educational assessment and evaluation shall be liberalised by their being based in whole or in part on continuous assessment of the progress of the individual" (p.9). This statement is well amplified in subsequent sections of the document dealing with Primary Education (Section 4), Secondary Education (Section 5), Tertiary Education and finally in Section 12 which deals with the Planning, Administration and Supervision of Education.

The repeated emphasis being placed on continuous assessment is a clear evidence of its importance. The National Steering Committee on Continuous Assessment in Nigeria Schools led by Professor Yoye regards continuous assessment as a method of ascertaining what a child gains from schooling in terms of knowledge, industry and character development, taking into account all his/her performances in tests, assignments, projects and other educational activities during a given period of term, year, or during the entire period of an educational level (Ipaye, 1995). It is also a method of using the recorded performances of each pupil to help him or her improve on his or her achievement through guidance. According to Ezewu and Okoye (1986), continuous assessment refers to a systematic and objective process of determining the extent of a student's performance in all the expected changes in his behaviour, from the day he enters upon a course of study and a judicious accumulation of all pieces of information derived from this purpose with a view to using them to guide and shape the student and to serve as basis for making important decisions about the child. In other words, continuous assessment should be systematic, comprehensive, cumulative and guidance oriented.

Continuous assessment is systematic in the sense that it is planned, graded to suit the age and experience of the children and is given at suitable intervals during the school year. Appropriate timing saves students from being tested to death or becoming bored with too frequent assessments. Comprehensiveness of continuous assessment means that it is not focused on academic skills alone. It embraces the cognitive, the psychomotor and the affective domains. A child is assessed as a total entity using all the psychometric devices such as test and non test techniques. Cumulative characteristics of continuous assessment means that all information gathered on the individual has to be pooled together before a decision can be taken. To say that continuous assessment is guidance oriented means that the information so collected is to be used for educational, vocational and personal- social decision-making for the child. Guidance and counselling activities thrive better on valid, sequential, systematic, continuous, cumulative and comprehensive information. (Denga, 1986).

Conceptually as well as in practice, continuous assessment provides feedback to children and teachers. Such feedback provides information which is used for purposes of improving on the child's performance or modifying the content, context and methods of teaching, as well as in making a variety of other decisions.

However, the notion of whether continuous assessment in Nigerian schools take into cognisance these four attributes, places a question mark on the classroom teacher. What are the continuous assessment practices of secondary school teachers in Nigerian? This is the focus of this study.

Utilising data obtained from Focus Group Discussions and interviews with 500 randomly selected teachers in 10 schools in Ilorin, Nigeria, the study sought to explore continuous assessment practices among teachers in Nigerian secondary schools.

### **Method**

*Design:* This study employed a qualitative approach to data collection. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate for a study of this nature as it can give depth and details of phenomena that are difficult to convey with quantitative methods (Flick, 2002).

*Participants and Setting:* Recruitment of participants for the study was by stratified random selection, guided by the information provided by the Kwara State Teaching Service Commission. Thus the participants for the study comprised 500 teachers (age range 30-55 years; male=198; female=302).

*Procedure for Data Collection:* Prior to the commencement of the programme, permission to conduct the study was sought from principals of the selected secondary schools where the study was carried out. Thereafter, the participants' consent was sought and obtained. They were equally assured of anonymity and confidentiality. The data collection exercise was mainly through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Litosseliti (2003) points out that compared with other qualitative methods where meaning emerges from the participants, focus group have an element of flexibility and adaptability. Toward this end, 10 focus group discussions (one for each school) were held with the participants. Each discussion lasted for an average of 1 hour and revolved around one major theme:

- Teachers' continuous assessment practices in relation to the four major attributes that characterise continuous assessment. Recording of the FGDs sessions was made through note-taking and also by the use of audio-cassettes.

*Method of Data Analysis:* Descriptive analysis was used for the demographic characteristics of the participants and to present the participants' responses on their continuous assessment practices. The transcription of the recorded audio cassettes, together with the recorded field notes, provided data for the thematic analysis. Transcripts were read and annotated. Multiple readings of the transcripts were undertaken to identify major themes or ideas revealed by the group members as well as critical words, phrases and examples. The experiences of the participants were compared and contrasted, searching for patterns either made explicitly by participants or derived implicitly. Important and frequently expressed ideas or themes were then studied for pattern of connection and grouped into broader categories. The main themes in the data formed a picture that reflected the assessment practices of all the teachers in the study.

### **Results**

The results of the demographic data showed that majority of the participants (60.4%) were females (Table 1). As Table 1 further showed, not all the teachers (29.6%) that formed sample for this study were professionally trained. The National Certificate in Education is currently the lowest qualification in Teacher Education in Nigeria. Table 1 also showed that the participants come from different parts of Nigeria with the Yorubas constituting the highest (61.8%).

**Systematic Attribute of Continuous Assessment:** Most of the participants (98%) consented to the fact that their continuous assessment practice is systematic in nature (Figure 1).

*One participant remarked:* The students in my school are tested on a regular systematic basis.  
*Another participant added:* Continuous assessment in my school is administered at predetermined intervals throughout the school year.

**Comprehensive Attribute of Continuous Assessment:** On the question of whether the teachers do ensure comprehensiveness in their continuous assessment practice, only 25% of the participants agreed to factoring the three (cognitive, psychomotor and affective) domains of learning into the overall performance of their students (Figure 1).

*One participant reported:* Frankly, apart from cognitive assessment, I have never bothered about other aspects of students' performances.

*Another participant added:* I have never factored the affective and psychomotor domains into the overall performance of the students because I do not know how to do it.

**Cumulative Attribute of Continuous Assessment:** 75% of the participants agreed to the fact that they normally ensure that the performances of the continuous assessment of the students are recorded cumulatively and that the final grade represents the students' performance over the year (Figure 1).

*One participant reported:* A students' continuous assessment scores during a particular term are recorded appropriately and used as part of the final score at the end of the term.

*Another participant added:* We normally organise three continuous assessment tests before the final examination and these scores form part of the students' overall grade at the end of the term. The terms' grades are also cumulatively recorded to form the session's final grade of the students.

**Guidance-Oriented Attribute of Continuous Assessment.** On the issue of guidance regarding students' continuous assessment scores, 70% of the participants owned up to the fact that they have not been bothering about speaking with their students regarding their performances.

*One participant remarked:* I do not normally call the students to discuss their performances

*Another participant added:* Frankly, I have never seen it as my duty to use the test scores to guide the students.

*Yet another participant added.* I have not been bothering about guiding the students based on their test scores, but I normally refer those of them that are very poor to the school counsellor.

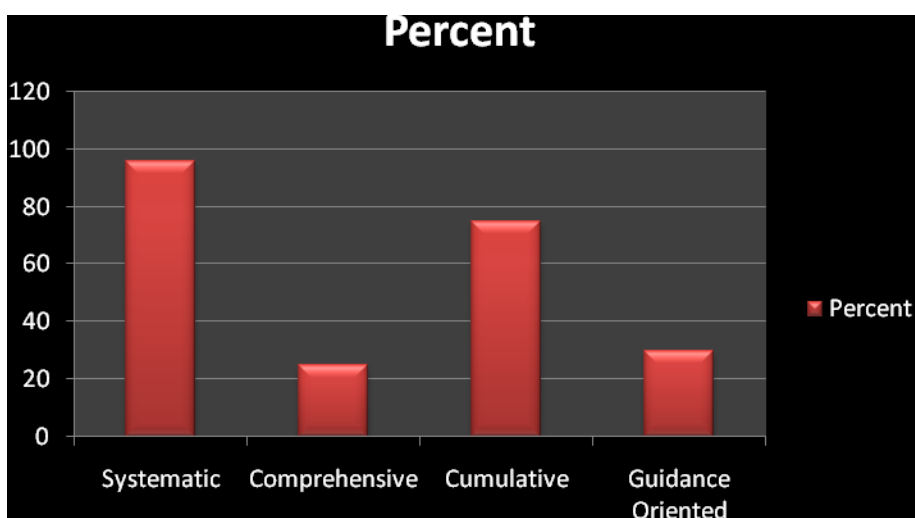
**Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Participants**

Characteristics	Frequency (N = 500)	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	198	39.6
Female	302	60.4

<b>Educational Qualification</b>		
NCE ✓	31	6.2
B.A.(Ed) ✓	117	24.4
B.Sc.(Ed) ✓	101	20.2
PGDE ✓	58	11.6
M.A.(Ed) ✓	26	5.2
M.Sc.(Ed) ✓	19	3.8
B.A. ×	72	14.4
B.Sc. ×	51	10.2
M.A. ×	14	2.8
M.Sc. ×	11	2.2
<b>Ethnic Group</b>		
Hausa	91	18.2
Ibo	101	20.2
Yoruba	308	61.6

✓ = With professional (teaching) qualification

× = Without professional (teaching) qualification



**Figure 1:** Distribution of Respondents on Reported Continuous Assessment Practices Based on the Four Attributes of Continuous Assessment

## Discussion

Teaching, learning and assessment are inextricably linked and assessment is the most significant motivator for learning. Continuous assessment has been a feature of the Nigerian school system for many years now. It is unfortunate however, that continuous assessment has not made the expected contribution to pupils' school performance due to inherent problems in its operation.

Results emanating from the current study suggested that continuous assessment practices of most of the teachers were systematic in nature in the sense that the students are tested at pre-determined intervals within a given school year. This is in line with the position of Denga (1986) that students' assessment should be carried out in such a way that the students are not overstretched in the name of assessment. The results also show that assessment practices of most of the teachers are okay as far as the cumulative nature of continuous assessment is concerned. This is also commendable and lends credence to the submission of Ipaye (1995) that the major advantage of continuous assessment is the cumulative evidence it provides the learner regarding the direction of his/her achievement in the academic area.

However, the results emanating from the present study show that the continuous assessment practices of most of the teachers fall short of being comprehensive and guidance-oriented in nature. These latest findings contradict the work of Olomolaiye (1992) who emphasised the value of evaluating the outcomes not only of the cognitive but also the affective and psychomotor development, and the use of such evaluation for the proper guidance of the students. Ndudi (2001) also agrees with Olomolaiye (1992) that in order to assess each learner adequately, and to discover his/her latent skills, knowledge and abilities, teachers should resort to the use of tests with the aim of collecting information with respect to the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning. It is when a child has been exposed to a variety of learning tasks as well as to conglomerate of assessment devices that valid information could be obtained about the child's overall performance. These findings also run contrary to educational objectives of Nigeria's National Policy on Education which emphasised a comprehensive assessment of learners considering all the various aspects of the students' development in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. That most of the teachers are familiar with assessment in the cognitive domain alone (Idowu & Esere, 2009) may not be unconnected with the fact that some of them (Table 1) are not professionally trained. This is a worrisome trend in Nigeria's educational system. A situation where people are employed to teach without being trained in the art of teaching should not be. Little wonder some of the teachers do not know how to factor affective and psychomotor domains into the overall performance of the students. To bring out an overall ability of a learner, a situation where he is assessed in the three domains of learning is better than just basing assessment in the cognitive domain alone. Ensuring comprehensiveness in continuous assessment is useful because education is not just about intellectual ability; it is about acquisition of interpersonal skills, about right character traits, about discipline, about aptitude and skills (Idowu & Esere, 2009) and all these should be factored in the overall performance of students and used for guidance purposes.

## Conclusion/Recommendation

This study investigated continuous assessment practices of Secondary School teachers in Nigeria. All assessment practices reflect a number of assumptions relating to the nature of learning and the purpose of assessment. If educational institutions intend to equip graduates with attributes necessary for professional practice, for example critical thinking and lifelong learning capabilities, then current assessment practices must be examined.

Toward this end, it is recommended that the government of Nigeria and Teachers Registration Council should

- mandate teachers to go for in-service training and refresher courses to update their knowledge and skills of continuous assessment.
- stop employing people without requisite teaching qualification to teach in Nigerian schools.

- train and post more guidance counsellors in secondary schools to help in ensuring that continuous assessment practices of the teachers are as spelt out in the National Policy on Education.

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