

**HOW DIAGNOSTIC IS THE ASSESSMENT OF THE
"USE OF ENGLISH"? THE CASE OF KADUNA
POLYTECHNIC**

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ABSTRACT

In Nigeria, the “Use of English” (UOE) course is a general but compulsory course of study for the certification of students in all disciplines of Polytechnic education at all levels. The assessment of students in the UOE is school based. Semester results are made up of continuous assessment (C.A) and examination scores. The examination component of students’ semester result is no doubt summative assessment in orientation and practice. Over the years, the CA also has only been assessed summatively although it could be both summative and formative, which is diagnostic assessment. This paper investigates the awareness of the lecturers of the UOE about diagnostic assessment, whether they engage it and if not, why not through a set of questionnaire administered on some lecturers. The questionnaires were analyzed by obtaining the Mean, Variance and Consistence Index for each response as well as its standard deviation. Results obtained reveal that most lecturers are not aware that CA could be diagnostic consequently; they do not engage it whereas doing so would increase their students’ motivation and thus enhance their performance. Hence, the paper recommends among others the creation of the awareness of diagnostic assessment among lecturers.

INTRODUCTION

The “Use of English” (UOE) course is one of the general courses instituted by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) to satisfy the requirements for the certification of students in all disciplines accredited by the Board. A course is said to be NBTE accredited when it has the approval of the Board to be run. The Board is the Federal Government of Nigeria’s organ that is responsible for overseeing the activities of all Polytechnics and Monotechnics nationally. Apparently, due to the role that the English language plays in the Nigerian Education System in particular and Society in general, the Board has as one of the laudable objectives for the inclusion of the UOE syllabi of the disciplines to be:

This course is designed to provide the student with the necessary language skills that will enable him to cope effectively with the challenges of his course, to use English language effectively in the practice of his profession as well as interact with others in the society (NBTE, 1999 p.4)

The Board has in place eight syllabi for the eight semesters of study from the National Diploma One (NDI) level to the Higher National Diploma Two (HNDII) level of Polytechnic education which is one of the arms of tertiary level education in Nigeria. The course comes under the nomenclatures of the “Use of English” and “communication skills”. In Kaduna Polytechnic, it is taught by lecturers of the Department of Languages to all the students in the one hundred and five (105) disciplines offered in the institution as servicing lecturers of the other departments and they have the responsibilities to teach the course and as well assess the performance of students in it for their certification.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The assessment of students in the UOE as well as in all other courses in Kaduna Polytechnic and similarly in all the tiers of education in Nigeria is school based; examinations are arranged and conducted within the institution. In practice, the semester results of students is broken down into two components: the Continuous Assessment (CA) and the examination. The CA is forty percent (40%) while the examination is sixty percent (60%) to make up the one hundred percent (100%) that a student could score each semester. The examination component is administered at the end of a semester and it is clearly summative assessment in principle and practice. This is to say that the way it operates tallies with the view of Bloom, Hastings and Madaus (1971, p.117) that it “indicates the type of evaluation used at the end of a term, course of program . . . for purposes of grading, certification.” They add that its

essential characteristic is to make a judgment about the students and others with regards to the effectiveness of learning or instruction. In the case of the CA component, it has also only been summative in principle and practice even though it could as well be formative. According to Anderson and Krathwohl (2001, pp.101-102) as cited in (Newton, 2007, p.156), “formative assessment is concerned with gathering information about learning as learning is taking place, so that ‘in flight’ instructional modifications may be made to improve the quality or amount of learning”. They add to this view by saying that for them, it is the “use of systematic evaluation in the process of curriculum construction, teaching and learning for the purpose of improving any of these three processes”.

Carless (2007, p.171) sees “formative assessment as a process of eliciting understandings from the learner and using them to enhance teaching and learning”. Going further, Looney (2007, p.273) takes on the dimension that “formative approaches are... requirements for diagnostic assessment... intended to help identify learners’ capacities and needs,... learning disabilities or difficulties”. The purpose of diagnostic assessment according to Swearingen, (2002) is to ascertain prior to instruction each student’s strengths, weaknesses, knowledge and skills.

Bearing the aforementioned in mind, we are of the view that C.A could both be formative and summative; it could provide lecturers with information about students prior knowledge before a learning activity is begun and also provide data for the understanding of how much learning has taken place after the learning activity is completed. Therefore, if lecturers have the understanding of diagnostic assessment they would be in a better position to enhance students' performance in CA and consequently in their examination.

However, it seems that many lecturers of the UOE only understand the summative conduct of CA. Also, it seems that even those who understand that CA could also be formatively assessed are not engaging it due to some constraints.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The UOE studies is relevant to Nigerians for obvious reasons. Hence, the way and manner it is conducted is very crucial. The purpose of this study is to determine if lecturers are aware of formative /diagnostic assessment and how much of it they incorporate in the teaching of UOE. Precisely, we aim to determine if lecturers know about formative/diagnostic assessment first and foremost. Secondly, we aim to know if they engage formative

assessment in their teaching of the UOE and lastly, to know whether they know of formative assessment but do not use it in the teaching of the UOE and why they do not.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant because by implication it has bearing on all the one hundred and five (105) disciplines of Kaduna Polytechnic (Onjewu, 2007) to which the UOE is taught because students' results in the UOE add up to the total scores for their certification. In another vein, the findings in this study, could inform the basis for the organization of a departmental workshop at which these researchers could share experiences with their colleagues in their department and sister departments on the benefits of formative assessment in order to diagnose the needs of students for an over all enhanced teaching and learning.

Also, the results of the findings of this research could be discussed at a National conference for tertiary institutions with the view of sharing the idea nationally.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study sought data in answer to the following questions:

- Are the lecturers of the UOE aware that they could engage formative/diagnostic assessment in their teaching?
- Do the lecturers use formative assessment to derive the CA scores of their students?
- If the lecturers do not engage formative assessment, why do they not?

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The academic staff members of the Department of languages, College of Administrative Studies and Social Sciences (CASSS), Kaduna Polytechnic who are sixty one in number comprised the population of the study. The sample was forty three including only those engaged in the teaching of UOE because apart from them, the others teach other languages like French, Arabic and Hausa.

INSTRUMENTATION

A questionnaire was designed to measure the lecturers' perception of formative /diagnostic assessment. It sought information relating to the number of years spent on the job, their educational qualifications, their uses of test results and whether they sometimes modify teaching topics based on test results, involve students in identifying their needs to study the UOE and the problems encountered in teaching.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF THE INSTRUMENT

The instrument was valid in that it provided answers to the research questions of the study by determining the particular uses that test results are put by the lecturers. In the case of reliability, the instrument was subjected to the input and critique of experts in Educational Measurement as well as Mathematics and Statistics of the University of Benin and Kaduna Polytechnic respectively.

DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

Several techniques were engaged to analyze the data obtained. In the case of teaching experience of the lecturers and their teaching qualifications, the simple percentage was used while to determine the lecturers' perception of assessment, the Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) were engaged on the one hand. The Variance and Consistency Index (CI) were also used on the other hand.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Table 1.1: Frequency distribution of teaching experience

TEACHING EXPERIENCE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Less than 5 years	1	2.3
6 to 10 years	7	16.3
22 to 15 years	15	34.9
16 to 20 years	6	14.0
Above 20 years	14	32.6
TOTAL	43	100

Table 1.1 reveals that 1 (2.3%) of lecturers teaching English have taught for less than 5 years, 7 (16.3%) for 6 to 10 years, 15 (34.9%) for 11 to 15 years 6(14.0%) for 16 to 20 years and 14 (32.6%) for over 20 years. This shows that the lecturers are experienced.

Table 1.2: Frequency distribution of lecturers' qualifications

TEACHING EXPERIENCE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
PGDE	5	11.6
First degree	20	46.5
Master	15	34.9
PhD	2	4.7
TOTAL	45	97.7

Table 1.2 Reveals that 5 (11.6%) of lecturers teaching English have post graduate Diploma in Education (PGOE) 20 (46.5%) have First degree, 15 (34.9%) have Masters degree and 2 (4.7%) have Ph.D. This shows that lecturers of UOE are qualified.

Table 2.1: Mean and Standard Deviation of lecturers' Perception of Assessment.

S/NO	STATEMENT	MEAN	SD
1	CA is component of semester assessment	4.86	.41
2	CA questions are only based on what has been taught	4.78	.42
3	Test sometimes given to determine entry level	3.84	1.23
4.	Teaching modified based on test results	3.71	1.18
5.	Administer test only for CA	2.60	1.53
6.	Topics modified based on test results	3.64	1.28
7	Large class size militates against use of test for diagnosis	3.72	1.18
8.	Heavy workload militates against use of test for diagnosis	3.66	1.26
9.	Assessment methods used are effective	3.83	1.10
10.	Students who know their needs would be met are more motivated	4.14	.89
11.	Involving students in needs identification enhances performance	4.44	.67
12.	Syllabus can be modified based on test results	4.33	.64

Table 2.1 reveals that lecturers highly agreed with statements 1,2,10, 11 and 12 which have mean scores of 4.86, 4.78 4.14, 4.44 and 4.33. They agreed with statements 3,4,6,7,8, and 9 which have mean scores of 3.84, 3.71, 3.64, 3.72, 3.66 and 3.83. Statement 5 has a mean score of 2.60 which shows they were undecided. Statement I has the highest means score of 4.86 while 5 has the lowest of 2.60. Standard deviation shows that variation is low in statements 1,2,10,11and 12 which are 0.41, 0.42, 0.89, 0.69 and 0.64 but are higher in statements 3,4,5,6,7,8 and 9 which are 1.23 1.8, 1.53, 1.28, 1.19, 1.26 and 1.01. Mean score of statements 1 and 2 are therefore more representative because they have the least standard deviation of 0.41 and 0.42.

Table 2.2: Consistency Indices of lecturers' perception of assessment.

S/NO	STATEMENT	VARIANCE	C.I
1	CA is component of semester assessment	.023	.977
2	CA questions are only based on what has been taught	0.00	1.000
3	Test sometimes given to determine entry level	.534	.466
4.	Teaching modified based on test results	.114	.886
5.	Administer test only for CA	.939	.061
6.	Topics modified based on test results	.694	.306
7	Large class size militates against use of test for diagnosis	.733	.267
8.	Heavy workload militates against use of test for diagnosis	.755	.245
9.	Assessment methods used are effective	.472	.528
10.	Students who know their needs would be met are more motivated	.298	.702
11.	Involving students in needs identification enhances performance	.114	.886
12.	Syllabus can be modified based on test results	.114	.886

Table 2.2 shows that statement 1,2,10, 11, and 12 have the highest agreement because their CI's are 0.977, 1.00, 0.702, 0.886 and 0.886. This shows that lecturers agreed that C.A is a component of the semester assessment, C.A questions are only based on what has been taught, students are more motivated when they know their needs would be met, involving student in needs identification enhances performance and that syllabus could be modified based on test results. Statement 9 has an average CI of 0.528 and shows that lectures were not very certain if assessments used are effective. Statements 4,5,6,7, and 8 are nearest to 0 with CI's of 0.267, 0.061, 0.306, 0.267 and 0.245 this means lecturers disagreed that they administer tests for CA only, modify teaching methods and topics based on tests results, large class size or heavy mark load militate against the use of diagnostic tests. It is worthy to note that statements 4,6,7 and 8 that their mean scores showed that lecturers agreed with in table 2.1 became statements that they least agreed with in table 2.2. This is because the mean score unlike the measures of variability does not effectively indicate the measure of central tendency of a particular distribution.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The major findings are:

- ✓ Lectures do not administer test for C.A only. They administer tests sometimes to determine entry level of students, but CA is only based on what has been taught.
- ✓ Results of the tests administered by the lecturers are not used diagnostically because they do not use such results to modify their teaching methods or topics taught.
- ✓ Large class size and heavy work load are not factors militating against. The use of diagnostic tests.
- ✓ Lecturers believe that if students' needs are identified and they (students) know the needs would be met, they (students) would be more motivated and this will enhance their performance.
- ✓ Syllabus could be modified to meet student's needs.

From the foregoing, it could be deduced that CA is only always based on what has been taught. Also, it is obvious that lecturers do not engage diagnostic assessment. From all indications, if indeed large class size and heavy workload are not the military factors, we could infer that the problem is the syllabus. Lecturers, at the commencement of every semester are handed a syllabus for each of the classes that they have been assigned which they are expected to implement to the letter against all odds because examination questions would solely be based on it. In fact, to make sure this is the case; a lecturer may not be

involved in setting the examination questions for the classes taught. Rather, another is assigned the responsibility to do so following the syllabus. Therefore, every lecturer is only focused on the implementation of their syllabus even though they know that it could be modified to better meet the needs of their students who would in turn be better motivated if such is done.

Conclusion

Diagnostic assessment which comprises the formative and summative attributes is a very crucial component of education. Ideally, assessment should be more than merely a test at the end of instruction. It should be an integral part of instruction which provides information and guides to lecturers as they make instructional decision. It is therefore imperative for lecturers to utilize assessment in an effective manner bearing in mind the purpose of and principles behind it. In particular, it is important that they investigate and utilize diagnostic assessment.

We, therefore, make the following recommendations:

- Considering the importance of the UOE to Polytechnic students in and out of school, its successful implementation should not continually be left to chance. Conscious effort like what has been done in this paper should always be made to enable its teaching and learning be more relevant, meaningful and as effective as possible.
- In house departmental workshops should be organized periodically on how to teach the various aspects of the UOE and its assessment methods to enable the cross fertilization of experience among lecturers. Precisely, we recommend one to discuss diagnostic assessment as soon as possible.
- Although, school authorities like the Polytechnics have to ensure the implementation of the syllabus handed down by supervisory agencies, they should also invent and monitor an internal machinery for implementation that takes into consideration their local and peculiar situations.
- Lecturers themselves should be more up and about and cultivate a better zeal to learn on the job by collaborating with colleagues to constantly renew their knowledge.

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