African Research Review

Alternative Assessment and Women Education in Nigeria

(Pp. 303-310)

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Abstract

*Women in Nigerian Society are in most cases not seen to have been well
treated. This in most cases has been attributed to cultural factors which saw
the place of the woman as in the kitchen. The situation is fast changing
though and in some states within Nigeria there is a preponderance of women
in schools. In many states, women education centers have been established to
open up educational opportunities for women folk. Very often, the emphasis
have been on vocational education specialties which in most cases are
mainly amenable to alternative assessment if the psychomotor outcomes they
emphasis are to be realized. This paper examines the women education
programs as presently implemented in two states in Nigeria. A sample of fifty
two trainers was used as source of data collection. A questionnaire which
explores the assessment processes utilized was constructed. Supervisors of
two of the centers were interviewed. The data was analyzed using an
interpretative norm and thick descriptions. Alternative assessment
procedures used often were identified. Based on the results it was
recommended that teachers in these centers should be assisted to put into
practice the use of some authentic assessment techniques.*

Introduction

Traditional education existed in Nigeria before the coming of the Europeans. it constituted the process of acculturation and the development of national character and facilitated the transfer of societal rules, regulations, customs, tradition and culture from one generation to the other. it also enhanced the development of social attitude and optimal development of the individual. It is as a result that Fafunwa (1974) maintains that the history of education in Africa is incomplete without adequate knowledge of the traditional or indigenous education. Ngwu (2006) reiterated that before the coming of the Europeans to Nigeria, there were well established systems of education in the country. According to him, this education was part of the cultural system of the people and took place in the environment where the children grew up, in the homes where interpersonal communication skills were taught; in the villages where group process and skills were learned, in the farms where they learned vocational skills and methods of agriculture, in the age grade sets where social communication political skills and knowledge were acquired, in the market for learning economic and marketing skills etc. There was no rigid division between learning and life.

In Nigeria pre-colonial era, there was no laid down education for women. An average Nigerian traditional woman was a complete servant to the husband and children and was bound to live her life as the culture and tradition of her community dictates. Basically, a woman in traditional Nigerian society was only domestically inclined. Her main duty was to keep the home, work in the farm and teach her female children the rudiments of home keeping.

Early Western education in Nigerian was centered on Literacy and its origin can be traced to Muslim traders and the Portuguese Priest. Literacy among the Muslims was centered on Koran and the worship of Allah while among Christians it centered on the Bible and the worship of god. According to Omolewa (1981) these contact with Muslims and Christians led to traditional religion being gradually abandoned. it should be noted that women generally had no place in the early literacy efforts in Nigeria; attention was given to only men. The journey in women education has progressed tremendously since then.

Drawing attention to the situation of women education in early years of Nigerian education, Maduewesi (2005) noted that Nigerian woman was seen as passive sexual object who was both a devoted wife and a mother for whom society has carved out defined roles, manners and acceptable characteristics.

In those bad old days according to Nigerian cultures. Women are not seen or heard, but in few cases could occasionally be seen with absolute permission of her husband. The Nigerian woman was relegated to the background, ignored, dehumanized and generally confined to lower status in society. She only featured when allowed and in none descript activities like, serving, dancing and entertainment. This was why when western education came to Nigeria women were shielded from its influence until very late. The result is that the gap between education men and women is still very wide. The prevailing situation is such that women have now embraced education, the consequence is that the disparity between men women education are closing day by day.

In Nigeria, government has shown interest in women education because of its commitment to the international conventions on the rights of women. Nigeria is taking a queue from what is happening in other countries of the world. Afemikhe (1988) had indicated that women lag behind men in education and also indicated an increase in number of women occupying decision making positions. Oyinlola (2000) reflecting on Kofi Annan's point of view indicated that in economic terms, the gender divide is widening; women earn less, are more often unemployed and generally are poorer than men'. Jellema and Unterhalter (2005) quoting Herz and Sperling (2004) articulates the benefits of women education to include availability of women able to resist debilitating practices such as female genital cutting, early marriage and domestic abuse by male partners'. Therefore building capacity of women is a desideratum. As a result one cannot but agree with pant (2004) who opined that

> capacity building for women's collectives is an essential input to reduce the vulnerability of group members to poverty, and to enhance their participation in economic growth through improved livelihoods.

It is no wonder, therefore, that many initiatives have come up stream in an endeavor to promote women education. In Nigeria, a former first Lady, Dr. (Mrs.) Maryan Babagidda floated the idea of better life for rural women. Part of the efforts to actualize this was the establishment of women education centers nationwide. These centers have not fared equally well across the states in Nigeria. Whereas they have massive structures in some states, in others the centers are a shadow of their earlier conception. Within the last few years wives of state Governors have also set up skills acquisition centers

for females. The interest in all these cases is to open up opportunities for women so that they can contribute their quota to national development as well as assists them to eke better living.

Most of educational programmes in these centers are mainly technical and vocational education oriented. Generally, their major objective is to enhance the status of women in Nigeria and to encourage their participation in the national process as well as making them to be self –reliant. Various international and non governmental organizations are also involved in the education of women and to strengthen women's political action framework. A census of such courses run shows the preponderance of computer, catering, fashion designing courses.

These are programs which have great tilt toward acquisition of skills. The attainment of such skills can best be assessed through use of performance assessment approaches. Authentic assessment should be in the fore in this regard. The use of the conventional assessment techniques prevalent in formal schools may not bring out clearly what the participants may have learnt. it is as a result that this paper explored the utilization of authentic assessment procedures as part of overall training of the participants in these women education centers.

Research Questions
The questions addressed in this study were:

1. What prevalent assessment techniques are used as part of the training programs in the women education centers?

2. Are authentic assessment techniques more prevalent than the traditional assessment procedures?

3. What are the assessment needs of the instructors in these centers?

Methodology of the Study
The population for this study comprises all instructors in the women education centers in Edo state of Nigeria. In Edo state there are presently four centers with an instructor's population of fifty two. Because of the small size of the population, an attempt was made to sample all members but usable questionnaires were obtained from 87 instructors.

A questionnaire designed by the researchers and interview of coordinators of two centers were utilized. Two relevant sections of the questionnaire were

used. The first section asked respondents to indicate how often they use some assessment procedures which included the conventional assessment practices and some authentic assessment procedures. Respondents were asked to respond on a three-point scale of 'never used', rarely used' and 'frequently used'. The final section requested for information on amount of need required to utilize assessment procedures in the first section. The response categories for this section were 'no need at all' 'a limited need' and 'much need'. The coordinators of two of the centers were interviewed on matters related to assessment practices.

Two research assistants assisted with data collection. The usable questionnaires were scored. For the first part of the questionnaire frequencies of the responses were determined. For each of the items 'never used', ' rarely used' and 'frequently used' were scored 1, 2 and 3 respectively . For the last section, 'no need at all', 'a limited need' and 'much need' were scored 1, 2 and 3 respectively.

The lower real limit of frequently used response which was 2.5 was used as a normative value for items requesting for use of assessment practices. Thus any mean value greater than 2.5 was indicative of use of the assessment procedure. In the same token a mean greater than 2.5 indicated an assessment need.

Results
This section is presented in two sections.

Frequently used assessment procedures:
Table 1 shows that most conventional assessment techniques are used. These include essay tests, multiple choice tests, practical student exhibition, and class discussions. These are not unexpected as these groups of teachers were deployed from the secondary schools to teach in these centers. it is surprising that collection of students' best work was not indicated as a procedure. This is at variance with information provided by the coordinators who indicated that *students best works were collected and kept by the teachers as allowing students to do that could lead to loss of the good works, which were used during exhibitions.*

The fact that teachers observe students at work was good as this could assist them in the assessment of process as well as product outcomes. Unfortunately the same group of teachers claimed that they did not assess students as they worked.The situation could be that only acquisition of

process skills was of interest. The coordinators on their part indicated that it was expected that students were interviewed to get a thorough understanding of the procedures. It is possible that this expectation was not meant.

Interview of the instructors showed that initial plan was to assist trainees to acquire relevant skills but this has changed as *the trainees now register for the NABTEB examination with the hope of eventually passing the advanced courses to facilitate admission into tertiary institutions. This is contrary to the spirit behind the establishment of the centers*

Assessment Needs:
Table 2 shows the expressed needs of the teachers studied. The results are as expected as those practices utilized often did not pose problems. Thus needs were related to interview of students, open ended responses, students self assessment and collection of students best works. What this means is that portfolio utilization needs to be taught just as assessment of students by themselves is necessary. As indicated by one coordinator,

what do the students know to begin to assess themselves, nor having to collect their best works. They are learners and may not know the criteria used for deciding on the quality of the works.

The fact that the teachers have no need for practices like use of essay, multiple choice and practical was substantiated by a coordinator who indicated that

these are professional teachers who are very used to testing. Moreover the program run in the centre are practical based and therefore practical should be at the core of all happening. This is more so as skills acquisition is the thrust in the program.

The results show that conventional assessments are commonly used and the teachers equally indicated need for further training in their usage.

Discussion and Recommendations
These results point to limitations of current assessment background of teachers in these centers focusing on skills acquisition. The non utilization of portfolio should be of concern as previous writers (Mills, 1990; Murphy and Smith, 1992) have indicated that it is a valid way to assess student's understanding. Added to this is the fact that students have to rationalize the inclusion of their best works which aids in timely reflection and purposeful metacognition.

The fact that these centers were initially setup to train women and award certificates of attendance could probably have led to the emphasis in use of conventional assessment procedures. Most teacher education programs in Nigeria do not seem to emphasize these authentic assessment procedures. The same old things are taught. Teachers' trainers need to look beyond what they were taught to bring assessment in line with current developments in education. In addition it may be necessary to continuously run programs to update teachers on developments not only on pedagogy and content but also on assessment procedures. In this way one can expect to get benefit of the founding fathers of the centers.

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Table 1: Mean and Variance of Usage of some Assessment Procedures

How often do you use each of these?	Mean	Decision
Interview of students	1.50	Not used
Open-ended responses	1.87	Not used
Teacher's observation of students at work	2.61	Used
Students' self assessment	1.99	Not used
Student exhibition	2.51	Used
Class discussion	2.54	Used
Collection of students' best work	1.70	Not used
Students recitations	2.54	Used
Assessment as students work	1.69	Not used
Essay	2.62	Used
Multiple-choice questions	2.55	Used
Practical	2.80	Used

Table 2: Mean and Variance of Assessment needs

Do you need assistance on how to construct or use	Mean	Decision
Interview of students	2.60	Need
Open-ended responses	2.71	Need
Teacher's observation of students at work	2.54	Need
Students' self assessment	2.74	Need
Student exhibition	1.20	No need
Class discussion	1.33	No need
Collection of students' best work	2.65	Need
Students recitations	1.40	No need
Assessment as students work	1.45	No need
Essay	1.30	No need
Multiple-choice questions	1.23	No need
Practical	1.40	No need