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Assessment of Students' and Parents' Attitudes to Continuous Assessment: A Base-Line Study for School-Based Assessment Practice

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Abstract

This study assessed the status of the students' (the beneficiaries) and their parents' (major stakeholders) attitudes to Continuous assessment in order to determine their entry behaviour for SBA with a view to either upgrading or sustaining. The populations of the study were the Junior Secondary School students and their parents. The samples included one hundred and fifty (150) students and fifty (50) parents. The instruments used were the Students' Questionnaire on Attitude to Continuous Assessment (SQACA) and Parents' Questionnaire on Attitude to Continuous Assessment (PQACA). The major finding was that the students and the parents were slightly positively disposed to the practice of Continuous Assessment. The implications of this and other findings to effective educational management were discussed and recommendations were made.

Keywords: *Continuous Assessment; School-based Assessment.*

Introduction

There appears to be a wrong perception about what the purpose of education is. In Nigeria, many seem to believe -though wrongly- that the main purpose of education is to pass in public examinations. This has led many to believe that examinations must be passed at all costs ("a do or die affair") hence the increase in the reported cases of examination fraud at all levels of education. This wrong perception has also reduced the value placed on classroom assessment more so, since the Continuous Assessment (CA) practice has also been reduced to series of tests, mainly in the cognitive domain in many schools. There is therefore the need for improvement in the mode of evaluation in our educational system.

CA is the type of assessment in which students are assessed in the cognitive, affective and psycho-motor domains, a number of times and at certain intervals using a variety of assessment techniques such as tests, projects, observations, questionnaires and interviews. The results of these assessments are recorded and kept on a continuous basis for future use in decision making on the students and for guidance purposes. In 1977 CA practice was introduced into the Nigerian educational system at the same time the educational system was changed to the 6-3-3-4 system to replace the one-shot system of students' evaluation. In the course of implementing the CA programme, some experts observed (e.g. Emeke, 1996 and Obe, 1980), and even the Education Inspectors, that the teachers, principals, parents and students generally did not like the change in the mode of our educational evaluation to CA practice. Various reasons were given for this but the most prominent among them are that it meant more work for the teachers; the principals, teachers, parents and students did not fully understand the CA concept and that finance which was required to provide the

necessary materials for the successful implementation of the programme in the various schools, was not provided by the government. In an attempt to make CA practice work in schools despite these “problems”, the school principals came up with the idea of administering two periodic tests per term for the “CA” and the end of term examination on the students. However, these periodic tests were similar in every way to the end of term examination where all the students in a school wrote tests according to a prepared time-table for one week. The scores obtained by students in each of these tests formed part of the students’ final assessment score for the term in every respective subject. The schools in Lagos State in particular were seen practicing the old system of evaluation but using the name CA.

CA was thus being practiced with the sole aim of preparing students for examinations but with less emphasis on understanding or application and very little attention was given to the higher mental skills – synthesis and evaluation (NTI, 2006). Furthermore, the results obtained from the periodic tests do not serve any formative evaluation function for both the teacher and the students because the teachers never re-visited the topics covered irrespective of whether the students passed or failed in the periodic tests. In addition, the students were denied the opportunity of prompt feedback on the progress they have made in learning. The School-Based Assessment (SBA) practice is aimed at improving on the weaknesses of the CA practice and this is the reason why it has been introduced into the school system.

By itself, SBA is not a new method of assessment; rather it aims at improving on or removing the weaknesses which were noted by the experts and other stakeholders in the CA practice, the most important of which is the fact that it lacked the attributes of formative evaluation. Formative evaluation is used to evaluate the progress of students’ learning during instruction. According to Okoli (2000) and Onasanya (1985), formative evaluation helps to form the students’ new behaviour and it is accomplished by supplying feedback to the students. The feedback tells the student the extent he is responding correctly or incorrectly and identifies the specific learning errors that need correction. The feedback also serves as reinforcement to successful learning. The primary objective of SBA is to assess students with the aim of facilitating their learning- a reason why it is often referred to as “Assessment for Learning”. SBA is defined as an assessment practice that broadens and expands the form, mode, means and scope of assessment in the school in order to facilitate and enhance learning (NTI, 2006). Like CA, SBA uses diagnostic (pre-instruction assessment to know learners’ entry behaviours), formative (during instruction) and summative (post-instruction) assessments. However, SBA pays more attention to formative assessment than CA does to ensure that the students learn.

In SBA and CA practices, apart from the teachers, the students are the most important factor. This is because without students, there can be no teaching and therefore no assessment. Assessment according to Mehrens(1978) aids the student in the following ways:

- Communicating the teacher’s goal;
- Encouraging good study habits;
- Increasing motivation and
- Providing feedback that identifies his strengths and weaknesses.

Sax (1980) observed that in order for tests to provide valid information about pupils, the students must consider tests as important, relevant and beneficial and they must perform as well as they can. In other words, they must be positively disposed to the assessment practices in their schools so that they can get valid feedback which they need to make realistic decisions. However, research findings showed that most of the students do not understand the concept of CA and its mode of operation, a major reason why they feel that they have too much work to do under the CA programme (Emeke, 1996 and Alade, 1995). For the successful implementation of the SBA programme in schools, the students need to be adequately educated about its

mode of operation, what their roles would be and the advantages they will get through the new assessment practice which makes it better than CA practice. All these could help to ensure that students have a positive attitude to SBA practice in schools.

The parents are also important when assessment practices are being considered because they have the right to know their children's progress in the various aspects of the school programme. Nyako (1986) identified parental interest as one of the variables that contribute positively to academic achievement of students and that the most important aspect of parental interest is showing concern in whatever activity the child engages in. For a child to perform creditably under either the CA or SBA practices, it means that there has to be some form of cooperation between the home (the parents/guardians) and the school (the teachers). Morse and Wingo (1970) assert that the child benefits most when teachers and parents have mutual interest in his development. In this regard, the parents should move closer to the school to know about the mode of assessment in use while the teachers too should be receptive of parents who show interest in their children's assessment procedures for the benefit of the students. Some of the problems parents had with CA practice were that many of them did not understand the concept, did not know its advantages, how to interpret their children's report cards and the roles they were expected to play (Alade, 1995). All these affected the parents' attitude to CA practice and may be transferred to SBA practice if it is not prevented.

Attitude is a concept that has been variously defined by many researchers (Chukwu, 1990; Araromi, 1987; Corney, 1975; Mehrens, 1978 and Emeke, 1994). For the purpose of this study however, the definition given by Corney (1975) will be adopted. Corney defined attitude as "a predisposition to act or behave positively or negatively towards an object, a person or a group of people". Attitude held by others are not observable, they must be inferred by others from behaviour because while one might conceal one's own attitude, only one's public behaviour can receive objective study (Chukwu, 1990). Thus, investigators depend heavily on behavioural indices of attitudes like what people say or on their responses to questionnaires or on physiological signs e.g. change in heart beat rate. Attitudes can be generalized and transferred (Otegbeye, 1990). For example, a teacher's indifferent attitude to his/her profession can be transferred to the assessment of his/her students. Such a teacher finds the construction, marking and even recording of students' performances cumbersome, thereby carrying it out in a haphazard manner.

Emeke (1994) asserted that a positive attitude is likely to engender achievement of a goal or objective than a negative attitude. Therefore, it is important that everybody that is involved with the SBA practice in the educational system should be positively disposed to it especially the teachers, the students and the parents so as to guarantee its success. Attitudes are learned and they can be changed if it is deemed necessary (Mehrens, 1978 and Okosieme, 1990). However, it is the opinion of the researcher that we cannot decide to alter, modify or reinforce attitudes until we know what the current status is. This study therefore sets out to assess the status of the attitudes of students and parents to the practice of CA in schools. The knowledge of the status of their attitudes to CA practice will assist the managers in education to know how to implement SBA in schools such that everybody will be carried along successfully especially those who are directly concerned.

Statement of the problem

Since the introduction of the CA practice into the educational system about thirty years ago, studies and observations showed that the assessment practice cannot be described as being successful. A variety of factors are responsible for this among which is the attitude of the major participants and stakeholders (especially teachers, students and parents). In order to correct the flaws observed in the CA practice, the

SBA practice has been introduced. This is coming at a time when every body has got used to the “modified” CA practice introduced by the school heads. However, with the introduction of the SBA practice which is believed to be a better assessment practice than CA, it is important that the current status of the attitudes of the major participants in the CA programme be assessed to ensure that they have the right entry behaviours for the effective practice of SBA in schools. This study therefore, assessed the current status of the attitudes of the students and parents to CA practice as a baseline for effective SBA practice in schools.

Significance of study

The study will help to determine the current status of the attitudes of students and parents to the practice of CA. This is useful because the students can by their reactions to their assessment grades and comments indirectly ensure that teachers go about the assessment practice in the proper way. It will also help to determine the level of awareness of students and parents about its concept. The students’ and parents’ attitudes can be upgraded if necessary by providing them with the information they require to understand the concept of SBA and how it differs from CA. The provision of the necessary information can ensure that they have a positive attitude towards SBA. As a pressure group, their attitude can influence how successful the SBA practice will be in schools.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the study:

1. What is the current status (in terms of direction) of the attitudes of students and parents to the practice of CA in schools?
2. Do the students’ levels of educational attainment have any effect on their attitude to the practice of CA in schools?
3. What factors militate against the success of CA practice in schools?

Research Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was tested in the study:

Research hypothesis: There is no significant difference between the attitudes of JSS and SSS students to the practice of CA in schools?

Methodology

The study was a descriptive survey. The population consisted of all the secondary school students and parents in Education District 4 of Lagos State. In all, one hundred and fifty (150) students were involved. A stratified random sampling procedure was used to select twenty-five students each from the three Junior Secondary (JSS) and three Senior Secondary Schools (SSS) used for the study. All the students chosen were either in J.S.2 or S.S.2. Since the study was restricted to Education District 4. Fifty parents who were resident in this area and whose children were attending the selected schools formed the study sample. One hundred copies of the questionnaires were distributed randomly among the sampled students to be given to their parents for completion. After persistent effort for two weeks, only sixty-four copies were returned but only fifty of them were usable (thirteen of them were either improperly filled or seriously mutilated).

Two questionnaires – Students’ Questionnaire on Attitude to Continuous Assessment (SQACA) and Parents’ Questionnaire on Attitude to Continuous Assessment (PQACA) – were used to collect data. The instruments were constructed by the researcher based on the information from related literature and inputs from teachers, principals and inspectors. The SQACA has three sections – A, B and C. Section A- provided general information about the students like sex and class. Section B contained statements which were used to elicit information about the students’ attitude to CA while section C provided reasons for the students’ attitude.

The response format was the Likert type for section B and “Yes” or “No” for section C. The SQACA has a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.66. The PQACA has two sections –A and B. Section A- dealt with the background information while section B provided statements which were used to elicit information about the attitude of the parents to CA. The face and content validity for each instrument were determined by some experts in Test and Measurement, teachers and principals. PQACA has a test-retest reliability of 0.72.

Administration

For the SAQCA, each of the selected schools was visited. The twenty-five students randomly selected were taken to a vacant classroom. Each one of them received a copy of the SAQCA and after they were properly briefed about what to do, they were given thirty minutes to respond to the questionnaire. The completed copies of the SQACA were collected back immediately thus ensuring 100% return rate.

Copies of the PQACA were given to the parents through their children or wards who were either SS2 or JS2 students in the selected schools. A twelve-day period was allowed within which the forms were completed and returned. Only a 50% return rate was recorded for the PQACA.

Data Analyses

The maximum score on each of the two instruments was 50 which represented the most positive attitude to CA practice. The minimum score on both was 10 and it represented the most negative attitude to CA practice. Further analyses were done using percentages, mean, standard deviation and t-test.

Results

Research question 1: - What is the current status (in terms of direction) of the attitudes of students and parents to the practice of CA in schools?

Table 1: Analysis of the Responses of Students on the Attitude to CA Scale

S/N	STATEMENTS	AGREED		DISAGREED	
		N	%	N	%
1.	I like continuous assessment practice because my results will not be based on final examinations.	110	(73%)	40	(27%)
2.	With the continuous assessment practice, I do not need to wait till the end of the term or session before I start to read.	126	(84%)	24	(16%)
3.	I do not like continuous assessment because if I fail, I can only blame myself.	102	(68%)	48	(32%)
4.	Teachers do not always announce before they give us tests.	39	(26%)	111	(74%)
5.	A truant cannot perform well under the practice of continuous assessment- this is good.	84	(56%)	66	(44%)
6.	I prefer taking examinations at the end of the term or session to the practice of continuous assessment.	119	(79.3%)	31	(20.7%)
7.	With the practice of continuous assessment, I feel more confident and have a better chance of passing my exams.	132	(88%)	18	(12%)
8.	If a teacher does not like me, I am likely to fail his/her subject.	129	(86%)	21	(14%)
9.	The practice of continuous assessment does not allow students to relax.	81	(54%)	69	(46%)
10.	I like continuous assessment because the early knowledge of my test results will keep me on my toes at all times.	98	(65.3%)	52	(34.7%)

Mean score = 36.0 Standard deviation = 7.68

The responses of students to each item on the Attitude of Students to Continuous Assessment Scale are presented in Table 1. The table shows the frequencies and percentages (in parentheses) of their responses to each item. The average total rating on the attitude scale (numbers 1-10) was 36.0. This indicated that the students' attitude to CA was slightly positive. The standard deviation was 7.68.

Table 2: Analysis of the Responses of Parents on the Attitude to CA Scale

S/N	STATEMENTS	AGREED		DISAGREED	
		N	%	N	%
1.	I hear of continuous assessment but I do not know what it is about.	22	(44%)	28	(56%)
2.	Report card brought home only at the end of the session is not useful in helping the child.	48	(96%)	2	(4%)
3.	My child's final result should take into consideration all his scores in the tests taken during the session as done in CA.	36	(72%)	14	(28%)
4.	It is necessary for me to visit my child's teacher during the term to find out how my child is fairing as CA practice requires.	16	(32%)	34	(68%)
5.	The practice of continuous assessment makes me feel uneasy and confused.	43	(86%)	7	(14%)
6.	I find it difficult to interpret everything in my child's report cards.	47	(94%)	3	(6%)
7.	Only professionally qualified teachers can assess a child effectively in continuous assessment practice.	48	(96%)	2	(4%)
8.	The parents need to be enlightened about the practice of continuous assessment.	38	(76%)	12	(24%)
9.	If a teacher does not like my child, he is likely to fail the teacher's subject under the practice of continuous assessment.	50	(100%)	0	(0%)
10.	I am aware of the change in the method of evaluating the students to continuous assessment.	34	(68%)	16	(32%)

Mean score = 38.2

Standard deviation = 9.84

The responses of parents to each item on the Attitude of Parents to Continuous Assessment scale are presented in Table 2. The table shows the frequencies and percentages (in parentheses) of their responses to each item. The average total rating on the attitude scale was 38.2 which indicated that the parents' attitude to CA was slightly positive. The standard deviation was 9.84.

Research question 2: Do the students' levels of educational attainment have any effect on their attitude to the practice of CA in schools?

Research hypothesis 1: There will be no significant difference between the JSS and SSS students in their attitude to the practice of CA in schools?

Table 3: t-test Comparison of the Attitude Scores of Junior Secondary School Students and those in Senior Secondary Schools

SCHOOL TYPE	MEAN	S.D	T(CAL)	T(TABLE VALUE)
JUNIOR.SECONDARY	32	4.63	0.824	1.658
SENIOR SECONDARY	36	4.26		

At 0.05 level of significance

Table 3 shows that the Junior Secondary School (JSS) students had a mean score of 32 and a standard deviation (SD) of 4.63 while the Senior Secondary School (SSS) students had a mean score of 36 and SD of 4.26. The calculated t-value was 0.824 and the critical t-value was 1.658 at 0.05 level of significance. Hypothesis 1 was thus accepted.

Research question 3: What factors militate against the success of CA practice in schools?

Table 4: The Percentage Responses of students to Highlighted Problems of CA

	STATEMENTS	YES	NO
1.	My teachers mark all my tests' papers regularly and hand them over to me in time.	93 (37.2%)	157 (62.8%)
2.	I do not understand how the marks in my report cards have been arrived at.	141 (56.4%)	109 (43.6%)
3.	I do not like taking many tests as done in the practice of CA.	206 (82.4%)	44 (17.6%)
4.	I always agree with the scores my teachers enter into my report cards because they truly reflect my performance.	118 (71.2%)	72 (28.8%)
5.	My assessment scores are based only on my test scores.	133 (53.2%)	117 (46.8%)

Table 4 shows the responses of students to the highlighted problems of CA practice as it affects them. The table shows the frequencies and percentages (in parentheses) of their responses to each statement.

Discussion of Results

The result showed that the students and the parents both have slightly positive attitudes to CA with mean scores of 36 and 38.2 respectively. It was observed that the mean attitudes scores for the two groups fell in the region of "Agreed" on the scales. These findings are consistent with the findings by Alade (1995). However, in this study, the parents' attitude was more positive than the students'. These results give an indication that the students and the parents have the required entry behaviour for the practice of SBA. The SBA practice therefore, has a high chance of success especially where both the students and the parents are concerned since the SBA practice is only an improvement on the CA practice. Emeke (1994) asserted that a positive attitude is likely to engender achievement of a goal or objective than a negative attitude. Since attitudes are learned and they can be changed (Mehrens, 1973 and Okosieme, 1990) it is necessary to still work on both the parents and the students to ensure that they have a positive attitude to SBA even more positive than they had for CA practice.

To answer the second research question, the only hypothesis in the study was tested. The result of the analysis showed that the hypothesis was accepted, that is, there is no significant difference between the JSS and SSS students in their attitudes to the practice of CA in schools. In other words, the students' level of

education does not significantly affect their attitude to CA practice. This implies that the two groups of students must have undergone similar experiences where the practice of CA is concerned (they were attending schools within the same Education District) which must be the reason why their attitudes are similar. This position is supported by the view that the status of an individual's knowledge about an object, person, people or event also affects the kind of attitude the individual will have towards it (Okosieme, 1990). The implication for the management is that since CA was being implemented in the same way throughout the State (thanks to the school principals who met regularly to find common solutions to their common problems), it is now very necessary to re-train the teachers to ensure that they understand properly its concept, identify the flaws in its implementation and how the flaws will be corrected by the proper practice of SBA.

The responses to the third research question which dealt with the factors which militated against the success of CA practice in schools were analyzed. The first problem highlighted dealt with the marking of students' test papers and notification of test results. Only 37.2% of the students agreed their teachers do these while 62.8% said their teachers do not. This finding is not in agreement with those of Alade, (1995) where 63% said "Yes" and 37% said "No" to this statement. This shows that an increasing percentage of teachers do not give feedback to their students in time. Many students stand the risk of not being able to improve on their learning because by the time a decision is made (at the end of the session) it will be too late to help such students to improve in their learning (Osafehinti, 1984). Since the SBA practice emphasizes formative evaluation, the teachers should be closely monitored to ensure that they mark and give the students feedback in time for the students to be able to make the required amendments.

On the second problem highlighted, 56.4% agreed that they do not understand how the Marks in their report cards were arrived at while 43.6% disagreed. This result is related to the first problem because if the students do not receive the results of tests and other assessment exercises, then they may not be aware of the scores entered by their teachers in their report cards. Another explanation is that the students may not understand the mode of operation of CA practice in their schools hence the need to ensure that the students are properly enlightened about the mode of assessment in their schools especially in the SBA practice.

The issue of taking many tests was highlighted as the third problem. 82.4% agreed that they do not like taking many tests as required in the CA practice. This is in agreement with Ipaye's (1987) findings where the students identified taking of many tests as one of the problems they had with CA practice. This result can be attributed to the fact that the students lacked the awareness of the implications of not having the required number of CA scores. The educational administrators therefore need to give the required orientation to the students so that they will play their parts willingly and meaningfully in the SBA practice. Seventy one point two percent (71.2%) of the students agreed to the fact that the scores written in their report cards are true reflections of their individual performances while 28.8% disagreed. This is an improvement over the earlier finding where 54% agreed and 46% disagreed (Alade, 1995). However, there are still some students who still require information about CA practice so that they will be able to accept their final assessment results as being true reflections of their performances. Finally, for the students, the last problem highlighted dealt with the type of assessment done. Fifty three point two (53.2%) agreed that their assessment scores were based on test scores alone, that is, it was mainly in the cognitive domain. This situation is one of the reasons for the failure of the CA practice in schools. Assessments in the psychomotor and affective domains were usually ignored by the teachers for various reasons among which are the teachers' inability to construct the necessary instruments and to interpret the results correctly (Obe, 1995 and Emeke, 1996). This situation also points to

the need to re-train teachers in the area of test construction and interpretation of test results. A wide and in-depth knowledge in this area will ensure the success of SBA.

Conclusion and Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of the study it is included that:

- The attitude of students and parents to CA practice (and by extension the entry behaviour for SBA)was slightly positive
- The attitude of parents was more positive than that of the students'.
- The students' level of education did not affect the students' attitude to CA significantly.
- Some of the problems being faced by the students in the practice of CA which should be addressed for SBA practice to succeed are:
 - inadequate information on the CA practice
 - assessment being focused on the cognitive domain alone
 - lack of feedback on various assessment exercises given and
 - Students' unwillingness to take many tests

The following recommendations are made to ensure the successful implementation of SBA in schools:

1. The slightly positive attitudes of students and parents should be worked upon through the provision of necessary and adequate information about SBA practice in schools to ensure it becomes highly positive.
2. The class sizes should be reduced and kept at 40 maximum for effective SBA practice in schools.
3. Formative evaluation should be emphasized in all classroom interactions.
4. SBA records should be available in every school before the first day of every new session. This will prevent the loss of vital information and the accumulation of unfilled records in the school.

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