

## QUALITY ASSURANCE IN NIGERIA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM THROUGH CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT PRACTICE

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### ABSTRACT

The education system in Nigeria is highly diversified to cover all areas of human development from early childhood, primary, tertiary and even adult education. This implies that it is a huge capital and human investment both for the government and private sector. When people invest in a project, they rightfully demand for accountability for their investment. Thus all stakeholders in Nigeria are interested in a quality education system that will result in all round development of the child. This paper therefore discusses the role of continuous assessment in ensuring quality in the education system. It discusses the concept of quality education, quality assurance and continuous assessment. It looked at the relationship between continuous assessment and quality assurance, pointing out that continuous assessment improves students learning and self motivation, improves teachers instructional practice, provides feedback for parents and society and provides data for school self evaluation and external evaluation. It was then recommended among other things that teachers should be given regular training on the usage of various assessment tools including ICT tools, teachers should make assessment tasks age friendly and also provide effective feedback to both students and parents. Finally, training on accurate record keeping should be given to teachers and concerned personnel and adequate facilities provided.

**Keywords:** Quality Education, Quality assurance, Continuous assessment.

### INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian education system attracts the attention of many stakeholders. Being seen as the tool for achieving national development and transformation (FME, 2014, Afolabi, 2018,) the Nigerian education system has been diversified to cover different areas and different levels. The diversification of the education system implies huge capital and human investment which affects both the public and private sector (Owings & Kaplan, 2019). Thus the attention of all stakeholders to the education system is properly justified as all individuals naturally demand return on every investment. When there is a public outcry on the falling standard of education, the question of functionality and accountability of the various programmes enshrined in the system is being raised. For instance, Ajibade, (2019), in his attempt to critically analyze Nigeria's educational system, "called into question the employability of Nigerian graduates at different levels" (p.2). At such points of criticism, stakeholders seem to be demanding value for their money. They seek to be assured of how qualitative and productive the educational system is as well as the hope of their future generation. Towards actualizing these demands, several innovations are introduced in the educational system. Thus this paper seeks to x-ray continuous assessment(CA) as a means of assuring quality in the education system. The challenges facing the achievement of quality through continuous assessment are equally discussed.

### Quality Education

Education is a process which takes place both formally, informally and non-formally. This is a life-long process which commences from the early childhood period in Nigeria's formal education sector and spans through the secondary and tertiary education levels. The processes of education enable students to acquire knowledge which result in life transformations and effectiveness. However, the after effect of these processes can only become transformational when quality is maintained. Thus speaking from the perspective of some middle leaders in Singapore schools, Ng (2015) described quality education as one that "emphasizes holistic development" of the student (p.1). Education becomes qualitative when its processes expose the students properly and efficiently to knowledge, skills and character adjustments which are applied in meeting the demands of everyday challenges.

Quality education is not just education for all but according to Slade (2021), it is such that "serves each child pedagogically, developmentally" (p.2) and gives opportunity for all children to reach their "maximum potentials". To be qualitative, there must be an actualization of specified targets which is reflected by the inputs in the system, processes and outputs of the system. The inputs have to do with the students, teachers, curriculum, facilities, instructional materials etc. The processes refer to the teaching and learning processes, student/teacher interactions, use of time and space etc. The output are the test scores, graduation rates, skilled and employable graduates, performances in subsequent jobs (Chapman and Adams 2002; Okebukola, 2010). Ng (2015) further stated that "quality education is delivered by good teachers made possible by good teaching and learning processes and facilitated by a conducive environment" (p.1). Qualitative education has to be effective, efficient, relevant, sustainable and open for all (Barrett, Chala-Duggan, Lowe, Nikkel and Ukpo, (2006). These are quality indicators which are reflections of the state of education at any level and which stakeholders watch out for. Moreover, since quality determines the overall impact of any system assuring quality at any level is a matter which must not be toyed with.

### Quality Assurance

Quality assurance is a key process in any system in which efforts are made towards ensuring that resources are adequately provided, judiciously used and accounted for to achieve stated objectives and maintain high standards across all levels. Lemaitie, & Karakhanyan (2018) defined quality assurance in higher education as a process of establishing stakeholder confidence that provision (input, processes, Outcomes), fulfils expectations or measures up to threshold minimum requirements. Belawati and Zuhairi (2007) outlined the purposes of quality assurance to include serving public accountability, informing students' choices, improving teaching and learning, enhancing administrative process as well as the recognition of the standard of awards and disseminating best practices. In essence, it is quality assurance is a term which describes "the process of ensuring fitness for purpose" (Okebukola, 2010, p.3).

Quality assurance is not just a process, it is systematic in nature. Thus the European Commission (2021), stated that it entails the systematic review of educational provision to maintain and improve its quality, equity and efficiency. Also Chinomona, E; Chinomona, R and Moloji (2013), described it as the systematic measurement comparison with a standard monitoring of processes and an associated feedback loop that confers error prevention. Since at every stage, stakeholders seek value for their investment, quality assurance cuts across the entire educational system, from pre-primary to the tertiary level.

Several approaches are adopted in achieving quality in different countries and these are carried out by some agencies. With reference to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and

Development (OECD) Countries, Kis, (2005), stated that methods used for quality review are self review, peer review and external reviews while the approaches to quality assurance are accreditation, assessment and audit. In Nigeria, there are several quality assurance agencies whose duty it is to monitor and assure quality at different levels and for different examinations. Some of them include National Universities Commission (NUC), National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (JAMB), West African Examinations Council (WAEC), National Examination Council (NECO), National Business and Technical Examination Board (NABTEB), Federal Education Quality Assurance Service (FEQAS), State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), Universal Basic Education Board (UBEC) etc. For the Basic and Secondary education level in Nigeria, there is published a National Education Quality Assurance Handbook aimed at giving comprehensive guide for quality assurance evaluation at those levels. As stated in the handbook, quality education standards for institutions below the tertiary level include “Learners’ achievement and behavior, the quality of teaching and learning, curriculum and other activities, care, guidance and safety, the learning environment and leadership and management” (FME, 2016 : p7). The objectives to be covered under each of these sub-headings are clearly specified. Under the quality of teaching and learning, it is expected among other things that:

- The class size for nursery, primary, and secondary schools should not exceed 25, 35 and 40 respectively.
- Every learner should be continuously assessed to ensure that adequate progress is being achieved.
- Every learner should be able to participate fully in class activities with the support of the teacher etc (FME, 2016: p11).

These expectations are what the quality assurance evaluators monitor in schools. To successfully achieve this, they make use of evaluation schedules both for internal and external quality assurance evaluation. The structure of the evaluation schedule (ES) is based on the following:

- Outcome for learners
- The quality of provision
- The effectiveness of leadership and management
- Judgments, grades and descriptors
- Pitched judgments.(p.15)

The schedule guides the quality assurance evaluators towards collecting adequate information which serve as clear evidences in making right judgments. These evidences emanate from learners’ external and internal tests results, learners’ exercise books and test papers, national curriculum and state schemes of learners’ workbook, school records showing performance in science, art, culture, essays, exhibitions, quizzes, drama, debate. These are information which should be part of the continuous assessment records of each school. In essence, both school self evaluation (SSE) and External Evaluation (EE) of quality assurance cannot be possible without continuous assessment records.

### **Continuous Assessment**

Assessment is an integral part of the learning process. It is a process by which information is obtained relative to some known objective or goal (Kizlik, 2012). Assessment in education is a complex process. It entails “observing what students say, do, or make, and quantifying these observations in a meaningful way to make more general inferences about their skills and knowledge” (Kim, 2018; P.717). The department of education and training (2013), similarly described assessment as an ongoing process of gathering analyzing and reflecting on evidence to make informed and consistent judgments to improve future students learning. This implies that, assessment should be based on what the students themselves have done and not what the

teachers, parents or siblings have done. It should equally be ongoing and culminate into making informed decisions about students learning. Thus teaching, learning and assessment are inseparable parts of the education process. Assessment in Nigeria encompasses the broad areas of assessment for learning and assessment of learning (F.M.E, 2014). Educational assessment serves several purposes in the teaching learning process. Among such purposes are that it helps in determining what students know, their deficiencies and areas of special needs, appropriate placement positions for them, selection of appropriate curricula, whether the goals of education are being achieved or not (Morrison, 2010; Edutopia, 2008). When these purposes are actualized, quality is inevitable.

Prior to the introduction of the continuous assessment, a traditional approach to assessment which focused mainly on the assessment of learning in the form of an end of the term examination was adopted. This once for all or end of the term examination attracted a lot of criticisms, such as focus on the cognitive behavior to the neglect of effective and psychomotor (Osadebe, 2015), students giving serious attention to their study only during examination period (Adigun, 2016). This finally resulted into the introduction of continuous assessment with the National Policy on Education which first came on board in 1977. The policy affirmed that students' assessment will be liberalized by basing them completely or partly on continuous assessment of the student's progress (NPE, 1977). Continuous assessment and school examination is to be administered in the ratio of 40:60 in both public and private, secondary and primary schools (NPE, 2014:P.13)

Continuous assessment is the periodic and systematic method of assessing and evaluating students attributes (Walde, 2016). To carry out the continuous assessment, different tools are used at different times to assess students learning. The Federal Ministry of Education specified this in its handbook on continuous assessment by stating that it is a mechanism whereby the final grading of a student in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of behavior systematically takes account of all his performances during a given period of schooling (F.M.E, 1985). Adigun, (2016), saw Continuous assessment as a classroom strategy implemented by teachers to determine the knowledge, skills and understanding attained by students at a particular point in time. Thus continuous assessment is an ongoing process which systematically affords teachers the opportunities to discover and improve on what their students know and can do over time, using a variety of means and covering different facets of a student's behavior. These definitions reveal that continuous assessment has several features such as regular testing, use of a variety of tools, provision of feedback for improvement, coverage of smaller units in each assessment, wider scope of assessment to include both the affective and psychomotor domains, careful recording and guidance of the students, both assessment of learning and for learning etc. The definitions equally reveal that continuous assessment is systematic, comprehensive, cumulative and guidance-oriented in nature. The variety of tools used for continuous assessment include: tests, projects, assignments, seminar presentations, debates, drama, class work etc.

### **Assuring Quality in the Education System through Continuous Assessment**

Continuous assessment serves the purpose of enhancing students learning, improving the teachers teaching skill as well as improving the education and institutional assessment system on general (Shukla, 2019). It also provides a better picture of a student's focus and determination throughout the course (Hatt, 2019). Students' awareness that one form of assessment tool or the other will be administered on him or her stimulates a great sense of responsibility and diligence towards independent study while the lessons are still ongoing. A

result of such assessments helps the teacher to adjust and adopt better instructional strategies. In the Nigerian context continuous assessment has the following objectives:

- Gives the teacher greater involvement in the overall assessment of his or her pupils.
- Provides a more valid assessment of the overall ability or performance of the child.
- Enables teachers to be more flexible and innovative in their instruction.
- Provides a basis for more effective guidance of the child.
- Provides a basis for the teacher to improve on his or her instructional method. (FME, 1985).

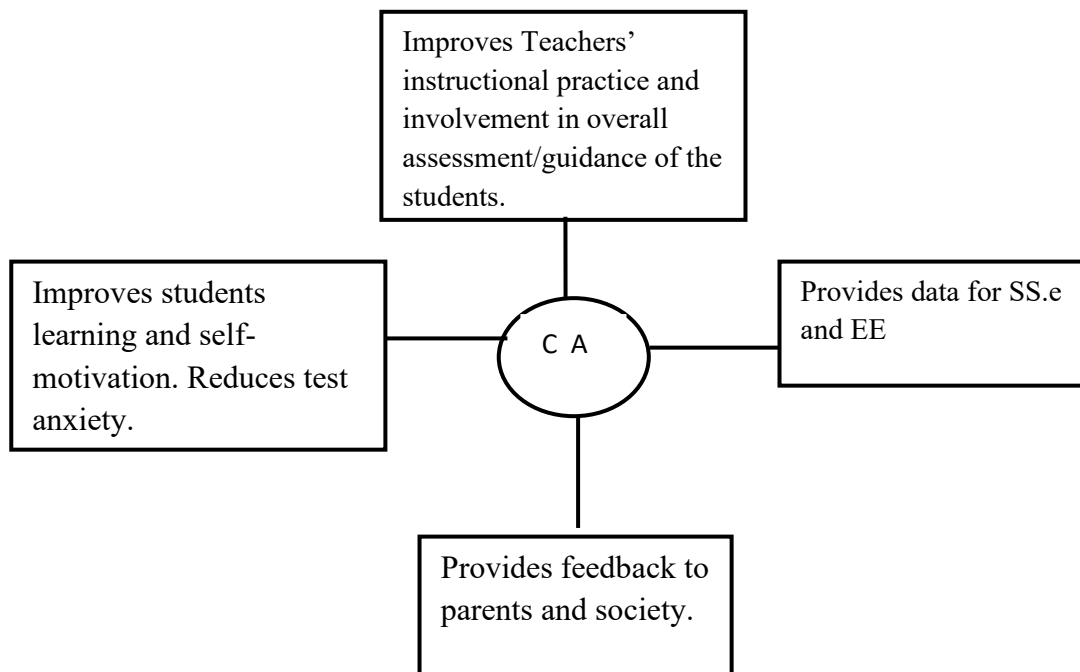
Akpan and Ikechukwu,( 2018) presented the objectives to include

1. Improving teaching and learning and collecting school based marks to be added to the final exam marks for certification and selection.
2. Accounting for performance throughout the period of schooling.
3. Providing data for the choice of instructional method and materials.
4. Reducing the tension created by examinations and the instances of examination malpractice. (p.38)

It can be stated that the purpose of continuous assessment covers improvement of teacher’s instructional practices, integrating the teacher in the assessment practice, improving student’s confidence in the assessment process and provision of more valid data of the overall performance and progression of the student for the purpose of effective guidance. All these, engender quality in the entire education system.

The relationship between continuous assessment and quality assurance can be presented schematically as shown below:

**Quality Assurance through Continuous Assessment**



Just like the quality assurance process which is both systematic, comprehensive, accountability driven, continuous assessment is systematic, cumulative, comprehensive, guidance-oriented. It aims towards achieving quality in the education system. Continuous assessment works towards improving students learning. Students are enabled to discover how they learn, consistently



improve on it and achieve maximum potential. This is because the practice of continuous assessment is formative, summative and diagnostic. Since the students are conscious of the consistent administration of different assessment tools, they are intrinsically motivated to learn, develop test taking skills and overcome test anxieties. Slade (2021) opined that quality education “serves a child pedagogically, developmentally” and for the purpose of “realizing maximum potentials” (p.2).

Effective continuous assessment practice enables the teacher to adjust teaching strategies to suit individual learners. The teachers or counselors also provide guidance to the students as a result of the comprehensive assessment of their abilities. Quality education is delivered by good teachers and made possible by good teaching and learning processes (Ng, 2015: p.1). Moreover Belawati and Zuhairi (2007) had earlier stated that some of the purposes of quality assurance include improving students’ choices, improving teaching and learning, being sure of the standard of awards etc.

A very key aspect of the continuous assessment practice is the generation and keeping of accurate records. Data generated from assessment are carefully organized and kept for easy retrieval and Usage (Otobong, 2019). These records serve multiple purposes. It is an evidence on the outcome for learners which are a part of evaluation schedule of the quality assurance instrument. Thus it provides valuable support for individual school’s self evaluation (ss.e) and the basis for the success of a school during external evaluations. These records equally provide feedback to both parents and the general society on the progress of their children and specific schools. Thus achieving the accountability or fitness of purpose standard in the quality assurance mechanism. Feedback to parents and families about their child’s learning progress and the way forward has been revealed as being effective towards improving a students learning achievement (Department of Education and training, 2021). When students’ achievement is improved, education quality receives a boost. From the foregoing, it can be seen that continuous assessment practice has a central place in determining the quality of education. By implication, quality education is closely associated to how well instructors strategize and implement continuous assessment appropriately (Walde, Getinet & Seifu, 2016). This is however bedeviled by several challenges.

### **Challenges**

The practice of continuous assessment for the purpose of quality assurance is faced with several challenges some of which include:

1. Managing very large class size due to increase in students’ population which hinders teachers’ versatility in applying assessment for learning.
2. Excess workload of the teachers which rarely gives them the opportunity for detailed attention to the student’s aptitude.
3. Teachers lack of adequate assessment skills and limited knowledge of different assessment tools.
4. Challenge of digital literacy and inability in applying ICT in assessing students’ progress to make assessment innovative, interesting and something that can also be achieved even outside formal school hours.
5. Challenge of scoring and interpreting students works especially for domains other than the cognitive domain.
6. Teachers trying to meet up with the expectations of parents, school authorities and external bodies instead of show casing what is on ground. To that effect, results are sometimes manipulated or adjusted to give an impression of school excellence. Quality sacrificed at the altar conformity to rules.

7. Challenge of adequate record keeping and continuity of records. This could be associated with the challenge of digital literacy and ability to generate and manage data bases by the schools.

8. For the students, there is often the challenge of receiving assessment tasks that are either not age friendly or too much for the given period. The result is that such tasks end up with the parents and other people, takes away study time, relaxation time and brings frustration. Results from such assessments do not give correct picture of students' level of attainment or school quality.

## CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the foregoing that

1. Continuous assessment is very important in assuring quality in the education system.
2. Continuous assessment helps to improve the quality of students learning, instill self motivation and reduce test anxiety.
3. Continuous assessment improves education quality by transforming teachers' instructional practice and providing evidence based guidance for the students through the teachers.
4. Continuous assessment provides feedback for the parents and the general society which is a sort of accountability for the money spent on their children/ward.
5. through continuous assessment data are generated, organized and kept for the purpose of school self evaluation (SSE) and external evaluations(EE) by quality assurance agencies.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the relevance of continuous assessment as a key player in the maintenance of quality in the education system, it is recommended that:

1. Efforts should be made by both teachers and the school authorities to ensure that the continuous assessment practices are effectively executed.
2. Teachers should be given regular training on the usage of various assessment tools including ICT tools.
3. Teachers should make assessment tasks age friendly and not too cumbersome such that the students can effectively carry them out.
4. Effective feedback to students and parents should be incorporated in the continuous assessment practice to facilitate the improvement of the quality of students learning.
5. Training on accurate record keeping should be given to teachers and concerned personnel and facilities for data storage like water proof file cabinets, computer etc should be provided.

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