

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT PRACTICES TO CURB EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN SCHOOL-BASED SENIOR SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Federal Republic of Nigeria adopted Continuous Assessment practice to replace the old approach of single examination that determined the final assessment of a student at a curriculum conference where the former was alleged to be the major cause for examination malpractices. Each school assigned a staff to facilitate the practice and keep the record for onward submission when required. But, the new approach is facing challenges of inaccurate data, laziness from teachers as well as adoption of external candidates who do not partake in continuous assessment activities designed for school-based candidates. It is recommended among others that government should provide a national data-base for continuous assessment to prevent examination malpractices and harness examination processing.

Introduction

Continuous Assessment refers to the evaluation of a student's progress throughout a course of study. It is a system by which student's performance is judged by various pieces of work within the period of a course and not by one final examination. It is used to decide whether or not students have attained their study targets within the given period. This is emphasized in the National Policy on Education, as one of its philosophies is based on the development of the individuals into a sound and effective citizen and the provision of equal opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the basic, post-basic and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system to produce individuals who are morally sound, patriotic and effective citizens. The Post-Basic Education is the education students take after a successful completion of ten

years of Basic Education which includes senior secondary education; higher school; and continuing education given in Vocational Enterprise Institutions (VEIs) (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014).

These Secondary schools are established by government and some by private bodies, and are supervised by government regularly to ensure that all schools follow approved curricula and conform to the National Policy on Education. To maintain standard and easy classroom management, teacher-student ratio at the secondary school education level shall be 1: 40 (FRN, 2014). At the end of the secondary school level of education, the students take a common final examination (school-based) that qualifies them for admission into tertiary institution for further studies. Different examination bodies are responsible for conducting the final examinations and awarding the certificates for secondary school education. Such certificates includes the West African Senior School Certificate (WASSC), Senior School Certificate (SSC), National Technical Certificate (NTC), National Business Certificate (NBC).

National Vocational Certificate (NVC), and Senior Arabic and Islamic Studies Certificate (SAISC) among others. The certification is done by the Statutory public examination bodies based on continuous assessment and a national examination guided by strict ethics in the conduct of all examinations. The school-based examination is made up of two components: the main examination (taken at once throughout the country) which is weighted seventy percent (70%) and the Continuous Assessment component (conducted at the school level) which is weighted thirty percent (30%) (FRN, 2014). Those students who finished the secondary school education without passing the required grades for admission into schools of higher learning are later registered privately by the examination body of their choice as external candidates where the examination is weighted hundred percent (100%) as there is no continuous assessment for the candidates (National Examinations Council, 2014).

Examination bodies in Nigeria are saddled with the responsibility of developing and administering of test items for different trades/subjects and awards certificates for further studies. In the case of senior school certificate examinations, a subject can be made-up of minimum of two papers to maximum of four among practical, Essay, objectives, oral/aural and drawing and design in some cases. The test items are developed based on students' cognitive level designed by "Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives" (Adolp, 2011). In each case, a candidate's scores per subject are scaled to 70% while the continuous assessment takes the remaining 30% (National Examinations Council, 2014).

Based on observations by the writers, it has been discovered that the effectiveness of the 30% continuous assessment is hindered in many schools by some forms of examination malpractices. The prominent among the malpractices is allowing the

external candidates to reregister with the school-based students and have the 30% continuous assessment.

This is allowed to happen as the external candidates pays much higher than the school-based students which led them to unruly behaviours in examination hall and the school cannot have control of the situation.

Roles of Continuous Assessment in Senior School Certificate Examinations in Nigeria

The idea behind students' continuous assessment is to assess the entirety of the learner ability in the teaching-learning setting. It focuses on affective, cognitive and psychomotor behaviours of learners, as well as the inputs from syllabus and school facilities, teaching personnel and assistants and the interactions between teachers, students, and materials. When continuous assessment is implemented from this framework, it ensures a positive change in behaviour and improvement in the entire school system (Anukwe, 1990).

Nigeria adopted continuous assessment practice to replace the old approach of single examination to determine the fate of a student at 1981 curriculum conference where the former was perceived to be the major cause for examination malpractices during the examination (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981). Those responsible for the successful implementation of continuous assessment practices are the administrative heads called principals. To facilitate the method of continuous assessment practice in a school, the principal or any other person assigned should ensure that the teachers participated actively and provide a variety of opportunities for assessing students and also make sure teachers assess on a continuous basis (according to syllabus) and keep accurate and systematic records. Some of the activities for continuous assessment includes but not limited to class exercises, assignments, tests, projects, and practical among others. The information furnished by the process help to provide the schools administration on the students' weaknesses that need improvement.

Continuous assessment is an educational assessment that provides the necessary feedback required in order to maximise the outcomes of educational efforts. It is an integral part of effective teaching and learning.

To improve the teachers' participation in the final assessment of students, the activity is weighted 30% for every candidate in a subject and forwarded to the external examination bodies which is later merged with the individual candidate's examination result of 70% to make 100% (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). According to the National Examinations Council of Nigeria (2014), continuous assessment is strictly for school-based candidates and therefore external candidates are not allowed to register

for the school-based examination. This will not be unconnected to the fact that the external candidates do not participate in the continuous assessment, hence they are not entitled to the 30%. Giving any mark as "Continuous Assessment" to external candidates by a school management is one form of examination malpractice.

Examination malpractice

Malpractice is an irregular activity against the ethics governing implementation of certain ideas or procedures for smooth running of a programme. Examination malpractice is a purposeful wrong doing contrary to official examination rules designed to place a candidate at an unfair advantage (Wilayat, 2009). It is an illegal act committed by a student single handily or in collaboration with other stake holders before, during or after examination in order to obtain unmerited results. Fasasi (2006) opined that examination malpractice may be understood as "a misconduct or improper practice, before, during or after any examination by examinees or other stake holders with a view to obtaining good results through fraudulent means". Some of the identified types of examinations malpractices include leakage. This happens when an examinee or any unauthorized person has fore knowledge of the content of examination before taking the examination. It may also leak through a staff of the examination body, editors, printers, or supervisors for personal reasons like material gains or sabotage. There is also a case of impersonation where a person who is not enrolled as a candidate for a specific examination replaces one that is enrolled. It is a conspiracy between the examinee and the examination supervisor. Sometimes, tertiary students who are more knowledgeable impersonate for money related reward or some help for a girlfriend or boyfriend (Oko & Adie, 2016).

Some candidates do engage in bringing in foreign materials. It involves smuggling of unapproved materials (e.g. parts or entire subject note) into the examination hall. These foreign materials are hidden in the examination hall or even carried in by the candidates or their accomplices amid the examination. There is also aiding and abetting as a form of malpractice committed in examination hall. This is seeking or receiving help from non-candidates such as invigilators, teachers or other persons before, during and after the examination. It is characterised by smuggling in and out of question papers/answer booklets during the examination or display of maps, charts and models related to the subject and giving solved questions or any prepared materials to the examinees. Other examination offences include unruly behaviours, collusion, mass cheating, insult and violent behaviours and using electronic gadgets among others.

Examination Malpractice and Continuous Assessment Practice

The incidence of examination malpractice has been blamed on lack of seriousness of students in their studies, poor teaching and learning, poor invigilation and over-emphasis placed on paper qualification by employers of labour (Mabel, Kay & Anthony, 2013). However, the West African Examination Council stated that the

pressure on some school principals to increase the performance of their pupils in external examinations is responsible for the upsurge in the number of examination malpractice cases in the country (Chijioke 2017). This will not be unconnected to the fact that most schools consider external candidates as a money making avenue (by registering them as internal candidates) determined by how well students' performed in their final examinations.

According to National Examinations Council (2014), external candidates are exempted from school-based examination, but it is observed that most principals adopt such candidates to maximise profits because they paid much higher than the school-based students. The external candidates do not participate in school continuous assessment which is a component of external examination but will end up having the 30% scores of that assessment, when registered as school-based candidates, which is added to their examination scores (70%). This is no doubt, a clear examination malpractice committed by the school management. Such candidates are desperate, looking for a subject to clear some deficiencies hindering their entry into institutions of higher learning and are ready to employ whatever means to pass the examination. They engage in unruly behaviours, impersonation, aiding and abetting and bringing in foreign materials among others that discourages internal students to read and encourages them to emulate the attitudes. During the release of 2017 June/July Senior School Certificate Examination results by the National Examinations Council, it was stated that the council withheld the results of 50,586 students representing 4.81 per cent of the candidates who sat for the examination, on the basis of examination malpractices. The figure represented 0.52 per cent increase in cases of malpractice compared to the 2016 record. While 276 schools were involved in mass cheating in 34 states of the federation, 23 supervisors who aided malpractice one way or another was blacklisted (Pmnewsnigeria, 2017). That huge number of candidates are likely to either enrol in external examinations that is weighted 100 percent (if they can withstand miscellaneous expenses) or reregister with school-based candidates to get free 30 percent continuous assessment and make their way out. That window given to external candidates by the principals has become a cankerworm in the conduct of school-based examination and students' performance in tertiary institutions.

In recent years, many tertiary institutions withdraw students from schools due to poor performance and examination malpractices. The question is, how can a student with five and above credits in senior school certificate examination (which is the assessment of three years programme) fails to get at least 1.5 out 5.00 points scale of measurement in the institutions? In February, 2016, The Federal University of Technology (FUT), Minna in Niger State, has withdrawn 460 of 100 Level students following 'very poor' performance in immediate past academic session. The affected students could not get a Grade Point Average (GPA) of 1.5 after the session and by virtue of Nigeria University

Commission (NUC) guidelines, they cannot continue their programmes, (The Nation Nigeria, 2016). In the same vein, Olujimi (2016) and Lydia (2017) stated that 97 and 44 students have been withdrawn from the University of Ibadan and FUT Minna due to failure to obtain the minimum academic requirements and examination malpractices at the end of the 2014/15 and 2015/2016 sessions respectively. This must be connected with their poor academic attitudes at the senior secondary school level.

Other Challenges in Continuous Assessment Practice in Nigerian Senior Secondary Schools

1. Inaccurate data

The continuous assessment is said to be 30 percent but it is observed that some schools do not have that knowledge as they scored students up-to 99 percent on score sheets for both school-based and the imposed candidates who are not entitle to any marks. Any score can be converted to a higher or lower percentage but why are the students scored 99% when it is clearly stated that the score is over 30. This shows that the teachers are not properly informed as such they provide inaccurate data.

2. Laziness from teachers

The writer observed that some teachers are in the habit of 'I don't care attitudes' when it comes to giving and assessing students' using the most appropriate tool at a particular time. In some cases, teachers adopt just one type of assessment tools like 'test' which most student are not comfortable with and award marks arbitrarily while some cannot have even one assessment or refuse to mark due to nonchalant attitudes. This ineffectiveness from the part of teachers led to the students being weak with no effort to identify and correct such weaknesses; as such they relied on malpractices to make the minimum requirement for admission into schools of higher learning.

3. Students' population

Large class size is another factor that hinders the practice of continuous assessment in schools. The approved teacher-students ratio by the Federal Government of Nigeria is 1:40, but, due to the populous nature of public schools and some private schools (having a class of over 100 students), it is difficult for teacher to realize continuous assessment practically. No matter how courageous a teacher is, assessing such class within a period of 40 minutes will not be possible as about half of the time is covered by presentation.

4. Lack of Central National Database for Continuous Assessment

The term "database" refers to a set of related data and the way it is organized. Access to this data is usually provided by a "database management system" (DBMS) consisting of an integrated set of computer software that allows users to interact with one or more databases and provides access to all of the data contained in the database. The DBMS provides various functions that allow entry, storage and retrieval of large quantities of

information and provides ways to manage how that information is organized (Wikipedia, 2017). This system is lacking in Nigeria, thus, leaving continuous assessment practice being documented on paper which is vulnerable to destroy or misplace easily.

How to improve Continuous Assessment Practice and curb examination malpractice in Senior School Certificate Examination

1. Reorientations and retraining of teachers on the importance of C/A

The essence of reorientation and retraining is to revamp moral values and attitudes that might have faded over time and introduction of new innovations towards successful attainment of goals. Ministries of education should improve teachers' and students' attitude towards continuous assessment through workshops and seminars regularly to understand why external candidates must not be allowed to join school-based candidates in writing school certificate examinations. To achieve this, teachers need to be motivated by providing moral incentives such as further training in their field, and material incentives like salary increments, gifts and awards based on their performance. This strategy will at the same time change the direction of teachers and school administrators from extra financial gain generated from external candidates that paid much higher than the school-based candidates and results in examination malpractices leading to poor academic performance at higher levels of education.

2. Proper supervision by the management to avoid external candidates

The federal and states ministries of education as the supervisory bodies for efficient running of secondary school education in Nigeria need to take the admission processes more serious, ensure proper documentation of admitted students and never allow any external candidate to be registered for school-based examination as there is a provision made by examination bodies for such candidates to write external examinations that are weighted 100%. This can be achieved by exhibiting high level of integrity and commitment from the representatives of the ministries and schools management. The school-based candidates are trained and morally sound to listen to and respect their teachers and therefore under the total control while majority of those external candidates are out to make some papers in whatever way. This will encourage the students to read hard and prevent them from exposure to unruly behaviours.

3. Ban of Schools adopting external candidates

Students' attendance register contains the list of students registered and available in a school which the examination bodies captured during accreditation and reaccreditation exercise. With that statistics, the examination bodies should set a limit of candidates to be registered by individual school and that will help to trace a school with inflated number of candidates. Most schools administrators adopted the external candidates due to external influence from some government officials or to maximise profit which

should not be the major objective of an academic setup. To avoid that, there should not be any form of influence to the school management for accommodation of such external candidates so that sanity is maintained. A strict punishment or sanction (like de-recognition of centre to write external examination) should also be placed by the ministry in conjunction with examination bodies on any school attempting to register more than their set limit.

4. National data-base for continuous assessment

Good information is expected to be timely. The creation of central national database for continuous assessment will create a holistic mechanism for data sharing between the schools and examination bodies in the country and this will give room for quick response and processing of examination results as no manual entry from paper work will be required in the process. To improve the collection, analysis and storage of continuous assessment result, there is need to have a central data-base that contains detailed information about all students in Nigeria. It will provide information on the exact number of school-based candidates for senior school certificate examination and prevents the insertion of external candidates to enhance the smoothness and peaceful conduct of the examinations. This mechanism will go a long way in reducing diverse irregular activities in public examinations.

Conclusion

The rise in examination malpractice in secondary schools cannot be unconnected to improper continuous assessment practice for school-based senior school certificate examination in Nigeria. An allocation of undeserved scores to external candidates is greatly affecting the smooth running of school-based examinations. This is caused due to lack of commitment and teachers' inadequate knowledge of the way and techniques continuous assessment is practiced, lack of interest on teachers and students about continuous assessment, poor administrative support from government and quest to generate more internal revenue than quality and integrity.

Recommendations

1. Ministries of education should improve teachers' and students' attitude towards continuous assessment through awareness creation programs, such as conducting workshops, seminars and arranging regular experience sharing programmes.
2. Federal and state governments should create a national data-base for continuous assessment.
3. Appropriate sanctions have to be placed on any school that violated proper continuous assessment practice.
4. Counselling services ought to be maintained for suitable placement and educational counselling of students.

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