

## Implementing Assessment for Learning in Tertiary Institutions in the South-West Nigeria: A Qualitative Study

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### Abstract

Assessment for learning, which is used interchangeably with continuous assessment and formative assessment, is a vital component of the teaching-learning process. Studies have documented the benefits of assessment for learning to students, teachers, parents and other relevant stakeholders. In particular, feedback that emanates from assessment for learning, if effectively and timely presented, is of huge benefits in remediating observed gaps in teaching and learning. This study examines the strategies employed by university lecturers in assessment for learning/continuous assessment; how it is implemented, and how effective the feedback presented to students is as regards improving learning and achievement among others. The study employs the phenomenological design. Specifically, it employs the focus group discussion to explore undergraduate students' understanding of assessment for learning, the purpose it is meant to serve, the mechanisms adopted by their lecturers to conduct assessment for learning, the frequency of implementation and how feedback is presented to students to improve learning. Most of the students understood the concept of assessment for learning/continuous assessment and its benefits. However, the majority were dissatisfied with the strategies used, frequency and provision of feedback to students. Findings offer insight fill information for guiding the implementation of continuous assessment for improved teaching and learning.

**Keywords:** Assessment for learning, Continuous assessment, Higher education, Feedback mechanisms, Qualitative research

## Introduction

Assessment for learning, which is also referred to as Continuous Assessment (CA) in Nigeria has been very popular since its introduction in 1977 (FGN, 1977). The introduction of CA arose in the country's pursuit of quality education in Nigeria in general, and in particular, to ensure that scores arrived at by the end of a programme of education sample learner's cognitive, affective and psycho productive domains. Although at its inception, the policy emphasized the practice of CA at the various levels of the Nigerian educational system, its implementation was however limited to the primary and secondary levels of education. According to the policy document, which declared that the Universities and other institutions of higher learning will be required to reconsider the practice of... and to explore ways of introducing an element of continuous evaluation' (FGN, 1977, paragraph 43, (2)), CA was later extended into tertiary education due to its inherent merits.

Assessment is a significant process of teaching and learning. It has been used by teachers to measure how much learners have learnt after exposure to a unit of content. Technically, assessment is used obtain useful information about changes that have taken place as teaching learning progresses. It improves teaching and learning, if effectively executed, it yields valuable dividends for both teachers and students, and the significant others in the business of education (Falaye, 2005). Assessment aids 'internal programmatic decision making (Stiggins, 2001), and provides vital information on the learning needs of students (Erinosho, 2005; Falaye, 2005).

Continuous assessment, according to the National Policy on Education, is meant to be comprehensive, systematic, cumulative and guidance oriented. Comprehensiveness in this context means that the CA scores of students must be derived from a variety of instruments such as tests, projects, questionnaire, interview, observation and rating scales. It means that the total picture of each student is adjudged objectively and decisions are made based on the cognitive, affective and psycho-productive behaviours of the student. The systematic nature of CA calls for careful planning in the construction of the measuring

instruments, their administration on students, the intervals of administration, recording and the use of CA scores. Continuous Assessment is Cumulative in the sense that it takes into account previous performances of students in arriving at the overall scores. The benefit is that the decision arrived at by the end of the year or course of study is based on information accumulated over the period of time, and is most likely to be objective.

Perhaps one of the most valued is the guidance — oriented nature of CA. It is not just an accumulation of students' CA scores that are simply added to the end of semester/course examination's scores, the CA scores are meant to provide immediate feedback to the students and lecturers alike. For the lecturers, CA score is a proxy measure of teaching effectiveness (Falaye, 2005). If the majority of students performed poorly on a test, it could be assumed that the lecturer is unable to deliver the content in ways students will grasp and gain knowledge from the content passed across by the lecturer. The implication is that the results obtained from CA are to provide immediate feedback for the students to improve learning. Similarly, CA scores provide immediate feedback for the lecturer, this way s/he is able to identify gaps in learning that need to be improved and reinforced. One of the ways these are achieved is by adjusting teaching with the general aim of improving learning outcomes in future tasks. McMillan (2007) distinguished between Assessment of Learning and Assessment for Learning. While Assessment for Learning is formative, Assessment of Learning is summative. However, both are school based. Assessment for Learning involves assessing students' performance as teaching - learning progresses (Falaye, 2010) with the purpose of determining the extent to which students have profited from the classroom interaction using different assessment techniques. At the university level, summative assessment is for certification.

Continuous Assessment is a method of finding out what students gain from learning activities in terms of knowledge, thinking, and reasoning, character development and

industry (FGN, 1985) using various instruments such as tests, assignments, projects, questionnaire, observations and interviews. From the above, Assessment for Learning and Continuous Assessment are analogous. This justifies why they are used interchangeably in this study. The essence of Assessment for Learning is to improve performance. It requires that assessment is carried out as often as possible throughout the teaching-learning interaction using different assessment techniques to identify strengths and weaknesses for remediation. The implication is that teachers, as of necessity, give students feedback of their performances on CA.

The essence of the feedback is to assist both the teachers and the students to make corrections. Hence, feedback is a form of useful information for both the teacher and the students. Based on the performance of students, the teacher may need to re-plan and re-teach difficult contents, while the students, on their own, build on the feedback provided by the teacher and adjust their study habits for improved performance in order to achieve the objectives set for education. Literature on the implementation of CA in tertiary institutions in Nigeria is more or less non-existent, but much work had been carried out on its implementation in the secondary school level. Biakolo (2004) views feedback as an ongoing process to identify strengths and weaknesses in assessment performances, which should be specific in nature to enable students identify their strengths and weaknesses to facilitate their overall development. Scholars have shown the benefits of immediate feedback embedded in the practice of CA (Biakolo, 2004; Falaye, 2005), therefore, where CA is not planned and conducted at regular intervals, the benefits are not achieved as expected. Notwithstanding the values of assessment, researchers (Esere & Idowu, 2003; Ifiokobong, 2015; Kiadane, 2013; Ubong & Wokocha, 2009) have documented problems mostly linked with its implementation over the years. Some of the problems included poor record keeping, overdependence on the use of tests, not giving feedback on performance and providing

remediation, poor attitudes of teachers and poor knowledge of techniques for implementing CA among others (Adisa, 2003; Emeke, 1999; Osokoya & Odinko, 2005) have hampered the benefits inherent in the practice of CA.

How do undergraduates perceive what CA is? How far are lecturers able to leverage the values of CA to improve learning outcomes among students in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria? This is what the study mainly sets out to achieve. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the implementation of CA, highlight its lapses and make suggestions for guiding CA implementation in tertiary institutions. In this report, assessment for learning is used interchangeably with continuous assessment.

### Statement of Problem

Assessment for Learning/Continuous Assessment as the name implies is ultimately to provide information to both the lecturer and students that are useful for improving teaching and learning in order to advance the outcome of learning. As contained in the Policy on Education, Continuous Assessment was introduced into Nigeria education system in 1977. The CA practice started in the primary schools, and was later extended to the secondary schools. Continuous Assessment is seen as an approach to ensure that scores of students at the end of the primary and secondary education are derived from their performances in the cognitive, affective and Psycho-productive domains. Among the reasons for introducing CA is to reduce the tension associated with one-shot examination and to reduce examination malpractice. The practice of CA in tertiary education did not receive much attention as witnessed in the primary and secondary schools until recently that National Universities Commission (NUC) expressly directed.

As valuable as CA is, educators have identified several problems associated with its implementation. Predominant use of tests among the various techniques of measurement has made CA become continuous testing. Feedback of performance from CA is not always given to students, where it is provided; teachers hardly make out time to use the information for remediation. Most of the

research on the implementation of CA had focused on the secondary and primary schools. Little is known about its implementation in Nigeria's tertiary institutions.

Since CA is now mandatory at the tertiary education, carrying a weight varying from 30% to 40%, it is necessary to find out the status of its implementation at this level. Hence, this study explores the current practice of CA in the university with the purpose of identifying gaps in its implementation. The aim is to use findings from the study as a guide to resolving the identified problems that are related to CA implementation in order to enhance validity of scores. Ultimately, the findings could serve as an input in the development of CA policy implementation framework for tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

### Research Questions

This qualitative research was guided by the following four broad questions:

1. What are the views of undergraduates as regards Continuous Assessment?
2. How is Continuous Assessment implemented in the selected faculties?  
- strategies used;  
- frequency; and  
- feedback provided by the lecturers.
3. What are the merits and de-merits of Continuous Assessment as experienced by the undergraduates from the selected faculties?
4. What suggestions did the undergraduates give for CA implementation in their institutions?

### Methodology

#### Design

The study adopted the phenomenological design of the qualitative research approach. The design was chosen to enable in-depth information sourced from undergraduate students who had experienced the implementation of CA between two to three years, and therefore had knowledge of the topic. Since the aim of phenomenology is to

understand the essence of a phenomenon from the perspective of those who experienced it (Creswell, 1998), the choice of phenomenology design for this study is justified.

### Study Participants

Participants in this study were purposively selected. They were made up of undergraduates from five faculties in one of the three federal universities in the South-West, Nigeria. The faculties involved were those of Education, the Social Sciences, Agriculture, Technology and the Basic Medical Sciences. Each group is a mix of male and female students in their 200 and 300 levels, but is homogenous on the basis of the discipline. It is believed that the 200 and 300 level students would have had adequate exposure to continuous assessment, hence their choice. Each group comprised of a minimum of five and a maximum of eight participants. This made group interactions manageable.

### Data Collection Procedure

Focus Group Discussion was used to collect qualitative data from participants. From each of the five faculties, two focus groups were formed making a total of ten FGD groups. A Focus Group Discussion guide that contained the broad research questions including probes and prompts was developed to assist the FGD facilitators during the interactions. Discussions were tape-recorded after seeking participants' consent. It was backed up with note-taking.

### Data Analysis

Analysis of data, which involved the use of the inductive approach, was done manually. Inductive analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) is appropriate since the study is exploratory. First, the tape-recorded information was transcribed. Five different colour codes were used to differentiate the data collected from each of the five faculties. Thereafter, the transcribed notes were read, re-read; juxtaposing them with the field notes, rearranged and spread out on Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The participants' responses were sorted out based on the questions that guided the discussions. Thereafter, there was

comparing and contrasting the relevant information to identify themes.

### Rigor

To ensure rigour (trustworthiness) of the data and invariably the findings from this study, the researcher discussed the purpose of the study with the research assistant - a master's degree holder, as well as the broad questions. The aim was to check if the questions would adequately elicit the in-depth information required from the participants. Peer debriefing was done after each set of FGDs to check for any gap in data collection. Also, to ensure conformability, quotations from participants were used to buttress the findings.

### Ethical Considerations

In compliance with research ethics, the purpose of the research was shared with the participants. They were not coerced to participate in the study; therefore, their participation was based on informed consent. The participants were assured that the information provided would be kept confidential and that none of the outcomes of the research will be traceable to them. To further maintain anonymity, the names of the participants were not documented.

### Findings

The findings from this study are laid out under each of the research questions as follows:

**Concept of Continuous Assessment** Students from the Faculty of Education view Continuous Assessment as:

a practice whereby lecturers get to test the knowledge of their students to know how much had been learnt', to know the level of achievement of the behavioural objectives and how far the lecturer has been able to impart knowledge.

The view expressed above is very closely related to those of the students from the Faculty of Technology who submit that 'Continuous Assessment is a means whereby lecturers get to test the knowledge of students and get them ready for examination'. It is also 'a way of testing how much was learnt'.

For the Social Science students 'it [CA] is meant to be a series of test and assignments' so as to 'get them [students] ready for examination' and to avoid depending on exam scores alone.' Also, a participant from the Social Sciences had this to say: Continuous Assessment 'is supposed to be a test before exam, where lecturers give their students a fighting chance'; 'it is also supposed to be a booster for the examination'.

This is similar to the views held by students from the Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences. To these students, Continuous assessment 'is a way of assessing the students, to test their knowledge and to encourage them to read and to make them prepare always'. According to the participants from the Faculty of Agriculture, Continuous assessment 'is a system of grading students to assess them and to check if they are learning' and 'to check if they are learning for exams'. 'It is also an organized test by the teacher or lecturer to know how the students read and to test the knowledge impacted' on their students.

**Implementation of Continuous Assessment** Three main issues are the focus of discussion under CA implementation. One, the strategies used for implementing CA, two, how often it is conducted per semester by the lecturers in their faculty, and lastly, how performance feedback is provided to students by lecturers.

### Strategies used and frequency of CA

With respect to the strategies used, information provided by all the focus groups revealed that tests are most often used. For the frequency of conduct of CA, there appears to be an agreement across the five faculties. 'We take some [tests] once and others twice' by a student from the Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences. 'It is done once or twice and most often it is unannounced' says a student from the Faculty of Education and corroborated by all other students who participated in that group discussion. However, these views vary from those presented by the groups from the Faculties of Technology and Agriculture where a student from Technology says that tests could be given 'at every class'. 'Some [lecturers] give as many as three or four per

course' says a participant from the Faculty of Agriculture. A further probe indicated that it was possible in the Faculty of Technology due to the relatively low student-lecturer ratio in the class; and for other reasons such as checking absenteeism. A student from the Faculty of Education has this to say 'some lecturers give unannounced test to punish students who do not attend classes' while some lecturers just want students to read enough' says another student from the Faculty of Agriculture. The students from the Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences emphatically submit that they are 'always notified before any test is taken'.

At the other end is the revelation that some lecturers do not conduct CA. '

'Some [lecturers] give series of tests while others don't'. A student from the Faculty of the Social Sciences reveals. It was also revealed that 'sometimes topics not yet covered' are given to students as CA'.

#### Feedback provided by lecturers

With regard to the feedback component, the participants from the Faculty of Technology say that 'generally no feedback is provided', while 'some lecturers give general comments on performance', and the 'test results are sometimes pasted'. However, the group laments: 'we do not know how our CA scores are arrived at'. This is also in line with the group from the Faculty of Education who had this to say: 'scores are not given to us', 'students don't get their scores back' The students from the Faculty of Agriculture submit that where scores are released, 'it is usually done in the departments and not at the faculty level'. The Social Science students who volunteered information on CA and feedback lamented thus: 'more pathetic are cases when assignments are to be submitted on exam dates'; 'since the assignments haven't been evaluated with necessary feedbacks, we don't know if repeating the process undertaken in the assignment is good enough for similar questions in the exams'. This statement is corroborated by the students from the Faculty of Education: 'preparing to submit an assignment and preparing for an exam simultaneously, isn't helpful especially when

the assignments are not marked'. Most often students resort to self-assessment after their CA test: 'we depend on a self- assessment', 'after test is group evaluation, student evaluate oneself revealed by participants from the Faculty of Education. Implementation of CA 'is lecturer-dependent' appears to be the general consensus of all groups.

#### Merits and Demerits

All the groups of students richly elaborated on the usefulness of CA as a means of preparing students for, and to avoid over-dependency on the final examination (Table I). According to the medical students from the Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences, 'CA is done to encourage them to read' and 'to make them prepare always'. For students from the Faculty of Agriculture, CA is meant to 'keep students on their toes so as not to be carried away with just lectures, just piling up notes'. They went further to reiterate in different ways that 'Continuous Assessment stimulates students to prepare', 'it pushes students to go to their books', 'Often times, after a tiring day — especially after series of lectures, the thought of an approaching CA makes the students stretch further to study 'Some of us who often wouldn't normally read when nothing is at stake get prompts to read when tests are announced'. Similarly, for the Social Sciences students 'the test (CA) gives a push' and gets them 'ready for examination'.

Another merit of CA as expressed by the groups is provision of feedback to students and lecturers alike. The students from the Faculty of Education say that CA is used by the lecturer 'to check students' understanding so as to know whether to progress to a new topic or to go back on a particular topic'. It is also to allow 'the students know the styles and patterns of lecturers' questions in preparation for the exams' and to ensure that students 'attend lectures and focus their attention on the course'.

Students from the Faculty of Agriculture tied the merits of CA to performance. According to these students, 'it is an uphill task to make high grade from a one-shot examination at the end of a semester'; Exams are 100 marks and may be difficult to gather all scores in a single exam'. Thus, continuous assessment is 'used to

help students gradually to accumulate scores before the final examination'. It is also the opinion of education students that CA is more beneficial to the average and weak students as 'it helps the students to make good grades, especially for average students who may not be able to cope with a once-and-for-all examination'.

The use of many instruments by lecturers to collect CA scores and pooling the scores together will most likely increase students' overall scores at the end of the course. Such students could obtain scores through assignments, attendances, practical, and tests' as the case may be. A useful point here is the support for the use of variety of tools in CA. Continuous Assessment also 'helps students know areas to focus on when preparing for exams'. They often use the tests and other CAS 'to know the style of the lecturers'. These views expressed by the students from the Faculty of Agriculture corroborate those of the participants from the Faculty of Education.

The medical students' opinion about the merits of CA similarly supports that of the Education students. The medical students submit that CA 'makes students read ahead of exams'. 'It makes students know their strengths and weaknesses such that after CAs, they can go back to assess themselves'. 'Out of two or three tests, one's performance may expose one to know areas where one is okay or lagging, and topics where one needs to focus on the more'. To the medical students 'everything is okay, since we're often notified ahead and thus there is enough time to prepare'.

In a twist, while discussing the demerits of CA, education students attribute poor performance by students in CA to impromptu tests as students 'may not have grasped what they have been taught' and 'to some extent, it is stressful'. For the medical students 'an impromptu test puts anxiety in the students' and places a panic attack on them', while those from Agriculture elaborated more on the demerits of CA thus: It makes a mockery of students who did not prepare, even for those who score high marks, sometimes, test results may not completely give a full analysis of one's strength or weakness, since it is possible to cram and reproduce perfectly

to obtain good grades without really comprehending the nitty-gritty of the whole thing.

Supporting this viewpoint, students from the Social sciences restate: 'it [CA] is not a true test of students' knowledge; even the students who score high marks may just have crammed everything up'.

Another claim by the Social Science students is that 'results of CAS interfere with students' behaviour in the final examinations'. 'A student with a high CA score tends to relax more at the examinations and vice versa'. In another perspective, unannounced tests are used as a punitive measure according to education students: 'some lecturers give unannounced test to punish students who do not attend classes'. Also, the students submit that 'the CA results do not often reflect in the overall examination result possibly due to the lecturers wanting to use CAS just for attendance'. During the discussion, a student from the group interjects 'once the class isn't having much number of students on seat, the lecturer could say tear a sheet of paper. .'. Further still, a student from the Faculty of Agriculture says 'some [lecturers] forget to pick them [the scripts] along after the CA; they just get the total number of students present and their matric numbers - obviously just for attendance'. For these groups of

students, 'it [CA] is not effective', 'it is more of a routine by lecturers to give Cas'.

Yet, another general opinion expressed by the students from the Faculty of Agriculture about the demerits of CA is linked with what their lecturers expect from the tests and the scores awarded eventually. The following statements capture the students' views: 'one could have been studying a different area from the real questions presented', while another participant recalled that:

Some lecturers prefer word-forward responses, some others request for more than given points, where such students have not thought out of the box, students could be marked down. Therefore, getting high grades, sometimes, may not completely reveal one's strength in certain areas as expected.

Also, participants frown at 'using students to grade their papers'.

| Merits  | Demerits  |
|---|---|
| <p>'CA is done to encourage them [students] to read' and 'to make them prepare always' 'it keeps students on their toes so as not to be carried away with just lectures just piling up notes '</p> <p>'helps students gradually to accumulate scores before the final examination'</p> <p>'Continuous Assessment stimulates students to prepare ',</p> <p>'it pushes students to go to their books', . the thought of an approaching CA, makes the students stretch further to study.</p> <p>'the test gives a push' and gets them 'ready for examination '</p> <p>Lecturers use CA 'to check students' understanding so as to know whether to progress to a new topic or to go back on a particular topic '.</p> <p>'It allows students know the styles and patterns of lecturers ' questions in preparation for the exams '</p> <p>It ensures that students 'attend lectures and focus their attention on the course Continuous assessment is 'used to help students gradually to accumulate scores before the final examination'.</p> <p>'It helps the students to make good grades, especially for average students who may not be able to cope with a once -and-for-all examination '.</p> <p>'helps students know areas to focus on when preparing for exams'</p> <p>'Out of two or three tests, one 's performance may expose one to know areas where one is okay or lagging behind, and topics where one needs to focus on the more '</p> | <p>'an impromptu test puts anxiety in the students ' and places a panic attack on them',</p> <p>'to some extent it is stressful'</p> <p>'it makes a mockery of students who did not prepare ',</p> <p>'it is not effective', 'it is more of a routine by lecturers to give CAS '.</p> <p>'sometimes, test results may not completely give a full analysis of one's strength or weakness, 'it is not a true test of students' knowledge; even the students who score high marks may just have crammed everything up'. 'the CA results do not often reflect in the overall examination results'.</p> <p>'results of CAS interfere with students' behaviour in the final examinations'. 'A student with a high CA score tends to relax more at the examinations and vice versa '</p> <p>'some lecturers give unannounced test to punish students who do not attend classes'</p> <p>'lecturers use CAS just for attendance'.</p> <p>[Lecturers] 'using students to grade their [test] papers'</p> |

4. Suggestions for CA Implementation Based on the participants' experiences, they offered suggestions covering the instruments used for CA, frequency of CA, feedback, merits and demerits of CA. The participants from the Social Sciences suggested that CAS should not always be tests only. Circumstances such as ill health, may make students fail tests, hence strategies such as group projects and assignments should be used. Further still, the group provided another justification thus 'prepare us [our lecturers should] for the outside world, the world out there needs better communicators and team players, ' This view resonates the limited value of tests in transforming students to be world class graduates.

The Technology and Education groups recommended that specific feedback should be provided by their lecturers rather than give general comments on performance. This way, they would be able to have an idea about their performances and adjust their study habits. While supporting the recommendation put forward by the Technology and Education groups on the value of feedback, the Social Science groups submit that ' the norm should be that more attention should be given to the process of imparting and gaining knowledge than the final product of examination i.e. results'.

As regards the frequency and weighting of CA, it is the opinion of the Technology students that the 40% allotted to CA is too high, and thus suggested that the university should take a second look at it. Although when the groups were probed further on their preference, there was no consensus about the proportion of CA score in the overall semester examination. The groups' suggestions vary from 20% to 40%. With regard to the frequency of conducting CA, they suggested an average of two CAS per semester.

#### Discussion

The level of knowledge of the study participants about what CA means is satisfactory. However, it is obvious that most of the students equate CA to testing. Taking CA to mean testing may be traced to some reasons. One, it is transfer of knowledge. The

participants' knowledge right from their secondary school days and their experiences so far while in the university as undergraduates influenced their views about CA. Most teachers in the Nigerian secondary schools prefer to use test for CA. This corroborates the findings of Ifiokobong (2015) and Osokoya and Odinko (2005). Another reason for the preponderance use of test is its ease of construction when compared with other assessment tools (Falaye, 2010). It is obvious from this study that respondents prefer the use of a variety of tools to conduct CA. The 'use of many instruments by lecturers to gather CA scores and adding the scores together will most likely increase students' over-all scores at the end of the course...!.

All the groups richly elaborated on the impact of CA on the students in many ways: It is a means of preparing them for the final examination; it helps to avoid over-dependency on one-shot examination, to prompt students to put in more time to study among other advantages. These are in support of the objectives of CA as enunciated by the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2013). Perusing the education students' comment on the merits of CA, which is 'to allow the students know the styles and patterns of lecturers' questions in preparation for the exams'. It is interesting to note that students could decipher the assessment style of their lecturers from the format they use in implementing CA.

The demerits highlighted by virtually all the groups of students revolve around the ways lecturers conduct CA. Giving CA without notifying students ahead of time is generally not acceptable to them. It is stressful, raises anxiety and ineffective when students obtain low test scores, which eventually negates the purpose of testing; the frequency and what they are able to make out of the entire exercise. Students attribute low scores in CA to impromptu tests. They claimed that they may not have grasped what they have been taught, particularly for weak students.

The strategies used for implementation of CA in the university are not too different from

those used in the secondary schools. This study revealed that tests are most often used by lecturers across all the faculties at an average of two tests per course per semester. In terms of frequency of CA, in a few Faculties like Technology and Agriculture, tests could be given up to three or four times in order to keep students prepared at all times. This is probably because student enrolment is relatively low in the two faculties. In such cases, students attend classes in anticipation that the lecturer may give a test. This appears to be an effective strategy for getting students on their toes on the one hand, and for curbing absenteeism on the other hand. Ironically, in other faculties where tests are given more than once, students feel that it is punitive. Participants revealed that most often tests are given unannounced to make students prepare ahead of time. It is revealing that the students concluded that CA 'is lecturer dependent'.

As for feedback of performance on CA, generally students do not get to know their scores, since course lecturers do not release them. However, some lecturers merely provide general comments about their performance. The groups of students from the Faculty of Education submit that CA is used 'to check students' understanding so as to know whether to progress to a new topic or to go back on a particular topic' It is also meant to give the lecturers and students feedback, to allow 'the students know the styles and patterns of lecturers' questions in preparation for the exams'. Despite the value of feedback as revealed by scholars (Biokolo, 2004, Falaye, 2005, Falaye, 2013), unfortunately, some lecturers, in this case, do not provide feedback for students to know the gaps in learning and to provide adequate remediation, in order to prepare them for the semester examination. This could be traced to many challenges such as large student population, lecturers' attitudes and insufficient resources (Bamiro & Adedeji, 2010; Falaye, 2010).

Where lecturers' direct students to submit assignments on the day semester examination is written according to the information provided by some participants, it is obvious that feedback, either performance feedback or

corrective feedback, cannot be provided to assist students in preparing for the semester examination. Iterating the participants' views in this case, CA is just a routine. This practice negates the purpose of CA. The major purpose of CA is to use the scores as corrective feedback whereby gaps in teaching and learning are identified in order to provide remediation. Submission of assignments on the day of the semester examination is likely to be disruptive. Most likely students' attention will be divided and hence they may not be able to concentrate fully on preparing for the semester examination, and at the same time struggling to meet the submission deadline. Perhaps it is based on these observations that students tend not to have confidence in CA scores as painted by some participants that 'test results may not completely give a full analysis of one's strength or weakness'. They conclude that CA 'is merely a routine and ineffective'.

## Conclusion

Undergraduate students described the concept of CA in their own understanding, all pointing to a consensus of opinion on what CA is and what it does. The comprehensive discussion about the merits and demerits of CA is an eye opener. However, from the findings the current implementation of CA in the universities falls short of meeting its main objectives of comprehensiveness and guidance-oriented. Also, in the opinion of study participants, both students and lecturers appear to lose sight of the essence of CA in a situation where students are directed to submit projects/assignments on the day the end of semester examination is written. Findings from this study may not be generalized beyond federal universities in the south-west, Nigeria, since representative study participants were not selected from the entire universities in the country.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings from this study:

- Feedback of performance (students' CA scores) should be provided by course lecturers well in advance of the final semester examination. It enables

students identify gaps in the content tested for correction, and to seek assistance where needed;

- Course lecturers should review each test, projects etc. with the students for added guidance;
- Where there is a high student-lecturer ratio, lecturers need to plan well ahead to determine appropriate assessment strategies to employ, and to strike a balance between students' population and the ease of scoring;
- The National Universities Commission, the regulatory agency, need to come up with a valid framework for the implementation of CA in tertiary institutions of learning; . Each university should develop a guideline for CA implementation for uniformity based on the NUC framework. The guideline should be made available to both lecturers and students;
- Each university should mount in-house trainings for lecturers on the modus operandi of implementing CA; . A follow up study, to include the lecturers and significant stakeholders, is suggested. The findings are likely to provide more robust information that will further guide the development of CA implementation guideline; . Mixed-methods approach could be employed for the purpose of triangulation and for enhanced credibility of findings.

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