

ASSESSING THE APPLICATION OF ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING STRATEGIES IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS: CASE STUDY OF UNION SECONDARY SCHOOL, EHA-AMUFU, ENUGU STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the application of assessment for learning (AFL) strategies in Nigerian secondary school. It assessed the students' and teachers' perception on the application of AFL strategies. Two research questions guided the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. All the SS1-SS3 students and all the teachers in the case study school constituted the population. A sample of 150 students and 30 teachers were derived through proportionate stratified random sampling technique. Two instruments were used to collect data from the respondents. The instruments were validated and also checked for reliability and reliability indices of 0.80 and 0.82 were obtained respectively using Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient. Arithmetical mean was used to answer the research questions. Percentage was used to check extent of application of AFL strategies. Students' response revealed 82% application while teachers' response revealed 93% application of AFL strategies by teachers'. It was concluded that AFL strategies was substantially applied by teachers. It was recommended that training and workshops on assessment for learning strategies should be frequently organized for teachers such that they will be conversant with strategies for AFL and incorporate them in their daily teaching and learning activities.

Keywords: Assessment for learning, Strategies, Assessment, Application.

1.0 INTRODUCTION:

Assessment plays an important role in the teaching and learning process. It informs learning, that is, it is capable of providing information which can be used for improvement of learning. When used as such, it can be termed formative assessment or assessment for learning. This aspect of the role of assessment is not so pronounced as to the usage in Nigerian educational system. We are more conversant with the assessment which checks the extent of learning

(summative assessment or assessment of learning). Summative assessments are used to measure what students have learnt at the end of a unit or to promote students, to ensure they have met required standards on the way to earning certification for school completion or to enter certain occupations, or as a method for selecting students for entry into further education (OECD, 2020).

Assessment for Learning is a practice designed to satisfy students need to increase both motivation and achievement, by involving them in their own learning (Umar, 2018). Assessment for learning is based on providing instant and specific feedback after each learning step to avoid unnecessary delay of correcting students' errors. Assessment of learning and assessment for learning are supposed to complement each other to achieve educational goal. This seems to be obvious to policy makers in Nigeria, hence in the National Policy on Education (2013) it was stipulated that assessment shall encompass broad areas: (a) Assessment for learning. (b) Assessment of learning.

The benefits of assessment for learning according to Hawthorne (2022) includes: improved relationships between teachers and students; improved attainment and achievement; improved confidence, resilience and self-esteem amongst learners; improved classroom culture, teaching and learning environment; improved productivity and sense of motivation and improved meta-cognitive talk in the classroom. The benefits of assessment for learning are obvious in impacting learning. Apart from the said benefits of assessment for learning, Umar (2018) in a study to determine the effect on a group of Sudanese pre-medical students found that a significant difference exists between two groups of students taught using AFL in favor of the AFL group. Most of the studies found on assessment for learning are foreign. There also exist dearth of literature on application of AFL in Nigerian schools. The researchers therefore deemed it worthwhile as the Nigerian National Policy on Education is being re-assessed for global relevance, best practices and competitiveness to look at the extent of application of AFL in Nigerian schools. To this effect, two research questions guided the study.

Research Questions:

1. To what extent does assessment in secondary schools in Nigeria encompass assessment for learning strategies as perceived by students?
2. To what extent does assessment in secondary schools in Nigeria encompass assessment for learning strategies as perceived by teachers?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concept of assessment for learning:

Assessment for learning involves active involvement of students' through giving tasks, asking questions in the process of learning and from it, generate feedbacks which are used to improve learning. Assessment for learning as an application of formative assessment is a type of assessment which is intended to inform the teaching and learning (instructional) process (Mehmood et al in Oyinloye & Imenda, 2019). AFL is continuous and helps teachers to identify learning needs as well as inform learners about themselves and the progress they have made towards attaining intended goals and standards while the learning process is on-going (Stiggins in Oyinloye & Imenda, 2019). Assessment for learning according to Duckett in Oyinloye &

Imenda (2019) improves classroom practice, contributes to the personalized learning agenda, whereby learners are empowered to take active part in their own learning and develops the confidence of learners to undertake peer and self-assessment.

2.2 AFL Strategies:

AFL strategies are practices teachers are expected to imbibe in the process of teaching and learning in order to generate feedbacks which are used to improve learning. According to OECD (2020), key elements from case studies on formative assessment are:

- 1) Establishment of a classroom culture that encourages interaction and the use of assessment tools.
- 2) Establishment of learning goals and tracking individual student's progress towards those goals.
- 3) Use of varied instruction method to meet diverse students' needs.
- 4) Use of varied approaches for assessing students understanding.
- 5) Feedback from students' performance and adaptation of instruction to meet identified need.
- 6) Active involvement of students in the learning process.

Black and William and William and Thompson in Heitnk et al (2016) also identified five key strategies for implementing assessment for learning:

- 1) Clarifying and sharing learning intentions or goals and success criteria.
- 2) Generating opportunities to effectively gather evidence of students learning through informal and formal assessment. Example, through class discussions, questioning or learning tasks.
- 3) Providing formative feedback to students to support their learning.
- 4) Supporting students in acting as instructional partners through discussion and peer assessment.
- 5) Activating students as agents in their own learning through self-assessment and self-regulation.

2.3 Empirical studies on AFL:

Arnold (2022) examined 75 empirical studies published since 2002 that provided evidence of the lived experiences of secondary school students when teachers facilitated AFL pedagogical practices. Students' experiences were conceptualized to comprise six interrelated dimensions, ranging from recognition of classroom practices to integration with experiences beyond the classroom. His findings showed that students experience was responsive to change in teacher practice when students are co-practitioners of AFL and developers of disciplinary expertise. There was evidence that positive student's evaluation of the worth or value of a practice is an important precondition for productive student experience revealing pedagogic power of students as evaluators. AFL was also found to contribute to generative experience of learning when it enhances dialogic interaction with students and teachers as partners in moving learning forward. It was found that inclusive AFL and discipline specific AFL practices are evident but under-represented in the field.

Box (2020) in a study assessing an empirical study of an information systems development subject examined the application of one formative assessment strategy in response to change the mix of student profiles. The aims were to encourage students to engage in deep learning; increase a student's responsibility for learning by providing a structure for the learning effort and encouraging continuous study. Data was collected through participant observations, which is by an instructor conversations with the other instructor and students, judging assessments, a formative evaluation and in-class polls. The result indicated that the aims were to some extent achieved.

OECD (2020) in a work on assessment for learning – the case for formative assessment provided finding on assessment for learning drawn from recent analysis undertaken by CERI. It analysed formative approach in exemplary practice carried out in secondary schools covering eight education systems. They also analysed formative assessment in adult language learning, literacy and numeracy provisions and a framework for strengthening policy and practice across the sector as well as for building the evidence base. They found out that teachers had incorporated each of the six elements into regular practice. While teachers may have placed different emphasis on the various elements (example; some teachers placed greater stress on providing students with feedback, other teachers were more focused on providing students with variety of learning opportunities). They used each of these elements to shape teaching and assessment. Teachers thus created a framework, language and tools using the element of formative assessment to shape their approach to teaching and learning.

Oyinloye and Imenda (2019) investigated the impact of assessment for learning on learner performance in life science. They employed simple random sampling technique to select four schools from the King Cetshwayo District of KwaZulu Natal Province, South Africa for the study. They used a quasi-experimental, pretest-posttest comparison group design which involved four schools. Two schools formed the “treatment condition” while the other two served as the “comparison group”. A total of 160 grade eleven learners were used for the study. Also used were two teachers who were trained to use assessment for learning instructional approach while the other two teachers of the comparison group used their usual instructional approaches. The statistical technique used was the 2-factor ANOVA with repeated measures while the analysis was done using SPSS. Their findings revealed that learners following an AFL instructional approach performed statistically higher than those that followed normal classroom instruction.

Umar (2018) did a study on the effect of AFL on a group of Sudanese pre-medical students' performance in English for specific purpose. The study tries to identify student perceptions and attitude towards AFL. A total of 53 subject students were sampled and divided into experiment and control group. The experimental research design was employed. A comparison of the scores of the students revealed a significant difference between the two groups in favor of the experimental group. Students' attitude towards AFL was also checked through questionnaire and interview. The qualitative and quantitative analysis of the responses of students showed that they have positive attitude towards AFL.

Heitnk et al (2016) conducted a systematic literature review to reveal prerequisites needed for assessment for learning implementation. One research question guided the study. The result identified prerequisites regarding the teacher, the student, assessment and context such as,

teachers must be able to interpret assessment information on the spot, student engagement in assessment process is vital, assessment should include substantial, constructive and focused feedback and the school should have a school-wide culture that facilitates collaboration and encourage teacher autonomy. This result contribute to a better understanding of the multiple-facets that need to be considered when implementing assessment for learning from both a theoretical and a practical stand point.

Melkam (2016) investigated teachers' and students' perception towards the practice of assessment of students' learning in the faculty of Educational and Behavioural Sciences, Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia. The design of the study was survey. Four research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study was all the 2015 graduating class students and all teachers of the faculty of Educational and Behavioural Sciences. 24 teachers and 100 students were sampled. The finding indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between teachers and students in their perceptions toward the practice of assessment.

Nguyen and Ulbrich (2013) reported their experiences from aligning assessment strategies with available resources when constantly redesigning an introductory course on business information and communication technologies at a North America University. Examination and assignment results of 148 students were analysed to better understand the effectiveness of different assessment strategies when redesigning the course. Some assessment strategies were adapted to using fewer resources while maintaining an effective learning environment. The population consisted of all students in business information and communication technologies introductory course. The sample were 148 freshmen level students. The finding suggests that no significant differences occurred with regards to learning outcomes and that a computer-supported assessment strategy has advantages with regard to preparing students for examination.

3.0 METHODS

The design of the study was descriptive survey. The population of the study consisted 546 students and 44 teachers of Union Secondary School, Eha-Amufu. Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to draw students from senior secondary classes as follows: SS1 – 44 students, SS2 – 66 students and SS3 – 40 students making a total sample of 150 students. The researchers decided to use only senior secondary students to ensure they have a good understanding of the instruments they were expected to respond to. Two questionnaire instruments were developed and used for the study –“Students' Perception on the Application of AFL Strategy Questionnaire” and “Teachers' Perception on the Application of AFL Strategy Questionnaire”. The two instruments comprises 28 items each drawn from literature on AFL and formative assessment strategies adopted from key elements from OECD (2020); Black and William and William and Thompson in Heitnk et al (2016) and other literatures. The instruments have four response options: always, occasionally, rarely and not at all rated 4, 3, 2 and 1. Two experts in the Department of Educational Psychology, Measurement and Evaluation unit of Federal College of Education, Eha-Amufu validated the instruments. Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was used to ascertain the reliability of the instruments for students and teachers, 0.80 and 0.82 were obtained respectively. The researchers directly administered the copies of the questionnaires to students and teachers with the help of a teacher in the case study school. All the instruments distributed were collected, 150 for students and

30 for teachers. The research questions were answered using arithmetical mean. The standard mean was 2.50, mean ranging from 2.50 and above showed application of the AFL strategy, while mean below 2.50 showed that the AFL strategy was not applied. Percentage was used to check the extent of application; 50% and above showed high application while below 50% showed low application.

4.0 RESULTS

Research question 1: To what extent does assessment in Nigerian secondary schools encompass assessment for learning strategies as perceived by students?

Table 1: Mean Response on Students Perception on Application of Assessment for Learning Strategies.

S/N	Description	Number	Mean	Remark
1	My teachers’ in the course of teaching tries to get information on what we are able to learn from her teaching.	150	3.9	Applied
2	My teachers’ adjust their teaching based on the information they get from what we have learnt.	150	3.4	Applied
3	My teachers’ re-teach some topics to some students who do not understand that topic in their earlier teaching.	150	2.4	Not applied
4	My teachers’ give tasks that are not for grading.	150	2.3	Not applied
5	My teachers’ try to get information on areas we need more help with.	150	3.5	Applied
6	My teachers’ give us information on what we need to learn before lesson takes place.	150	3.4	Applied
7	My teachers’ made us to know the skills we need to develop through their teaching.	150	3.1	Applied
8	I am made to know what shows that I have learnt	150	3.6	Applied
9	We are encouraged to study in groups	150	3.4	Applied
10	We are given group assignments	150	3.5	Applied
11	My teachers’ allows us to interact in the class during lesson.	150	3.2	Applied
12	My teachers’ encourage students of mixed ability to work together	150	2.8	Applied

13	My teachers' give us enough time to think when they ask us questions.	150	3.4	Applied
14	My teachers' move at the pace of slow learners.	150	2.3	Not applied
15	My teachers' give us enough time to submit our class exercise	150	3.4	Applied
16	My teachers' make us reflect on what we learnt after lessons.	150	3.8	Applied
17	My teachers' give corrections to students' immediately after a task.	150	2.4	Not applied
18	My teachers' explain the criteria they use in marking our scripts.	150	1.8	Not applied
19	My teachers' give us written corrections.	150	2.7	Applied
20	My teachers' give us verbal corrections.	150	3.4	Applied
21	My teachers' use varied questioning pattern to ensure we understand her lesson.	150	3.3	Applied
22	My teachers' uses discussion questions and answer in teaching.	150	3.3	Applied
23	Teachers' check our understanding during teaching to help them solve to our learning problems.	150	3.8	Applied
24	Teachers' track students' progress towards their learning goals	150	2.8	Applied
25	Teachers' check Students' learning frequently in the learning process	150	3.8	Applied
26	My teachers' get students' actively involved in the learning process.	150	3.2	Applied
27	Teachers' use varied teaching methods to meet diverse need of students'.	150	3.4	Applied
28	Teachers' use varied approaches to assess our understanding.	150	3.5	Applied

From the result presented in table 1, 23 items (82%) have mean ratings up to 2.50 showing that they were applied by teachers while 5 items (18%) have mean rating below 2.50 which indicated that they were not applied by teachers.

Research question 2: To what extent does assessment in Nigerian secondary schools encompass assessment for learning strategies as perceived by teachers?

Table 2: Mean Response on Teachers Perception on Application of Assessment for Learning Strategies.

S/N	Description	Number	Mean	Remark
1	Getting information on what the students' are able to learn in the course of teaching.	30	3.3	Applied
2	Adjusting teaching based on information gotten from students' work.	30	3.4	Applied
3	Repeating teaching of topics to some students who do not understand in their earlier teaching.	30	3.1	Applied
4	Giving tasks that are not for grading.	30	2.4	Not applied
5	Identifying areas students' need more help.	30	3.7	Applied
6	Giving students' information on what they need to learn before lesson takes place.	30	2.6	Applied
7	Making students' know the skills they need to develop through the teacher's teaching.	30	3.0	Applied
8	Making students' know what shows that they have learnt.	30	3.6	Applied
9	Encouraging Students' to study in groups.	30	3.6	Applied
10	Giving Students' group assignments.	30	2.8	Applied
11	Allowing interaction among students' during classes.	30	3.0	Applied
12	Encouraging students' of mixed ability to work together,	30	3.4	Applied
13	Giving students' enough time to think when asked questions.	30	3.4	Applied
14	Moving at the pace of slow learners.	30	3.0	Applied
15	Giving students' enough time to submit class exercise.	30	3.1	Applied
16	Making students' reflect on what they learnt after lessons.	30	3.4	Applied
17	Always give corrections to students' immediately after a task.	30	3.4	Applied

18	Explaining criteria for marking scripts to the students’.	30	2.2	Not Applied
19	Giving students’ written corrections.	30	2.8	Applied
20	Giving students’ verbal corrections.	30	3.3	Applied
21	Using varied questioning pattern to ensure that students’ understand their lessons.	30	3.4	Applied
22	Using discussion questions and answers in teaching.	30	3.2	Applied
23	Checking students’ understanding during teaching to help them solve their learning problem.	30	3.6	Applied
24	Tracking students’ progress towards learning goals.	30	3.3	Applied
25	Frequent checking of students’ learning in the learning process.	30	3.4	Applied
26	Making students’ to be actively involved in the learning process.	30	3.7	Applied
27	Using Varying teaching method to meet diverse students’ need.	30	3.5	Applied
28	Using Varied approaches to assess students’ understanding	30	3.1	Applied

From the result presented in table 2, 26 items (93%) have mean ratings up to 2.50 showing that they were applied by teachers while 2 items (7%) have mean rating below 2.50 which indicated that they were not applied by teachers

5.0 DISCUSSION

From the study, students affirmed that their teachers apply almost all the AFL strategies except five, while teachers affirmed that they apply all except two. The report from the students and teachers response confirmed to some extent the truthfulness of teachers’ response that they apply the stated AFL strategies. However, from the study on students response, teachers do not re-teach some topics to some students who do not understand it in their earlier teaching; they do not give task that are not for grading; they do not move at the pace of slow learners; they do not give correction to students immediately after a task and they do not explain the criteria they use in marking their scripts. The non-re-teaching on areas not learnt by students may be due to so much content to cover in a week since teachers struggle to cover all the topics in the new week without having time to cover the topic of the previous week which were not properly learnt by the students. The effect of the above practice is that if examination are set from those areas which students did not learn well they will definitely fail the examination. Not giving task that are not for grading implies that exercises are mainly given to score and grade not really to assess whether students have actually learnt. Not moving at the pace of slow learners implies that some students will be left behind in learning. Such students may not cope with

other students in some topics. Not giving correction immediately after a task will create gap in students learning. The effect is that students may not be given the correction again or may not properly link the correction to the task. Not explaining the criteria used in marking the students' scripts will deprive students the skill on how to answer questions to score enough marks that will make them pass in examinations. Lack of knowledge on the importance of making students knowledgeable with the criteria used in marking their scripts could be a reason teachers do not do the above. The finding of Melkan (2016) that there is no significant difference between teachers and students in their perception towards the practice of assessment could be said to be in line with the finding of this work since teachers and students differentiated in just a few items. OECD (2020) study is also in line with the finding of this work since they found out that teachers had incorporated each of the six elements of formative assessment into regular practice and they used each of these elements to shape teaching and assessment.

6.0 CONCLUSION

From the finding of the study it was found that AFL strategies are highly applied in the case study school according to teachers. For the students, AFL strategies are partly applied by the teachers. It can therefore be concluded that AFL strategies is to a large extent satisfactorily applied.

6.1 Recommendations

- 1) Teachers should be taken through trainings and workshops to understand the need to re-teach those areas their students do not understand. The head of departments should help to supervise and enforce compliance of teachers.
- 2) Teachers should be trained to recognize that every teaching and learning task offers assessment opportunities, therefore students should be assessed day by day to check their learning, inform teaching and use as feedback to improve learning.
- 3) Teachers should be educated on how to create medium to carry slow learners along in their teaching.
- 4) Teachers should be encouraged and made to prepare marking guides or write answers down as they set questions. This will make it easy for them to give corrections to the students immediately after the task.
- 5) Teachers should be encouraged to explain criteria they use in marking the students scripts to them. A step to this is allotting marks to questions in the question paper.

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