

TOPICAL ISSUES AND PROSPECTS OF TRADITIONAL AND PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENTS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF CORE CURRICULUM AND MINIMUM ACADEMIC STANDARDS IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES.

**Mark E. Ugwoke, Blessing Chekwube Eloanyi, Eneze, Blessing Nkeiruka
and Eziokwu, Patricia Nkiruka**

Department of Science and Computer Education, Faculty of Education, Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu,
Nigeria.

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Abstract: Demands for new knowledge and skills in the 21st Century are impacting teaching, learning, and assessment in universities in Nigeria. The National Universities Commission (NUC) in 2022 introduced Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) for the Nigerian Universities System. Part of the implementation strategy of the CCMAS is the introduction of modern teaching methods. The ultimate goal is for students in Nigerian universities to acquire experiential learning. However, the assessment strategies critical to modern teaching methods were not incorporated in the implementation document of the CCMAS. Unfortunately, traditional assessments cannot evaluate experiential learning. This paper analysed topical issues and prospects of using conventional and portfolio assessments in the Nigerian university system. The paper established that despite the capacity of portfolio assessment to provide a nuanced, holistic, and student-centred evaluation of learning, most lecturers in the universities in Nigeria, still use traditional assessment. It recommended, among others, a robust educational policy direction to support the introduction of portfolio assessment in the Nigerian university system.

Keywords: Portfolio assessment, Experiential learning, Higher education reform, Traditional assessment, Curriculum standards

Introduction

Educational assessment is an important component of the learning process. It helps to determine if learning objectives have been met. It is an integral part of instruction, as it determines whether or not the goals of education are being met. Through assessment, we can evaluate teaching and learning. Huba, 2000 cited in Din, et al. (2023) defined educational assessment as the process of obtaining and analysing information from various sources to gain insight into students'

knowledge and their ability to apply the knowledge acquired from their educational experiences. It is a systematic process that uses data to document and improve student learning and programmes. Using empirical data, educational assessment is the systematic process of ascertaining a student's knowledge, experience, skills, and beliefs. It is a continuous process, and the results help improve classroom teaching and learning experiences. The ultimate goal is to quantify and document how much

a student knows. Traditional and portfolio assessments are used to ascertain what the students have learned.

Demands for new knowledge and skills in the 21st Century are impacting teaching, learning, and assessment in universities in Nigeria. The National Universities Commission (NUC), an organ of the Federal government of Nigeria, is responsible for developing curricula and setting standards for Nigerian universities. In 2022, the Commission introduced the Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) for the Nigerian university system in response to changing demands for new skills and knowledge in workplaces and society. According to the NUC (2022), the ultimate aim of CCMAS was to produce nationally relevant and globally competent graduates from the Nigerian university system.

At its launch, the Commission expressed optimism that the “2022 CCMAS documents will serve as a guide to Nigerian Universities in the design of curriculum for their programmes with regards to the minimum acceptable standards of input and process, as well as, the measurable benchmark of knowledge, 21st-century skills and competences expected to be acquired by an average graduate of each of the academic programmes, for self, national and global relevance”. Implementation of the CCMAS has impacted the pedagogical strategies across universities in Nigeria. Rufa’I (2023) remarked that the lecture method alone cannot produce graduates with appropriate skills currently needed in the job market locally and internationally. Instead, modern teaching methods such as discussion, problem-solving, role-play, project-based learning (PBL), case-study, assignment and inquiry methods for all categories of students should be adopted (Rufa’I,

2023). Experiential learning is the hallmark of modern pedagogical strategies.

However, the assessment strategies critical to modern teaching methods were not spelt out in the implementation document of the CCMAS. Unfortunately, the traditional assessments that are currently adopted by most university teachers cannot be used to evaluate experiential learning. Supporting this view, Koh (2017) posited that traditional assessments (teacher-made tests or standardised tests) could not be used to assess complex and soft skills like problem-solving skills, leadership skills, collaborative skills and other essential skills needed in the job market due to the pattern in which the items of the tests were structured. This development of continued use of traditional assessments may limit the effective adoption of the modern teaching methods of the CCMAS in Nigerian universities. Therefore, the question that is germane at this juncture is: which type of assessment should be adopted for the evaluation of experiential learning of the CCMAS? This paper analyses topical issues and prospects of adopting traditional or portfolio assessments in the Nigerian university system.

Traditional Assessment

Traditional assessments, mostly tests, are used mostly as summative assessments. Traditional assessments are therefore product-oriented. Normally the tests are administered at the end of a lesson, unit, or course. They could also be administered at the critical stage of a programme (Okoye, 2023) like the mid-semester examinations for courses. Traditional assessments measure what learners have learnt at a given time. The instrument is either teacher-made tests or standardised tests. According to Ebuoh (2024), teacher-made tests are tests developed by a teacher or lecturer for examinees in a particular school for local needs.

Examples of teacher-made tests are tests given by the teacher at the end of a lesson, mid-semester or end of the semester to ascertain what the students have learned.

Standardised test items, on the other hand, are more rigorous to generate. The test items are produced by professionals and commercialised with all examinees in a state or country required to answer the same questions under uniform directions and time limits (Ebuoh, 2024). Some of the examples of standardised tests are those of Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) Examinations, designed for admissions into tertiary institutions in Nigeria, National Business Certificate/National Technical Certificate (NBC/NTC) Examinations of the National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB), Senior School Certificate Examinations (SSCE) of either West African Examinations Council (WAEC) or National Examinations Council (NECO), among others. The structure of the items of traditional assessments could be true-false, matching, multiple-choice, essays, and short-structured (Kaipa, 2021). Quizzes, and examinations that evaluate students' knowledge and skills through a fixed format are other examples of traditional assessments. This technique's assessment processes are non-interactive between learners and between learners and teachers. It is mostly teacher-centred, not student-centred and this limits its application as part of the modern teaching methods of the CCMAS.

Despite the limitations of traditional assessment, it remains the assessment strategy currently applied by lecturers in most universities in Nigeria amidst the implementation of CCMAS. Okoye (2022) was very categorical while expressing his concerns over the continued use of traditional assessment (teacher-made tests) in universities in Nigeria. He pointed out that

the guidelines for assessments in most universities in Nigeria are that the lecturers are directed by the university management to set their questions and submit them along with the marking schemes some weeks before the commencement of the examinations to their respective heads of departments for vetting and moderation by the Departmental Academic Board before the administration of the tests. The scores or grades obtained from the administered tests must, again, be submitted to the heads of departments for the approval of the Departmental Academic Board before the results are published.

University management adopts these assessment guidelines as part of their quality assurance mechanisms to enhance the standards and quality of the examination test items. However, some teachers and heads of departments do not adhere to these regulations. There are instances where some lecturers fail to submit their examination test items for vetting to the heads of the department before the administration of the tests (Okoye, 2022). With reported technical issues associated with teacher-made tests (Ebuoh, 2024), the quality of such unmoderated tests and the fair grading of the students are not guaranteed. This is worrisome because most lecturers are not test construction and administration specialists. Continued adoption of traditional assessments as a component of CCMAS delivery across Nigerian universities is a threat to the realisation of its aims and objectives, hence the advocacy for the introduction of alternative (authentic) assessments including the portfolio assessments.

Portfolio Assessment

Demands for more functional education and pedagogical innovations have prompted changes in assessment. There is a clamour for a paradigm shift

from teacher-centred traditional assessments to learner-centred authentic assessments, such as portfolio assessments. Quansah (2018) defined a portfolio as a compiled file of reports, papers, and other materials used by the teacher and students to ascertain what a student has learned. It is equally used to appraise the strengths and weaknesses of the students. Another key features of portfolio assessment are the fact students are the ones that prepare it while the teachers supervise them. The assessments are not unilaterally carried out by the teacher alone, instead, students are part of the assessment process. It makes students understand how they are being assessed. The process for portfolio development includes student participation in the selection of work, in criteria, goal setting, and through self-assessment. Students and teachers collaborate in assessing and evaluating students learning from evidence in a portfolio collection.

The data obtained from the portfolios, like data from any other assessment instrument are used for decision-making regarding further learning by educators. Adopting portfolio assessment, learners are at the centre of the assessment process. As part of the self-assessment process, students are taught how to reflect upon the work in their portfolios. This process enables each student to know how to evaluate his or her academic performance by explaining what is important about the evidence included in the assessment and what it says about him or her as a learner. In Nigeria, portfolios have been used for undergraduate students in vocational and technical education, fine and applied arts, architecture, and Nigerian law schools (Council for Legal Education, 2016). However, adopting portfolio assessment for other undergraduate programmes in universities

across the country is not common, instead, traditional assessment is mostly used.

Issues with Traditional and Portfolio Assessment for the Implementation of the CCMAS

There are key issues with adopting traditional assessment for teachers and students in Nigerian universities. Most of the time, the assessment is antiquated because it assesses skills that are becoming increasingly obsolete. The traditional assessment items are usually developed from the curricula or academic benchmarks which are hardly reviewed in line with the current skill needs of the society. The review of curriculum and educational standards in line with the skills required in the industry and society is not regular in Nigeria.

Traditional assessments are usually one-off and can only provide information on what students can do at a particular time. The results from the assessments may tell us something about what students know at a given time, but fail to provide data on students' holistic learning. This assertion was also the opinion of Tong (2023) who argued that traditional assessments provide data that do not give teachers, parents and other education stakeholders the desired and accurate information about students' learning journey. Additionally, traditional assessment practices are not calibrated to the students' current state; therefore, they evaluate students' performance at the moment and not learning.

Another issue with traditional assessment is that the tests are considered uniform; the test items are the same and administered to all the students at the same time and under uniform conditions irrespective of the student's prior knowledge, abilities, experiences, and cultural backgrounds. Incidentally, the demographic structure of students in Nigerian universities indicates that they are from different cultural backgrounds and

possess different prior knowledge and abilities. Traditional assessments require all test takers to answer the same question or a group of questions uniformly. The test items are prepared and stored in a standard manner, thus, making it possible to compare the relative performance of students or groups of students (Burka, et al., 2021). Viewing assessments as being the same for all may introduce bias to the assessment because students of the same abilities may not have equal opportunities to demonstrate their learning. It is common knowledge to establish that some traditional tests may contain differential item functioning.

Portfolio assessments are costly to develop and apply. According to Tong (2023), the concerns about the cost-effectiveness of portfolio assessments relate to the teacher's time and the infrastructure required for effective assessment activities. The teacher will need good support staff to facilitate proper profiling of the students and other arrangements to enable seamless staff-student contact periods (Amsami, 2016). In another development, Anebi and Ngbede (2017) assessed the adequacy of human resources in universities in the South-East States of Nigeria. The study which employed a descriptive survey design and had a population comprising 567 Deans of Faculties and Heads of Departments revealed that the number and quality of academic and non-teaching (support) staff in Universities in the South-East States of Nigeria is inadequate. The human resources requirements in the universities fall short of National Universities Commission (NUC) standards. The inadequacy of personnel has negative consequences on the service delivery in these universities (Anebi & Ngbede, 2017) including effective implementation of portfolio assessments in the universities in Nigeria. Furthermore, a study by Amsami (2016) highlighted

that even though portfolios are utilised in the Faculty of Environmental Design, there are challenges in their implementation as many lecturers and students lack a clear understanding of portfolio assessment, which affects the quality of its application. The study identified the need for structured guidelines, including rubrics and self-reflection components, to enhance the effectiveness of portfolio assessments.

Another issue is that portfolio assessment is time-consuming. The study conducted by Mokhtaria (2015) found that teachers are hesitant to implement portfolio assessments because they perceive it as time-consuming to assess students' performance and provide formative feedback. Already, most teachers are overloaded with many class activities such as supervision of students' projects, preparation of lecture notes, and attending the academic board meetings, among others. Similarly, Tong (2023) stressed that the problems of adopting portfolio assessments can be more complicated in a large crowded class. The study by Amsami (2016) also identified time consumption, and crowded classrooms as problems in using assessment portfolios. Large crowded class size is a common phenomenon in Nigerian universities, especially public universities (owned by Federal and State governments). The student population in most courses is always large and crowded, especially for core courses that all students in a department or faculty must offer. It is common to experience over 1,000 students converging in a small lecture hall with a capacity of 300 students, hence posing challenges to teachers during lecture periods (Gbenga et al., 2023) and making the implementation of portfolio assessment difficult for the teachers. Besides, most teachers feel they are not familiar with portfolio assessment, thus not having sufficient knowledge or training to implement this approach.

The issue related to the validity of assessment using portfolios is another concern for its implementation in the universities. Validity is the extent to which the assessment measures what it is designed to measure (Ebuoh, 2024). In this context, the concern is the extent portfolios assess the curriculum learning outcomes. The establishment of concurrent validity when portfolio assessments are adopted is problematic. This was illustrated in Obodo (2014) which asserted that assessment has concurrent validity when the criterion is obtained at about the same time as the predictor (test scores), in which case both the criterion and the predictor are obtained concurrently. The lack of other tools that can be used to evaluate student performance in a related task is an issue that poses problems in measuring concurrent validity. Relatedly, there is a predictive validity issue while using portfolio assessments. The fact that portfolio assessment is relatively a new concept in assessment parlance and not commonly adopted in universities, it is not yet possible to ascertain whether portfolio assessments' results can be used to predict students' future performance in their various areas of specialisation.

The concern of portfolio assessment being subjective judgment is another issue in its applications. The assessment materials that a student selects while developing his or her portfolio may be somewhat different from what another candidate includes, reflecting differences in the student's background and cultural differences. This poses a problem to reliability using portfolios. Reliability is the degree to which the test scores are dependable or relatively free from random errors of measurements (Ebuoh, 2024). In other words, reliability is a measure of the reproducibility of the assessment. Reproducibility must be consistent over time and across candidates

and examiners. With overcrowded students in various courses in many universities in the country and coming from different backgrounds and cultures, establishing a high degree of reliability in assessments using portfolios may be difficult for the lecturers.

Prospects of Traditional and Portfolio Assessments for Implementation of CCMAS

Despite the issues of being discrete, uniform, isolated, and antiquated, traditional assessments are persistently used in teaching and learning in universities in Nigeria. The use of traditional assessment is believed to be efficient to administer, objective in scoring, and produce reliable scores. The assessments are equally cost-effective because the introduction of digital tools such as computers is used for scoring; thus, facilitating efficient large-scale administration of test items. The study by Saher, et al. (2022) reported that many teachers like using traditional and authentic testing tools such as portfolios to evaluate the skills and competencies of students.

Traditional assessment provides clear benchmarks for evaluating student performance and is easier to administer and grade, thus allowing for efficient assessments across large groups. Buxoro Davlat Universiteti (2021) asserted that traditional assessments can be used in evaluating the learning and retaining capacity of a student; analysing how much of the curriculum has been acquired by the student; helping teachers to compare the performances of different students; and recognise students' intellect and build their cognitive abilities. The traditional assessment approach is simple, straightforward, and time-saving. With the introduction of technology such as artificial intelligence in traditional assessments, their processes could be more efficient. The assessment option

enables teachers to manage crowded examination halls more efficiently than other forms of assessment (Buxoro Davlat Universiteti, 2021). Despite these benefits and prospects of traditional assessments, they can not be used to effectively implement the modern teaching methods of the CCMAS. Perhaps, it is for this reason that Saher, et al (2022) advocate for a paradigm shift from teacher-centred traditional assessments to learner-centred portfolio assessments. Given the popular calls for a paradigm shift from traditional teacher-centred assessments to student-centred assessments, portfolio assessment has tremendous prospects. The potential of portfolios to assess student performance and curriculum outcomes related to attitudes and professionalism is the major prospect for adopting portfolio assessments. The attraction towards portfolio assessments is hinged on the fact that they capture evidence of student's performance of all learning outcomes including new tasks and skills required in society. In a study by Saher, et al. (2022), it was found that educators who preferred the adoption of authentic assessment may have been positively influenced by the findings of the recent research that aimed to improve the assessment practices in higher education. Wylie and Lyon (2020) mentioned that innovative assessment practices could change how universities operate by rethinking assessment design to enable students to work collegially and be engaged in the assessment process such as self and peer assessments. With the increasing recognition of the benefits of portfolio assessment in improving student performance, educational stakeholders are encouraged to conduct workshops to train teachers on effective portfolio use.

Another key prospect for portfolio assessment strategy for the implementation of the CCMAS is its comprehensiveness. According to Tanimu (2019),

effective portfolio assessments are characterised by their comprehensiveness, predetermined structure, and informative nature. A comprehensive assessment strategy should include diverse data sources that reflect students' capabilities across various learning domains. This systematic approach helps educators understand students' progress more holistically (Ugwoke & Agwagah, 2024). Similarly, a study on the impact of portfolio assessment on students' achievement conducted by Otukpa, et al. (2024) found that portfolio assessment positively influenced students' achievement in mathematics. The study additionally found that students engaged with portfolio assessments showed improved performance compared to those who were not. This suggests that portfolios can foster greater student autonomy and responsibility for learning outcomes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while both traditional and portfolio assessments face significant challenges and prospects, there is a need for a paradigm shift in the assessment strategies in favour of portfolio assessments for all courses. The portfolio assessments will facilitate the effective implementation of the Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) in Nigerian universities. The innovative portfolio method of assessments captures all types of teaching and learning. The strategy is suitable for the assessment of soft skills such as problem-solving skills, leadership skills, communication skills, critical thinking skills, collaborative skills, and so on needed in 21st-century workplaces.

Recommendations

Given the superiority of portfolio assessment methods over the traditional methods for effective implementation of the CCMAS, the paper recommends the following:

1. The National Universities Commission, an organ of the Federal government charged with the responsibility of developing curricula and setting standards for the universities in Nigeria, amongst others, should introduce portfolio assessments as a critical component of the modern teaching methods the Commission recently introduced in the universities.
2. A comprehensive training programme through seminars and workshops on the development and applications of portfolio assessments should be organised for both the students and the teachers (lecturers). As a student-centred approach, a student needs to be knowledgeable on how to develop the portfolio while the teacher needs to know how to generate evidence of accomplishment by the students from the portfolio.
3. Integration of technology such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) in assessments can make their use more efficient. Utilising innovative digital traditional and portfolio assessments can streamline the evaluation processes and make them more efficient while also engaging students more effectively.

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