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# ATTITUDE OF UNDERGRADUATES TOWARDS FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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## Abstract

*The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004), enunciated that assessment of students' learning outcomes, shall be based on continuous assessment with variety of assessment techniques for maximum self-development and self-fulfilment. This practice was formally introduced to, and implemented at the primary and secondary school levels with clear guidelines for implementation. Tertiary institutions have also adopted it without specific guidelines. This paper was a survey which sought to ascertain the various formative assessment techniques used in tertiary institutions. This study was conducted in two universities in Anambra State. The sample size was 248 undergraduates (105 males and 143 females). Four research questions guided the study. A 35 – item questionnaire was developed by the researchers and used for data collection. The instrument was validated and internal consistency of 0.89 (89%) was calculated using cronbach alpha technique. Data collected were analyzed using frequency, and percentage. The findings revealed that undergraduates have a dwindling attitude concerning formative assessment and prefer only one take-home assignment for a course. It also revealed that undergraduates are affected by socio-cultural influences and family financial incapacibilities and engagement in other activities outside education. Based on the findings, recommendations were made which include that undergraduates should be encouraged to avail themselves of any opportunity that would promote their education.*

**Key words: Formative assessment, Attitude, Undergraduate, Sex**

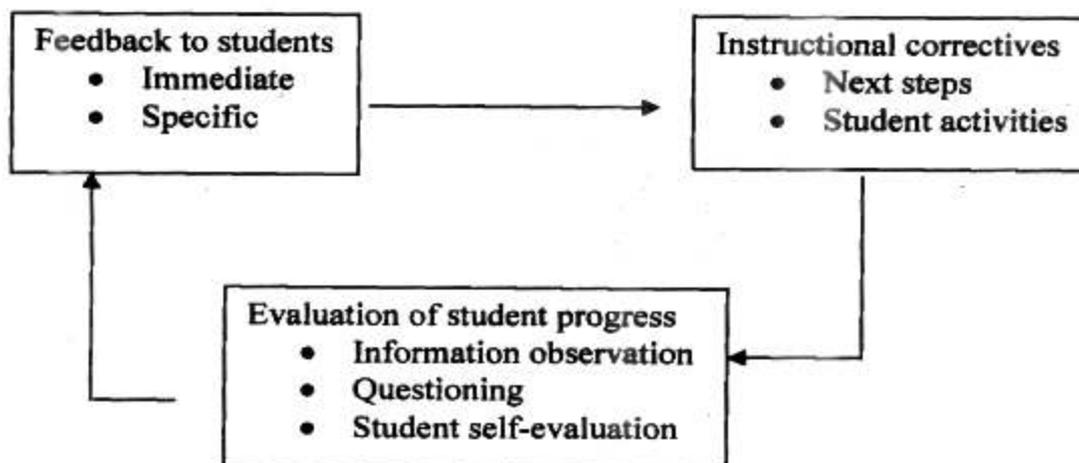
## INTRODUCTION

**A**ssessment of learning outcomes is an integral part of teaching and learning. Learning is a continuous process which involves learners' active participation in receiving, storing, interpreting and relating information to their previous knowledge and experiences. Assessment helps to ascertain whether or not learning has taken place in the individual learner. Also the effectiveness of school curricula on the one hand, and how the contents are delivered to the learner on the other hand could be judged by the findings from the students' assessment.

Classroom assessment is defined as the collection, evaluation and use of information derived from assessment to assist teachers make decisions that improve students' learning (McMillan, 2007). The feedback emanating from assessing achievement as learning progresses is valuable in promoting self-regulation, motivating learners and invariably developing lifelong learning skills. On the part of the teacher, assessment particularly when carried out formatively helps him/her to take decisions about the learners and the teaching learning process in order to improve the system and the learners. Looking inward, there is no doubt that

formative assessment can be employed as a powerful tool for raising the quality of education at the higher education level. Even though formative assessment has been adopted without specific guidelines, it has been observed that the current practices at the higher education level do not conform appropriately to the principles of assessment. (Ifeakor and Anekwe, 2008). Secondly, the times and mode of assessment do not sometimes favour most undergraduates in higher institutions. Perhaps they seem to be the group of students that would resume late each semester with many excuses like socio-cultural problems, family financial incapability, psycho-social issues etc. At the higher school level, students' learning is assessed formatively with the ultimate goal of ensuring that the goal of education is attained. Feedback from assessment procedures is primarily employed as a means of providing information to students on the level of performance, and to parents in order to make the necessary assistance available to the child to improve on her performance.

According to McMillan (2007), the goal of formative assessment is the improvement of students' motivation and learning. To reach this goal, teachers must employ a circular, continuing process



**Formative assessment cycle**

**Adapted from: McMillan (2007)**

Thus, after teachers gather evidence of students' knowledge, understandings and skills by monitoring students and asking questions, that evidence is interpreted (evaluation), and appropriate specific feedback is provided. This feedback, which either supports and extends proper understandings, or targets deficiencies, is followed by activities (corrective) that would build on understanding to broaden and expand their learning or correct misconceptions (Guskey, 2005). It is important that correctives contain new strategies and approaches, and include a message that making error or being wrong is a part of learning. Formative assessment techniques are judged by the extent to which they are embedded within instruction

and promote learning. Assessment without the use of instructional changes is not formative. Some teachers often give quizzes, for instance, each Friday, grade them and return the tests on Monday with a grade. By itself, this is not formative assessment, it is, rather, a short assessment. Formative assessment documents student learning to some extent after instruction, but it does so in small increments as corrective instructional practices are employed. This is seldomly done in Nigerian higher institutions and so is deficient of appropriate formative assessment practices. These values emanating from assessing students' achievement as learning progresses are valuable in promoting self-regulation, motivating learners and invariably developing lifelong

learning skills (Falaye, 2009). Consequent to the fact that, formative assessment of learning entails the improvement of knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and longlife education, the most seemly non-participation of most undergraduates in higher institutions affects their literacy and academic achievement.

The significance of formative assessment (home work, project, assignment etc.) had varied depending on the prevailing ideas on how learning occurs. According to Pelletier and Normore (2007);

- Formative assessment is important because it increases time-on-task.
- Formative assessment should have effect on memory because of practice requirements.
- It should have effect on transfer to the extent that properly devised application problems are included.
- The effectiveness of formative assessment depends on the difficulty of the formative assessment and the facilities for doing the assessment.
- The extent of what is learned depends on whether the formative assessment is completed and constructive feedback provided to the student.

- Formative assessment should have its goals built into the content and the nature of processing required.

Even though, most studies seek a linkage between formative assessment and academic achievement, the importance of formative assessment lies on the opportunity for the student to reflect on concepts, practice, procedures and develop competences so that whatever was learned could be used in new situations (Popoola, 2008).

Although, the Nigerian policy statement on assessment directs that continuous assessment must be implemented at all levels of education (FRN, 2004). The guidelines for implementation at the higher level of education were not explicit as it is in primary and secondary school levels. Educators at the tertiary level, it would seem, are at liberty to decide the timing of assessment, the continuous assessment modes to use, the frequency of assessment and the weightings of the assessment. Due to some environmental factors, the attitudes of undergraduates towards formative assessment remain questionable. This study therefore has set out to ascertain the attitudes of undergraduates towards formative assessment. The mode and frequency of formative assessment and the constraints to



formative assessment in higher institution were also looked into.

### **Purpose of the study**

In general term, the purpose of this study was to ascertain the attitude of male and female undergraduates towards formative assessment in higher institutions. Specifically, the study sought to:-

1. Ascertain the attitude of male and female undergraduates towards formative assessment in Nigerian universities.
2. Determine the mode of formative assessment prevalent in Nigerian universities.
3. Determine the frequency of formative assessment preferred in Nigerian universities.
4. Identify the constraints of undergraduates to formative assessment in Nigerian universities.

### **Research questions**

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What are the attitudes of male and female undergraduates towards formative assessment in higher institutions?
2. What modes of formative assessment techniques are prevalent in higher

institutions?

3. What is the frequency of use of formative assessment techniques in higher institutions in Anambra State?
4. What are the constraints to formative assessment use in higher institutions?

### **Method**

The design is a descriptive survey. A descriptive survey research is one which attempts to collect data from members of a population in order to determine the current status of that population.

This study was conducted in two universities in Anambra state namely: Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and Anambra State University, Uli.

The population comprised all Undergraduates in the faculty of Education from the two universities. At Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka there are 752 students and 240 students at Anambra State University, Uli.

A total of 25% of the students from each university formed the sample giving the sample sizes of 188 students (88 males and 100 females) from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and 60 (17 males and 43 females) from Anambra State University, Uli. Random sampling technique with replacement was used to select the students from their

various departments and universities. In all, 105 males and 143 females (248) formed the sample size.

Instrument for the data collection was a 35-items questionnaire developed by the researchers. The instrument was in four sections answering the four research questions. Section 1 and section 4 sought to elicit information on the degree of agreement with the item statements. While the section 2 and section 3 are to elicit information on the level of preference to the item statements. The response format is strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), disagree (D), strongly disagree (SD) with nominal values of 4, 3, 2, 1 respectively. While the section 2 and section 3 are to elicit information on the level of preference to the item statements with the response format of very much preferred (4), much preferred (3), just preferred (2), not preferred (1).

The instrument was face-validated by two experts in measurement and evaluation from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. They were expected to validate the instrument in terms of relevance to the topic, ambiguity of the statement, clarity of language and adequacy of the items. The experts, after examining the instrument made some corrections which were effected in the final draft of the

instrument.

The instrument was trialed on forty (40) (20 male and 20 female) students of faculty of Arts and Social Science from Anambra State University, Uli. The reliability of 0.89 was calculated using Cronbach Alpha technique. This value was deemed appropriate for the study.

The researcher administered the questionnaires with the aid of two trained research assistants from each of the university. One research assistant was for the males while the other was for the females. The questionnaires were retrieved two days after. Out of the 248 questionnaires administered, 102 from males and 141 from females (243) were completely completed and used for data analyses. The rest were discarded. Frequency and percentage count were used to answer the research questions.

## Results

The results were shown below in tables 1, 2, 3 and 4.

### **Table 1: Attitude of male and female undergraduates towards formative assessment in Nigerian universities**

S/N	Formative Assessment	Male N = 102		Female N = 141	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Are important aspects of student s' evaluation.	96	94.1	96	68.1
2.	Few students respond to formative assessment.	55	53.9	50	35.5
3	Encourages students to read before attending lectures	95	93.1	35	24.8
4	Improves students' overall performances	88	86.3	41	29.0
5	Threatens students.	21	20.6	100	70.9
5	Creates test phobia in students.	12	11.8	85	60.2
7	Improves students study habits	80	78.4	24	17.02
8	I hate formative assessment because it is stressful.	29	28.4	95	67.4
9	Should include projects, field – trip, construction work and moulding.	92	90.2	61	43.2
10	I prefer formative assessment because it reduces time students spend on extra-curricular activates.	19	18.6	78	55.3
11	Formative assessment should carry more weight than it presently carries.	91	64.5	10	7.1
12	Deepens students' knowledge of the course.	82	80.4	37	26.2
13	I like formative assessment because it keeps students busy.	85	83.3	108	76.6
14	I hate formative assessment because it makes the learning tedious.	38	37.2	100	70.9
15	Prepares students for end of course examination.	92	90.2	43	30.5
16	Students do not have time to prepare adequately for frequent tests.	76	74.5	89	61.7
17	Gives clues to the questions to expect in the end – of – course examination.	87	85.3	113	80.1

Table 1 revealed the attitude of male and female undergraduates towards formative assessment. The findings showed that 94.1% male students agreed that formative assessments are important aspects of evaluation, 93% agreed that it encourages students to read before coming to lectures, improves students overall performance (86.3%), should include projects, field-trips, construction work and moulding (90.2%), more weights should be assigned to formative assessment (64.5%), prepares students for end – of – course examination (90.2%); improves students study habits (78.4%), students do not have to adequately prepare for frequent

tests (74.5%), gives clues to the questions to expect in the end – of – course examination (85.3%), few students respond to formative assessment (53.9%) On the other hand, 70.9% of female undergraduates noted that formative assessment threatens students and 76.6% agreed that it keeps students busy. Meanwhile, 70.9% stressed that it makes the learning tedious and 61.7% agreed that they do not have time to prepare adequately for frequent tests, creates test phobia in students (60.2%), reduced time students spend on extra-curricular activities (55.3%), gives clues to the questions to expect in the end-of-course examination (80.1%).

S/N	Formative Assessment	Male N = 102		Female N = 141	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
18.	One test, midterm test, one project, end of term.	72	70.6	13	9.2
19.	One test, midterm test, assignment, end of term exam.	70	68.6	25	17.7
20	Project, mid term test end of term exam.	49	48.0	22	15.6
21	Two tests, mid term test project, end of term exam.	39	38.2	22	15.6
22	Two tests one take home, one project, end of term.	20	19.6	6	4.3
23	Only end of course examination	20	19.6	83	58.8

In terms of the mode of formative assessment that students prefer, table 2 revealed that most male undergraduates prefer one test, midterm test, one project and end of term examination (70.6%). Most male students (80.4%) do not prefer only end of course examination. Female undergraduates do not prefer many modes of formative

assignment (9.2%) except only end of course examination (58.8%).

**Table 3: Preferred frequency of formative assessment by male and female undergraduates in Nigerian universities**

		Male N = 102		Female N = 141	
S/N	Formative Assessment	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
24.	Many tests incorporated into each course.	14	13.7	12	8.2
25.	Two test per course	33	31.7	9	6.3
26.	One test per course	49	48.1	9	6.3
27.	Two take home assignment per course.	56	54.6	88	62.5
28.	End of course examination only.	28	27.3	71	50.0
29.	Un-announced test	25	24.0	12	8.2
30.	Announced test	42	41.1	70	50.0

Table 3 showed that 31.7% of male undergraduates and 6.3% of female undergraduates preferred two tests per course. 54.6% of males and 62.5% of females preferred two take home assignments per course. 27.3% of males and 50% of females preferred only end of course examination. 24.0% of males and 8.2% of females

would prefer un-announced test while 41.0% and 50% of male and female respectively would not prefer un-announced test.

**Table 4: Constraints to formative assessment by undergraduates in Nigerian universities**

S/N	Types	Male No	Male %	Female No	Female %
30	Returning late to school after resumption	106	75	70	68
31	Family financial incapability, level of exposure and overburdened household chores before going to school.	119	84.4	79	77
32	Lack of physical materials to construct projects and other forms of formative assessed.	79	56.3	62	60
33	Pre-occupation with extra curricula activities like going to watch films, cyber café, face book etc	110	78.1	77	75
34	Engagements with parties, birthdays, travels etc.	104	73.8	65	64
35	Sociocultural influences, emotional feelings affective dispositions, psychophysical problems.	131	93	92	90

Table 4 showed the response of male and female undergraduates to the constraints of formative assessment which include returning late to school (68%) for male and (75%) for female, family financial incapability – males (77%) and females (84.4%), pre-occupation with activities like watching films – males (75%), females (78.1%), engagement with parties – males (64%), females (73.8%) and socio – cultural influences - males (90%), females (93%).

### Discussion

From the study, it was found that the attitude of male and female undergraduates towards formative

assessment varied. Male students agreed that formative assessments are important aspects of evaluation (94.1%), encourages students to read before coming to lectures (93%), improves students overall performance (86.3%). They even supported adding more tasks into formative assessment as to boost their knowledge. This includes projects, field trips, construction work, moulding (90.2) and it gets them prepared for end-of-course examination (90.2%). This finding complement that of Falaye (2009) who noted that formative assessment promotes in students self-regulation, motivates them to develop lifelong learning skills. On

the other hand, female undergraduates opined that formative assessment threatens students (70.9%), makes the learning tedious (61.7%), creates test phobia in students (60.2%), reduced time students spend on extra-curricular activities (55.3%). These findings are in line with the report by Adegun and Komolafe (2010) that the attitude of female undergraduates to evaluation practices brings a setback to female literacy. Furthermore, Anugwo (2010) noted that most female students come late to school already burdened by emotional, social, psychological, physical and cultural problems with the result that formative assessment brings a threat to them.

The result of the findings in terms of mode of formative assessment indicated that most male undergraduates prefer different types of formative assessment (tests, projects, assignments, midterm test and end-of-course examination). This might be to expose and drill them with feedbacks in order that learning might be achieved. Meanwhile female undergraduates do not prefer many modes of formative assessment rather they prefer only end-of-course examination. These findings were in line with the work of UIS (2007) and Onwubiko (1999)

who reiterated that female undergraduates tend to fend for other activities other than their academics.

The findings in table 3 showed the preferences of the frequency of formative assessment. It was found out that sometimes what is good for the goose is also good for the gander. Both male (54.6%) and female (62.5%) undergraduates preferred take home assignment. But on the other hand, 27.3% of males and 50% of female undergraduates preferred only end-of-course examination and 41.0% and 50% of males and females respectively would not prefer unannounced tests. This also buttressed the finding of Falaye (2009) and Anugwo (2010) who noted that most students prefer take home assignments that give room for collaborative work where it is not needed.

The result in table 4 showed that there are constraints to formative assessment by male and female undergraduates. Anugwo (2010) emphasized that family financial incapability, level of female exposure and overburdened house chores, pre-occupation with activities other than their academics, socio-cultural influences, psycho-physical problems and affective dispositions were among the constraints.



## **C o n c l u s i o n   a n d r e c o m m e n d a t i o n s**

This paper examined the antecedents of formative assessment of students' achievement in higher institutions and its role in providing more opportunities for higher education. The modes and frequency of formative assessment were also examined and the constraints that militate against male and female undergraduates from active participation in formative assessment was also x-rayed.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- The government in her policy statement should enunciate specific guidelines for formative assessment in higher education.
- Higher institutions should have specific timetable for teaching and examination to acquaint the students of the programme and avoid absenteeism from un-announced assessments.
- Students should make sure, as much as possible, not to avoid formative assessments so as to avail themselves of self-development and self-fulfilment.
- The effect of socio-cultural influences, family socio-

economic status, and engagement in other activities should be reduced by the parents.

- Undergraduates of higher institutions should be encouraged to avail themselves of any opportunity that would promote their education.

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attitudes towards different sorts of migrants, the criteria for accepting or excluding different sorts of migrants, the extent of contact with members of migrant communities, the perceived costs and benefits of migration, and the main drivers of these attitudes. Here we provide topline findings on some of these questions, specifically: the overall levels of support, or lack of support, for immigration; the differences between European countries in their attitudes to immigration; the extent to which European publics differentiate between different types of migrant; the perceived costs and benef