

Assessment of teaching and learning in Nigeria: Some methodological issues

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ABSTRACT

Assessment of teaching and learning internationally and within Nigeria formed the crux of the paper. The focus is the basic and secondary education levels. The main objective is to demonstrate that assessment of teaching and learning are core to education delivery. The concept of assessment was analyzed. Cases of assessments in Africa were cited and compared. Then the analysis went in-depth into the frameworks for assessing teaching and learning internationally and within Nigeria. It revealed the insufficient assessments so far in the Nigerian education system and the commendable decision of the Minister of Education in 2012 to set up a national committee to develop national blueprint for assessing learning achievements in Nigeria. Against these backgrounds, the paper made several recommendations that included the need to institutionalize national frameworks for assessing teaching and learning in Nigeria. It also advised that the national frameworks should be compatible with international teaching and learning assessment models so as to enable comparison of findings in Nigeria and internationally. It further called for the establishment of a national forum on teaching and learning assessment driven by the Federal Ministry of Education to promote exchange of best practices; collaboration among stakeholders involved in teaching and learning assessments to boost the exercises; and the implementation of the recommendations of the learning assessments committee set up by the Federal Government.

Keywords: Assessment, teaching, learning, basic and secondary education.

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INTRODUCTION

Teacher and student performances are two sides of the same coin, so to say. The ultimate aim of teaching is to bring about learning. Therefore, a teaching process that does not result in learning is of no use. Without quality teaching, only a limited form of learning is possible. This is why the *National Policy on Education* (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013) states that “*No education system can rise above the quality of its teachers*”. In some American states, employers even use students’ academic achievement as part of the criterion for deciding teacher performance. Though this may be controversial, especially among teachers unions which may argue that several factors (and not just the teacher) are responsible for students’ performance, it shows the great weight attached to quality of teaching when assessing why students pass or fail. Indeed, quackery in the teaching profession has led to the wrong assessment or classification of otherwise brilliant students as “failures”

whereas the failure of such students is as a result of poor pedagogical skills of the teachers.

The foregoing underscores need to bring both teaching and learning into some form of assessment framework. The assessment of teaching and learning in Nigeria has not been sufficiently done. Sometimes, only learning is assessed while teaching is left out and vice versa. Such a situation makes it impossible to have comprehensive data and plausible generalizations about the *teaching and learning trends* in the school system. There are however, few good learning assessments that tried to ascertain altogether the impact of teachers, school administration, parents and environment on the performance of students to show that all these factors count.

Assessment of teaching and learning refer to *rational observation and abstraction of data concerning teaching and learning performances across subjects, classes and programmes* (and this can extend up to the various levels

of the education system and countries) *over time in order to understand trends in the quality of teaching and learning, the predisposing factors and steps necessary to achieve and sustain optimal performance in teaching and learning.* For the UK Department for International Development, DFID (2012:1), assessment of student achievement “entails measurement of learning, analysis to diagnose problems, and use of the findings to guide remedial action”. It further defines a national assessment as “a survey of schools and students (and sometimes teachers) that is designed to provide evidence, at the level of the education system, about students’ achievement at a particular stage of education, in identified curriculum areas (e.g., reading or literacy, mathematics or numeracy, science).”

METHODOLOGY

The presentations in this paper are based on literature review and experiences of the author as former Director in charge of Operations at the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN), an agency of the Federal Ministry of Education established by an Act of the National Assembly to regulate the teaching profession in Nigeria. Therefore, the expressions in the paper, besides literature, are the author’s eye-witness accounts of the situations on ground and direct involvement in the development of documents, policies and programmes for teacher professionalism in Nigeria.

The paper is equally based on data and findings of a national committee set up in 2012 by Nigeria’s Minister of Education to develop blueprint for learning assessment for the country. The committee which had the author as Chair comprised a wide range of stakeholders with expertise in teaching and learning assessment - some of them had actually conducted teaching and learning assessments in Nigeria. Among the stakeholders were the Federal Ministry of Education, UK’s Department for International Development (DFID), UNICEF, and the US Agency for International Development (USAID). Others were the Commissioners of Education from various states in Nigeria, Executive Chairmen of State Universal Basic Education Boards in Nigeria, and some non-governmental organisations. The committee had “focused group” sessions and brain-storming, collated and synthesized existing data on learning assessment so far in Nigeria, critically reviewed past teaching and learning exercises in the country and came up with recommendations to the Federal Government on ways to institutionalize learning assessment in Nigeria.

ASSESSMENT OF TEACHING IN NIGERIA

Teacher professionalism has become a subject of analysis and interest in the last ten to twenty years more

than ever before. This has given rise in some countries to the establishment of teacher professional regulatory agencies to accelerate the professionalization of teaching. Yet in the countries without specific teacher regulatory agencies, the national ministries of education and related agencies have filled the gap and played the same role. It is therefore, hard to find a country that is not currently making efforts to strengthen teacher quality and professionalism. For this reason, many countries have documented what they regard as *professional standards* for teachers and related documents that clearly deal with the issues about the functions of teachers, the expected competences, performance criteria and indicators of good performance.

It is interesting, perhaps, to begin with a view on “Teacher Professionalism and Pedagogy” expressed by Pollard (2009). He stated that teaching as a professional activity is distinguished by “qualifications, standards and accountabilities” as well as being “characterized by specialist knowledge and expertise” (p. 4). He goes on to define pedagogy as “the practice of teaching framed and informed by a shared and structured body of knowledge and by moral purpose” (p. 4). He argues that teachers can be regarded as professionals only if they are able to progressively acquire the required knowledge and master the pedagogical expertise through their careers. He concludes by asserting that good teaching involves taking strategic decisions concerning the curriculum and organisation of classroom sessions but equally entails a great degree of implicit and instantaneous decision about the complex learning situations and the practical skills required to carry them through. Therefore, he believes that “pedagogic expertise thus reflects the ability to combine science, craft and art”.

The views of Pollard above perfectly agree with the popular idea that teaching is both a science and an art. This is because it takes a combination of sound knowledge of scientific theories, laws, and principles as well as cognate practical skills, creativity and innovation to effectively and dynamically manage learning situations.

But the big question is, how much of teaching or teacher performance is assessed in Nigeria? Is there a nationally accepted teaching assessment framework and is this consistently applied? The straightforward answer is that there is a national teaching assessment framework but the assessment of teaching is not sufficiently carried out in Nigeria. The national teaching assessment framework has been provided by the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN), the statutory body that regulates teaching in Nigeria. However, this is yet to gain wide and desired implementation. Apart from the TRCN framework, there are also statutory agencies in Nigeria that have mandates for quality assurance in teacher education but again these agencies have not consistently come up with assessments of the performance of the teachers that they produce. This is why it is important that this paper discussed the

framework and modalities for assessing teaching in Nigeria and made recommendations for effective implementation.

The three key agencies responsible for quality assurance in teacher education are the National Universities Commission (NUC), National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN). However, the NUC is not known to have any significant teacher quality monitoring report or publication. The NCCE (2005) had a *Tracer Study of Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) Graduates of 1998-2002*. The NCCE (2008) again published a report of a Monitoring and Evaluation of *Academic Standards in Federal Colleges of Education, Nigeria*. Such publications gave very useful insight into what is happening to quality among the NCE products. Also in 2005-2006, several stakeholders such as the World Bank, TRCN, NUC, NCCE, National Teachers Institute (NTI), Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT), etc jointly commissioned a national research into the quality of NCE and Bachelors of Education graduates in the school system. The report of the research published by the lead consultant, Tee-Kay Educational Consultancy Services (2005) showed serious skills gap among the teachers.

The teachers seemed to be better at theories than practice and many of them did not communicate effectively and had poor information and communication technology skills. The effort by stakeholders, though just once, gave impetus for extensive review in teacher education curricula at both the NCE and degree levels in the years after the report.

WHAT CONSTITUTES TEACHER COMPETENCE?

A key issue in the assessment of teaching is to determine what constitutes professional knowledge, skills and values expected of teachers.

The Tuning Africa Research Project (2013) extensively studied African universities, trying to understand the competences they are imparting on learners. The Research investigated what it called generic and specific competences. The generics are competences that every university graduate should have notwithstanding discipline or subject area while the specifics are the specialist competences associated with given disciplines or subject areas. Tables 1 and 2 present the list of the generics and specifics in competences as generated by Tuning Africa (2013).

Table 1. Generic competences expected of teachers as listed by Tuning Africa (2013).

1. Ability for conceptual thinking, analysis and synthesis.	9. Flexibility, adaptability and ability to anticipate and respond to new situations.
2. Professionalism, ethical values and commitment to Ubuntu (respect for the well-being and dignity of fellow human beings).	10. Ability for creative and innovative thinking.
3. Capacity for critical evaluation and self-awareness,	11. Leadership, management and teamwork skills.
4. Ability to translate knowledge into practice.	12. Communication and interpersonal skills.
5. Objective decision-making and practical cost-effective problem solving.	13. Environmental and economic consciousness.
6. Capacity to use innovative and appropriate technologies.	14. Ability to work in an intra- and intercultural and/or international context.
7. Ability to communicate effectively in both the official/national and the local languages.	15. Ability to work independently.
8. Ability to learn how to learn and capacity for life-long learning.	16. Ability to evaluate, review and enhance quality.
	17. Self-confidence, entrepreneurial spirit and skills.
	18. Commitment to preserve African identity and cultural heritage.

In drawing up the pedagogic competences In Tables 1 and 2, Tuning Africa noted what it called the eleven core components of teacher education which were common in the teacher education curricula across the African universities. These core components are: (a) Subject content, (b) Educational theory, (c) Methodology, (d) Practice, (e) Assessment, (f) Planning, (g) Values and ethics, (h) Communication and ICT, (i) Health and safety, (j) Research, and (k) Quality assurance. From these core components and the listed pedagogic competences, the Tuning Project classified competences required of teachers into four such as (a) competences related to knowledge, (b) competences related to educational

practice and skills, (c) competences related to values and ethics, and (d) interpersonal competences.

The competences identified by Tuning Africa, especially the four classes of competences are very similar to what the rest of the world is basically regards teacher competences. The teacher competences are commonly seen in the teacher professional standards documents issued by the various teaching regulatory agencies or even the ministries of education or related agencies of the various countries. For instance, such classes of competences are found in the professional standards, regulations and laws issued by the following professional regulatory organisations or countries: The

Table 2. Specific (pedagogic) competences expected of teachers as listed by Tuning Africa (2013).

1. Having mastery of the subject knowledge/understanding the discipline.	10. Being able to research (observe, describe, analyse, etc.)
2. Applying information and communication technology.	11. Understanding and applying policies and regulations.
3. Developing resources and instructional materials.	12. Ability to identify and deal with students with special needs, gifted and otherwise.
4. Having ability for critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity and reflection.	13. Ability to work in a team.
5. Ability to assess and evaluate, including self and others.	14. Exercising professionalism, ethics and values; ability to understand and abide by the ethics and values of the teaching profession.
6. Providing counsel, guidance and conflict resolution (peace education) for complex situations.	15. Ability to become a life-long learner.
7. Interpreting curriculum documents, information and sources and seeing them as a roadmap.	16. Ability to develop competences for employability in students (ability to enhance employability in one's own profession).
8. Managing projects.	17. Ability to inspire self-confidence in the learners.
9. Being able to choose, use and design innovative teaching and learning strategies.	

United Kingdom Teaching and Higher Education Act of 1998; the Welsh Assembly Government (2006a, b); New Institute of Teachers (2009); Department of Education, Republic of South Africa (2005, 2006); and Higher Education Quality Committee, Republic of South Africa (2006). Others are the Training and Development Agency, United Kingdom (2006, 2007); Queensland College of Teachers (2007); Ministry of Education, Ontario Province (2002); and Ontario College of Teachers (2004, 2006).

The authorities above clearly spell out the core activities of teachers, the competences and contexts required for performing the activities as well as the standards (or benchmarks) against which teacher performances are judged. Some examples may suffice here. The table hereunder is an abstraction from the Ontario Ministry of Education (2006) publication titled, *Supporting Teaching Excellence: Teacher Performance Appraisal Manual*. The publication is in accordance with the *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession* issued by the Ontario College of Teachers which is the regulatory agency for the teaching profession in the Ontario Province of Canada. The Ontario Ministry of Education publication gave a comprehensive list of teacher performance indicators, which it called "Look-Fors".

Tables 3 to 5 give further detail about what constitute teacher competences.

The *Professional Standards for Nigerian Teachers* (TRCN, 2012) also outlined the roles of the teachers and competences. In doing this, the documents grouped the competences under four headings or domains, namely:

- i. Professional knowledge
- ii. Professional skills
- iii. Professional values, attitudes and conduct
- iv. Professional membership obligations

Under these four domains, the document identified thirty

six (36) focal areas or sub-themes and eighty four (84) competences. The document also gave performance indicators for each of the 84 competences. A combination of the *Professional Standards for Nigerian Teachers* and the frameworks cited above are necessary guides for teacher assessments. The Professional Standards in addition has an instrument (as an appendix) that may be used to assess teachers in respect of the 84 competences or standards. Therefore, the assessment of teaching must start with a good understanding of what to look for.

ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING IN AFRICA: A WORLD BANK REPORT

Tee-Kay Educational Consultancy Services (2005:2) reported that the Monitoring of Learning Achievement (MLA) Project in Africa has been on-going since Jomtien (1990). The Project, sponsored by the UNESCO and UNICEF, aims at "assisting member states in developing and strengthening their national system for monitoring and assessing learning outcomes covering early childhood to the junior secondary school (JSS) levels. The central concern is with quality of basic education especially with literacy, numeracy, and life-skills." Tee-Kay recalled that the major deduction by the World Forum on Education for All at Dakar in April 2004 in respect of the MLA surveys in more than 120 countries (46 in Africa) was that more attention should be given to curriculum planning, teacher education and training, and textbook development (Figure 1). Tee-Kay further stated that MLA findings:

Suggest that important questions be raised about the competence and effectiveness of teachers, among other factors, in promoting students' learning... This is the more necessary as teachers lack appropriate pedagogical skills

Table 3. Part of the Teacher Performance Indicators as listed by the Ministry of Education, Ontario (2006).

Domains	Competences	“Look-fors”
1. Commitment to pupils and pupil learning	1.1 Teachers demonstrate commitment to the well-being and development of all pupils	The teacher: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Applies knowledge effectively about how students develop and learn physically, socially, and cognitively. 2. Responds to learning exceptionalities and special needs by modifying assessment processes to ensure needs of special students are met. 3. Shapes instruction appropriately so that it is helpful to students who learn in a variety of ways. 4. Effectively motivates students to improve student learning. 5. Seeks and effectively applies approaches for helping students' cognitive, affective and social development. 6. Models and promotes the joy of learning. 7. Provides responsive and thoughtful feedback on assignments. 8. Etc.
	1.2 Teachers are dedicated in their efforts to teach and support pupil learning and achievement	The Teacher: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assists learners in practicing new skills by providing opportunities for guided practice. 2. Provides for active student participation in the learning process. 3. Employs appropriate balance of student and teacher directed discussion/learning. 4. Establishes and environment that maximizes learning. 5. Encourages students to excel to the best of their ability. 6. Utilizes a variety of teaching strategies suited to the individual needs of students. 7. Etc.
	1.3 Teachers treat all pupils equitably and with respect	The Teacher: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demonstrates care and respect for students by maintaining positive interactions. 2. Promotes polite and respectful student interactions. 3. Addresses issues of equity and diversity by planning appropriate experiences. 4. Differentiates curriculum expectations and teaching strategies to meet the needs of all students. 5. Addresses inappropriate student behaviour in a positive way. 6. Etc
	1.4, 1.5, 1.6, Etc	The Teacher: Etc, etc.
2. Professional knowledge	2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2tc.	The Teacher: Etc, etc.
3. Teaching practice	3.1, 3.2, 3.3, etc	The Teacher: Etc, etc.
4. Leadership and Community	4.1, 4.2, 4.3, etc	The Teacher: Etc, etc.
5. Ongoing professional learning	5.1, 5.2, 5.3, etc	The Teacher: Etc, etc.
6. Etc	Etc	Etc

Source: An illustration by the author from the Ontario Ministry of Education (2006) publication.

Table 4. Core performances expected of a teacher at different stages of the teaching and learning process (consensus among Nigerian key stakeholders), 2014.

Stage 1: Lesson preparation	Stage 2: Actual teaching
i. Possession/	i. Exhibition of appropriate entry behaviour of learners
ii. Mastery of good knowledge and competence of the subject	ii. Introduction of topic
iii. Preparation of quality lesson plan	iii. Stimulation of learners' interest
iv. Preparation of lesson note with appropriate content (content articulation)	iv. Presentation of facts/ Development of lesson
v. Statement of objectives and expectations of the lesson	v. Communication with learners
vii. Selection of appropriate teaching methods	vi. Demonstration of effective use of the chalk or white maker board
viii. Selection of variety of appropriate instructional resources	vii. Implementation of activity-centred teaching
ix. Arrangement of sitting positions in class	viii. Utilization of instructional resources
x. Management of class size	ix. Balancing teacher and learner talk- times/time management
xi. Relating topics to other school subjects, specific careers, global trends and emerging issues	x. Eliciting appropriate responses from learners and appropriate teacher reaction
xii. Promotion of decency and good mannerism	xi. Inclusion of learners of all backgrounds and abilities
xiii. Sequencing of content	xii. Summary of lesson
xiv. Improvisation of teaching resources when there is none	
xv. Team planning where applicable	
xvi. Sourcing for instructional resources from the internet	
xvii. Modification of instructions using prior assessment outcomes	

Source: Nwokeocha (2014).

Table 5. National mean performance in the various assessed subjects by class.

Primary 6	JS 1	JS 2	JS 3
%	%	%	%
English language 48.8	40.45	39.75	42.26
Mathematics 42.87	37.68	34.42	33.61
Primary and Integrated Science 40.78	22.38	21.05	27.83
Social Studies 49.77	25.15	23.15	27.07
Life Skills NA	NA	NA	NA
Introductory Technology -	45.08	50.00	23.40

Source: Federal Ministry of Education (2010).

that will enable them teach well. Present teaching methods merely engender rote learning. Teachers lack innovative strategies that stimulate creativity and that make learning an engaging and pleasurable activity. There is

also a significant degree of mismatch between content of teacher education programmes, the pedagogical skills required in schools, and even the requirement of the National Policy on Education (Tee-Kay, 2005:5).

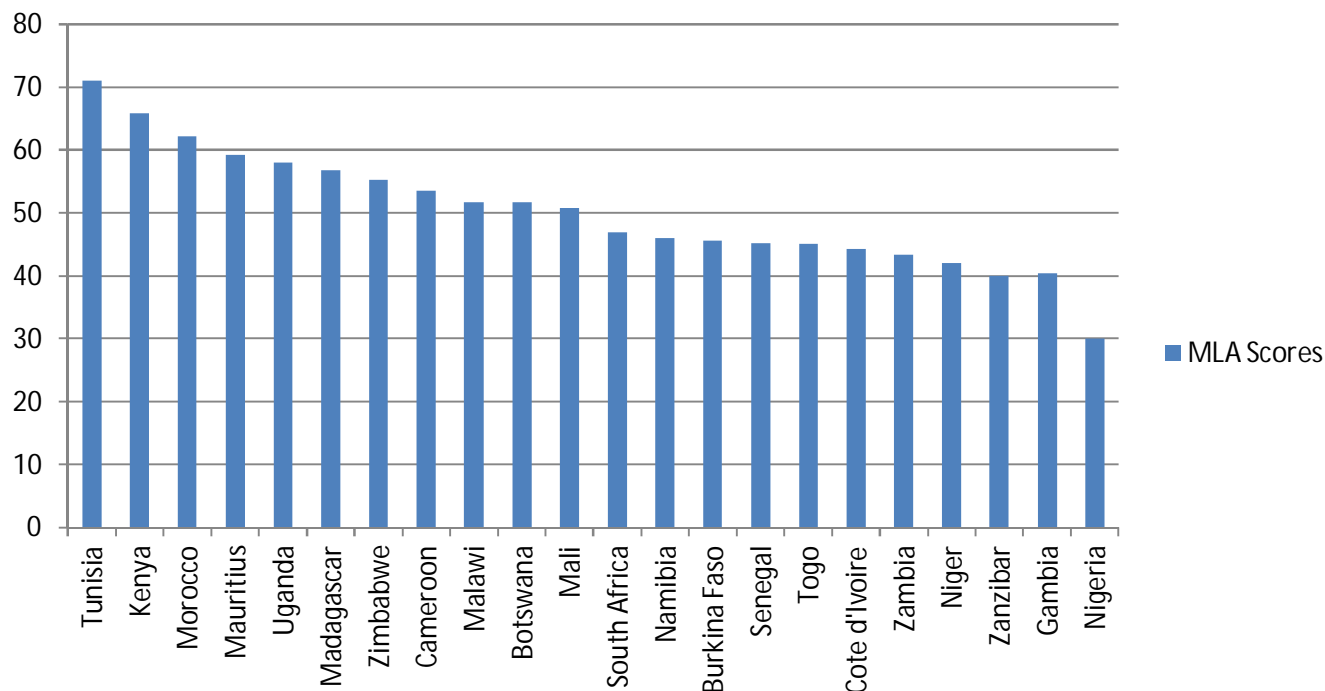


Figure 1. Learning Assessment Equivalent Scores, Sub-Saharan and North Africa, 1990s. Source: Adapted by this author from the World Bank Report on School Education in Nigeria: Preparing for Universal Basic Education, cited in Tee-Kay Educational Consultancy Services (2005:4).

ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING IN NIGERIA: REPORTS BY UBEC AND FEDERAL MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

The attempts to assess learning at the national level in Nigeria have been irregular. The lack of coordination and institutionalization of learning assessments in Nigeria led the Minister of Education in 2012 to set up the *National (Ministerial) Committee on Monitoring of Learning Achievements*. The Committee was charged with the responsibility of developing a national blueprint that will institutionalize learning assessments in Nigeria and bring it to international level.

Following are highlights of some attempts by various organisations to assess learning in Nigeria:

- i. Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) in 2006 assessed learning for Primary 6, and Junior Secondary 1 and 2 with the report not published until 2009. In June 2011, UBEC again conducted another assessment for Primary 4, 5, and 6 and Junior Secondary 1 pupils in English, Mathematics and Life Skills - with objective and essay style questions.
- ii. The Policy, Planning, Management and Research (PPM &R) Department of the Federal Ministry of Education in 2011 assessed learning across schools in the states. This involved tests for Primary 4 and 6 pupils in Mathematics, English and Life-skills, with both objective and essay style tests.
- iii. The International Development Partners (IDPs) also

conducted learning assessments:

- a) The Northern Education Initiative (NEI), supported by USAID did so in Bauchi and Sokoto States; and
- b) The DFID-ESSPIN programme supporting 6 states (Lagos, Kwara, Kano, Jigawa, Enugu and Kaduna) also had the exercise among primary pupils in the public and private schools in Primary 2 and 4 in Mathematics and English Language.

The UBEC (2009:4-5) in its National Assessment of Universal Basic Education Programme conducted in 2006 made the following findings:

- i. Very few (8 to 15%) pupils/students had required textbooks in the core subjects;
- ii. Most teachers (over 80%) had the minimum qualification of NCE;
- iii. Most teachers (over 90%) had at least 6 years of teaching experience;
- iv. Most teachers (over 70%) had the required textbooks and the national curriculum;
- v. Many of the schools had over populated classes;
- vi. Many of the teachers (about 70%) prepared their lesson notes on weekly basis;
- vii. Pupils/students' family background, teachers and parents characteristics affected pupils/students' general welfare in school and subsequently their academic performance, skills and character;

- viii. Pupils/students' performances in the core subjects were very low. The national performance ranged from mean score of 21.05% (JS 2 Integrated Science) to 50.00% (JS 2 Introductory Technology);
- ix. Pupils/students tended to perform better in items at the level of knowledge than those at the level of comprehension and application, which show that teachers needed to improve their teaching methodology and teach not only facts but also principles, comprehension and application;
- x. Many pupil/student, teacher and school factors were potent and consistent predictors of achievements in the core subjects.

Based on its findings, the UBEC (2009) made the following recommendations:

- i. There should be a conducive and child-friendly environment for teaching and learning process;
- ii. There should be adequate number of qualified teachers for the basic education programme;
- iii. There should be provision of sufficient quantities of relevant teaching and learning materials, including textbooks, reference books, instructional materials, etc;
- iv. The class size should be a maximum of 40 pupils/students and teacher-pupil/student ration of 1:35;
- v. All pupils should have access to high quality schools within a distance of 1km from their homes;
- vii. All pupils/students should be encouraged to actively

- participate in co-curricula activities;
- viii. Teachers should have the national curricula and should be encouraged to continually review and improve on their teaching techniques/methodologies;
- ix. All schools should have essential infrastructural facilities such as classrooms, libraries, laboratories and specialist rooms;
- x. All schools should have convenience: Toilets, boreholes/hand-dug-wells, incinerators, etc;
- xi. Teachers and parents should be encouraged to attend PTA meetings, where they can cross-fertilize ideas. PTA meetings should be held, at least twice every term;
- xii. Teachers should endeavor to teach every topic in the curriculum at all the cognitive levels knowledge, comprehension and application;
- xiii. Parental monitoring of children's school and out-of-school activities should be encouraged.

Also, the Federal Ministry of Education (2010) in its publication gave further information about the assessments of learning achievement conducted by UBEC. It asserted that the performance of students as revealed by the UBEC assessments of 2006 and 2009 "did not seem to have reflected the investments that the government has made and is still making in education. The results might be related to the inability of some pupils/students to read and interpret printed matter." For instance, the national mean scores by classes are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Core performances expected of a teacher at different stages of the teaching and learning process (consensus among Nigerian key stakeholders), 2014.

Stage 3: Learning assessment	Stage 4: After-school and out-of-school activities/extracurricular activities
i. Administration of achievable and time-bound assessment (Good quality assessments) ii. Matching assessment items with topic taught iii. Matching assessment with lesson objectives iv. Making assessment practical and interesting v. Utilisation of valid questions vi. Utilisation of different assessment methods vii. Marking tests and commenting on assessments made viii. Reporting/ ix. Feedback to learners, other teachers, school authority and parents x. Application of assessment results in decision-making and planning of future instructions xi. Awareness and avoidance of unethical, illegal and inappropriate assessment methods xii. Evaluation of instructional strategies xiii. Documentation of learner achievements xiv. Use of standardized assessment instruments xv. Involvement of peers in assessment (peer assessment) xvi. Evaluation of all domains of learning	i. Supervision of meals where applicable (for boarding schools) ii. Supervision of siesta where applicable (for boarding schools) iii. Supervision of prep, assignments and practical iv. Coordination of clubs and societies v. Organisation of games and sporting activities vi. Supervision of environmental sanitation activities within the school compound vii. Supervision of agricultural activities for learners viii. Supervision of students under disciplinary action ix. Advocacy and sensitization visit to parents x. Provision of counseling services xi. Supervision of religious activities xii. Coordination of field trips and excursions, and visit to itinerant learners, etc. xiii. Coordination of "Open Days" xiv. Organisation of cultural activities xv. Maintenance of safety and security of learners xvi. Provision of health services xvii. Organisation of extension/remedial classes

Source: Nwokeocha (2014).

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES IN DESIGNING A NATIONAL LEARNER ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

The Ministerial Committee on the Monitoring of Learning Achievement in Nigeria (Federal Ministry of Education, 2015) opined that the objectives of learning assessment in Nigeria shall be:

- i. Determining how well students are learning in the education system with reference to the curriculum and skills for their lives ahead.
- ii. Determining whether there are particular strengths and weaknesses in students' knowledge and skills.
- iii. Determining whether particular groups of children perform poorly or exceptionally well.
- iv. Ascertaining which factors are associated with students' performance.
- v. Monitoring trends of students' performance over time.

The Ministerial Committee goes further to state that:

Learning is a key goal of education. If learning has not taken place, all efforts and investments in education amount to a waste. Therefore, most nations use quality of learning as the key measure of success of investment in education and some even go to the extent of using learning achievement as a predictor of teacher quality and performance. In such countries, which include the United States of America, teachers whose students excel are rewarded while those whose students fail are sanctioned...The purpose of monitoring learning achievement in Nigeria shall be to provide evidence to policy makers, educationists and the general public regarding the performance of the education system, in order to improve learning outcomes for all children. (Federal Ministry of Education, 2015:6)

In designing the national assessment system, there are key issues that must be resolved otherwise there are bound to be methodological challenges for implementation. Put differently, many questions must be answered while designing a learning assessment system because the answers to those questions will determine the approach and techniques that can be employed in the assessment process. Therefore, Figures 2 and 3 have graphical illustrations of the issues.

In designing learner assessment for a country, a number of variables or factors are considered. This may range from what levels to assess and what subjects; how often to conduct the assessment and which stakeholders need to be involved, among others. The factors are indeed very complex and must be judged and selected within the context of the education structure, history and operations of each country. As a general guide, the DFID

(2012:2) lists the following as part of the factors that may be considered:

- i. What curriculum area (e.g., mathematics) or construct (e.g., numeracy) to assess?
- ii. At which grade(s) or stage(s) of education to assess?
- iii. Whether to assess the whole school population at the chosen grade(s) or a probability sample of schools and students chosen to represent that population?
- iv. How often to assess: annually or every three to four years?
- v. Whether policy/decision makers expect achievement to be described using raw scores, percentages, by curriculum domains/units, the proportion of students achieving curriculum attainment targets, or attaining specific proficiency levels?
- vi. How, and to whom, should the findings of an assessment be communicated?

RECOMMENDATIONS OF NIGERIA'S NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON LEARNING ASSESSMENT

The Ministerial Committee set up by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2012 to develop a blueprint for the assessment of learning in Nigeria came up with a number of recommendations that may be summarized at this point (Federal Ministry of Education, 2015).

The blueprint recommended that every learner assessment must clearly specify the following issues:

i. Who to assess:

- a) Sample or census? – Probability sample is preferred.
- b) What levels? - Primary, junior secondary (JS), Islamiyya, nomadic, senior secondary (SS) must be covered (All levels of education formal and non-formal below tertiary)
- c) Public or private schools? – Both should be covered
- d) Urban and rural schools? – Both should be covered
- e) Sex: Boys and girls – Both should be covered
- f) What classes? – The following should be the target: Primary 3, 6; junior secondary 3; Islammiya and Almajiri; senior secondary 3. The assessment should take place every 3 years; it should be a cohort or trend study following the same children possibly so as to ascertain trends over time or staggering the exercise in three years as follows: Year 1: Primary 3, Islammiya and Almajiri, and Primary 6; Year 2: JS 3 and Year 3: SS 3 . The exercise should be early in the third term and based on the current and last year's curriculum.

ii. Who to look at: Assessment should target learners, teachers and school administrators such as head teachers and principals.

iii. What to assess: This should cover the curriculum as well as skills (competency) particularly literacy (including

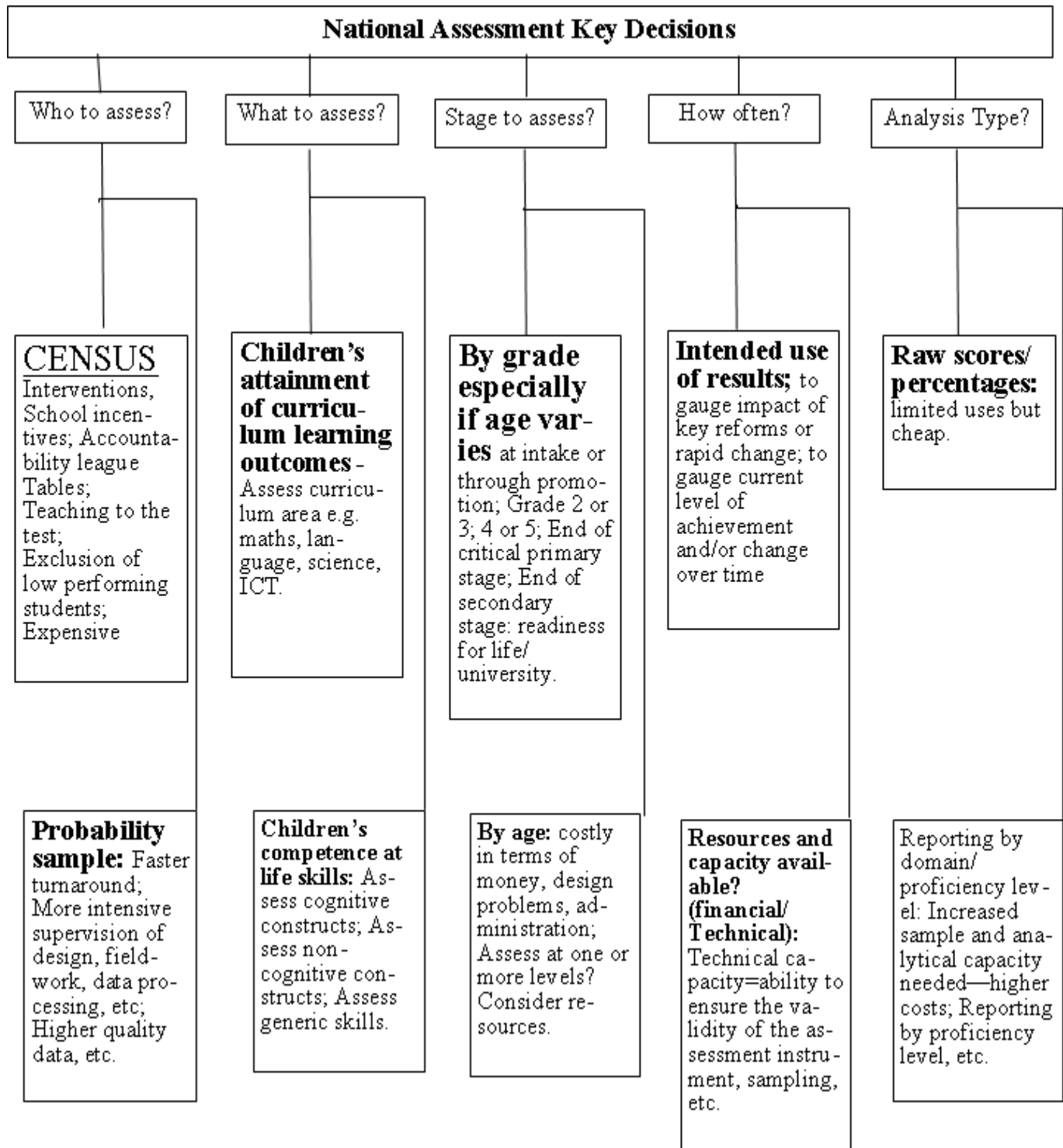


Figure 2. The type of decisions to make while designing learning achievements. DFID (2012) adapted by Nwokeocha (2013: 101).

scientific literacy), numeracy and life skills. The assessment should be able to establish if the curriculum is working. The Mathematics, English and Life Skills curricula issued by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) are the ones to be

assessed.

iv. Methodology of assessment: Methodology should match teaching techniques for each level eg. EGRA and EGMA (Early Grade Reading and Early Grade Mathematics methods) for primary 3, the children should

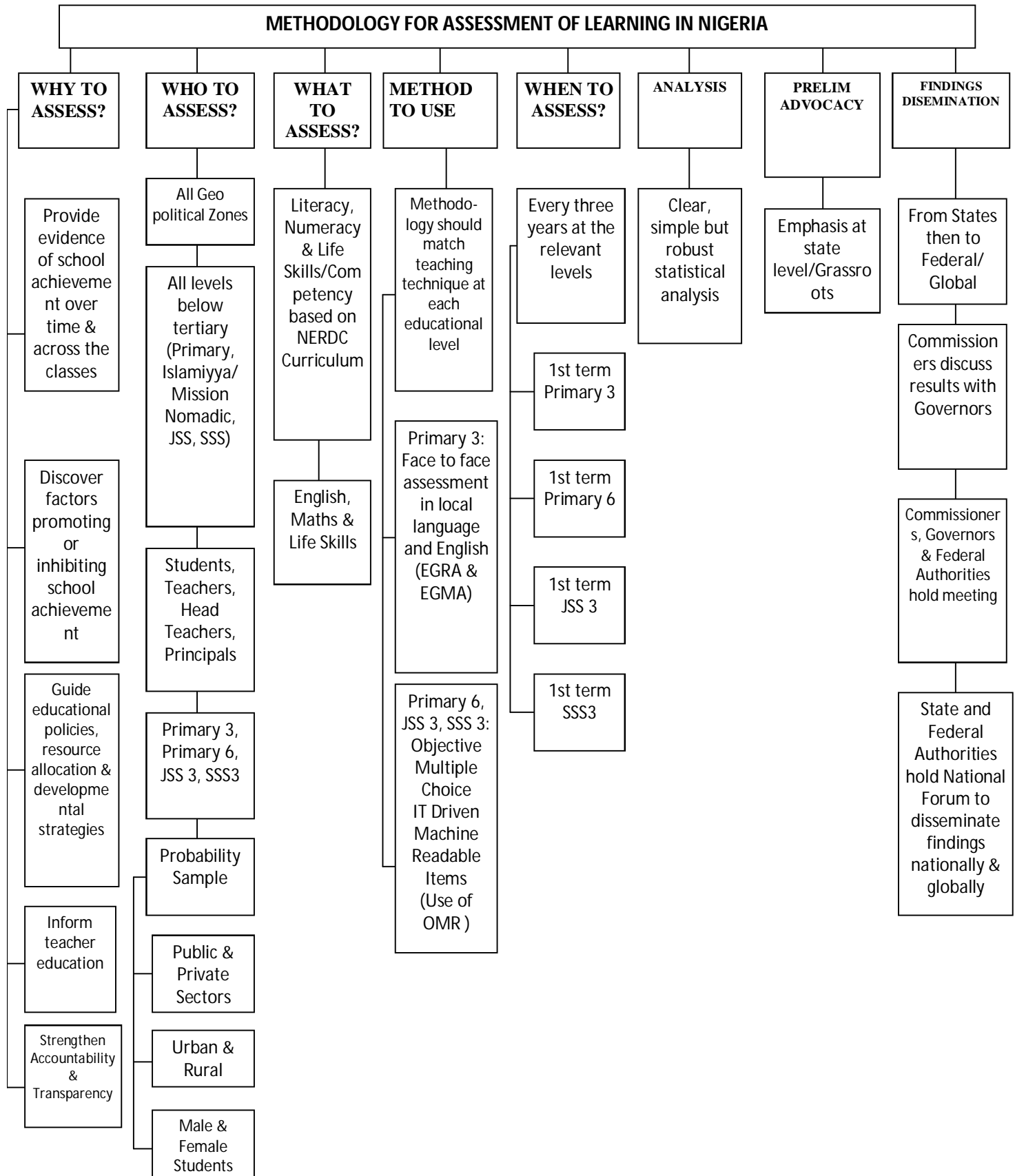


Figure 3. The complex elements involved in Learning Assessments in Nigeria. Source: Nwokeocha (2013:102).

be assessed using the same language they have been taught to read and write – although this creates problems for comparability between states which constrain interpreting the findings as a national assessment per se. The rest of the levels could all be objective and multiple choice. The administration, marking and reporting of the assessment should be information technology driven. The implementing body should synergize with national and international examination bodies like Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), National Examinations Council (NECO) and West African Examinations Council (WAEC).

v. How to report findings of assessment: Report should be clear, simple and robust reporting and avoid overly complex statistical data.

vi. Pre-assessment sensitization, advocacy and buy-ins: The first phase in the implement of learning assessment blueprint should national sensitisation and advocacy programmes to get stakeholders at state levels and grassroots “to get commitment into the three year cycle and towards institutionalisation of the assessment as a national ongoing exercise which is never interrupted by external events”.

vii. Data repository and dissemination of findings: The Federal Ministry of Education should be the repository of data collected in all learning assessment exercises.

viii. Driver of learning assessments in Nigeria: The Federal Ministry of Education was recommended to drive the process while its agencies could use their institutional mandates and resources to facilitate the implementation of the exercises.

Besides the above recommendations, the national committee also analysed the political implications of the results of learning assessment in the country. It pointed out the likelihood of regions with unfavourable findings reacting negatively. Therefore, the committee called for caution and the need to follow a process of consultation starting from the states and grassroots towards the national and international levels in the dissemination of findings.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper explored issues relating to the assessment of teaching and learning internationally and within Nigeria. It demonstrated that assessment of teaching and learning are core to education delivery. It showed that the concern for assessing of teacher and learner performances cut across countries, educational systems and epochs. However, facts in the paper indicated that much progress has not been made to institutionalize these exercises in the Nigerian school system. A few instances of the exercises exist but they have been insufficient to reveal reliable and comprehensive information that can help policy formulation. Also, the exercises in Nigeria have rather been carried out by a few stakeholders without

collaboration or a national framework, which made it impossible to relate the findings by one stakeholder to the findings by another. In this light, it is his highly commendable that the Minister of Education of Nigeria constituted a national committee to come up with a blueprint to help to institutionalize and monitor learning achievements in Nigeria. It is hoped that the implementation of the blueprint will become manifest soon.

On the bases of the facts discussed in the paper, the following measures are recommended:

i. The government should implement the new national blueprint for assessment of learning in the basic and secondary schools in Nigeria.

ii. The national blueprint should at all times promote compatibility of national with international teaching and learning assessment models.

iii. Stakeholders should support the implementation of the teacher assessment framework provided by the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria, titled *Professional Standards for Nigeria Teachers*.

iv. Stakeholders in Nigeria should comply with the national teacher and learner assessment blueprints to ensure that the findings of their assessments could be integrated in the national data management systems and reported internationally.

v. There should be a national forum on teaching and learning assessment driven by the Federal Ministry of Education to promote exchange of best practices.

vi. Stakeholders should seriously consider synergy in order to pull resources and expertise together to carry out more effectively the assessment of teaching and learning in Nigeria.

vii. It is also important to put the outcome of teaching and learning assessments into good use. For instance, it should be recognized that students' academic achievement is largely related to teacher quality and commitment. In this case, a reward scheme may be put in place to recognize teachers whose students achieve excellent results. Similarly, teachers with poor-performing students need not be punished. Rather the students' poor results indicate a need for training or retraining of the teachers. It may also indicate a need for the supply of lacking instructional materials and/or general improvement in the school environment.

viii. Overall, teaching and learning assessments are part of the very critical issues in teacher quality and education delivery which must be kept at the front burner all the time.

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