

THE ROLE OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IN IMPROVING LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR UPPER PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN EDUCATIONAL DISTRICTS I AND II, LAGOS STATE.

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Abstract

In modern educational discussions, formative assessment has become a crucial technique for enhancing learning outcomes, especially in primary education where core skills are established. This study examined the role of formative assessment in improving learning outcomes for upper primary school pupils in Educational Districts I and II, Lagos, Nigeria. Using the descriptive survey research design, a carefully self-designed questionnaire was used to collect data from 200 randomly selected primary school teachers from Districts I and II. The questionnaire items were validated by experts and yielded a Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.827. The data collected were analysed using frequency distribution table and one sample t-test statistics, at 0.05 level of significance; with the aid of SPSS 21.0. The findings indicated that formative assessment procedures, often reflected in Nigeria's practice of Continuous Assessment (CA), did not show a statistically significant impact on the academic achievement of upper primary pupils; formative assessment significantly improves engagement and motivation in learning among upper primary pupils; and that there are significant challenges faced by upper primary teachers in conducting formative assessments. Hence, this study recommends among others, that, government should establish ongoing professional development initiatives to enhance teachers' competencies in the design and execution of successful formative assessments; educational authorities should to incorporate formative assessment processes into policy frameworks in conjunction with summative methods; primary schools must be well equipped with instructional materials and technological instruments to mitigate implementation challenges.

Keywords: *Formative assessment, learning outcome, upper primary school pupils, pupil engagement and motivation, implementation challenges, Lagos education district*

Introduction

The processes of teaching and learning are fundamental to educational growth, with assessment acting as a vital tool for directing and enhancing learning outcomes for pupils. In modern educational discourse, formative assessment (FA) has emerged as a crucial strategy for improving learning outcomes, particularly in primary education where foundational skills are established. Formative assessment is defined as a planned, ongoing process used by both teachers and pupils during instruction to elicit and use

evidence of learning in order to improve understanding of intended outcomes and to support learners in becoming self-directed (NWEA, 2023). Unlike summative assessment, which evaluates learning at the end of an instructional period, formative assessment is integrated into the teaching process, providing continuous feedback to both teachers and pupils. The core components of FA include clarifying learning intentions and success criteria, eliciting evidence of learning through questioning and tasks, providing timely feedback that moves

learning forward, encouraging self- and peer-assessment, and adapting teaching based on assessment information (Heritage, 2018; Andrade & Brookhart, 2020). These ideals position FA not merely as a testing tool but as an instructional practice that promotes active engagement, reflection, and ownership of learning. In practical classroom settings, teachers may employ strategies such as exit tickets, learning journals, think-pair-share, and targeted questioning to identify pupils' misconceptions and guide instruction accordingly. Such practices ensure that teaching is responsive and learning gaps are promptly addressed.

Formative assessment approaches have garnered global attention for their role in transforming classroom dynamics and fostering learner-centred pedagogy. In nations like the United Kingdom, Singapore, and Finland, FA is embedded within comprehensive educational reforms that emphasise meaningful learning experiences rather than rote memorisation. Singapore's "Teach Less, Learn More" campaign, for instance, incorporates formative assessment into classroom practices to enhance engagement and critical thinking (Tan, 2019). Research further indicates that FA not only enhances academic achievement but also fosters pupil motivation, self-regulation, and the cultivation of growth mindsets (Schildkamp et al., 2020; Andrade & Brookhart, 2020). These results highlight the worldwide significance of formative assessment in advancing holistic educational outcomes.

In Nigeria, elementary education serves as the foundation of the entire educational system, providing children with essential literacy, numeracy, and life skills that are critical for lifelong learning. Beyond academic competence,

elementary education plays a central role in fostering socialisation, moral development, problem-solving abilities, and the capacity for critical thinking (UNESCO, 2021). It is at this stage that children develop the foundational skills necessary for participation in society, laying the groundwork for employability, civic responsibility, and national development. Scholars emphasise that a strong elementary education system reduces future educational disparities, decreases dropout rates, and increases the likelihood of success in higher education and in the labour market (World Bank, 2020).

Despite this recognised importance, elementary education in Nigeria continues to face persistent obstacles, including overcrowded classrooms, inadequate instructional resources, and limited opportunities for teacher training (Adebayo & Ogundele, 2021). These limitations frequently result in a heavy reliance on summative assessments, which evaluate learning outcomes only after instruction, without addressing challenges as they arise during the learning process. In Lagos State, particularly in Educational Districts I and II, these difficulties are evident, as disparities in pupil achievement between public and private schools highlight deficiencies in teaching and assessment methodologies. Notwithstanding governmental interventions such as teacher training programs and the EKOEXCEL initiative aimed at improving instructional quality, the effective incorporation of formative assessment into classroom practices remains constrained.

The persistent issue of inadequate pupil performance highlights the urgent need for innovative approaches to teaching and assessment in Nigeria. Formative assessment offers an effective means to bridge these gaps by

allowing teachers to enhance their teaching methods through ongoing feedback. However, obstacles include teacher fatigue, insufficient assessment literacy, and oversized class sizes impede its extensive implementation (Adedoyin, 2020). Moreover, there is scant research evidence assessing the efficacy of formative assessment in Nigerian primary schools, especially within the varied socio-educational contexts of Lagos State. The lack of evidence hinders its institutionalisation and perpetuates teachers' dependence on conventional summative approaches.

This study is motivated by the urgent necessity to investigate the impact of formative assessment on improving learning outcomes for upper primary pupils in Educational Districts I and II, Lagos State. This research aims to offer empirical insights into teachers' behaviours, problems, and views to impact policy decisions, teacher training, and classroom techniques. In addition to its scholarly contribution, the study corresponds with international commitments, notably the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4, which advocates for equitable and quality education for all by 2030 (UNESCO, 2021). Comprehending the efficient implementation of formative assessments in resource-limited contexts such as Nigeria has the potential to enhance academic achievements and promote equity and inclusion in education. This study aims to illustrate how formative assessment can function as a transformative instrument in meeting pupils' learning requirements while providing teachers with effective techniques to improve instructional delivery in varied classroom settings.

Research Objectives

The main aim of this study is to examine the role of formative assessment in improving learning outcomes for upper primary school pupils in educational districts I and II.

Objectives of the Study

1. evaluate the impact of formative assessment procedures on the academic achievement of upper primary pupils;
2. analyse the degree to which formative assessment improves engagement and motivation in learning among upper primary pupils; and
3. identify the challenges faced by upper primary teachers in conducting formative assessments.

Research Questions

1. What is the impact of formative assessment procedures on the academic achievement of upper primary pupils?
2. To what extent does formative assessment improve engagement and motivation in learning among upper primary pupils?
3. What are challenges faced by upper primary teachers in conducting formative assessments?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are tested in this study:

- H₀₁:** There is no significant impact of formative assessment procedures on the academic achievement of upper primary pupils.
- H₀₂:** Formative assessment does not significantly improve engagement and motivation in learning among upper primary pupils.
- H₀₃:** There is no significant challenge faced by upper primary teachers in conducting formative assessments.

Literature Review

The Concept of Formative Assessment

Formative assessment denotes evaluative procedures implemented throughout the teaching and learning process, primarily aimed at enhancing learning rather than solely evaluating it. In contrast to summative assessment, which measures accomplishment at the conclusion of instruction, formative assessment is ongoing, interactive, and diagnostic, offering prompt feedback to improve teaching efficacy and learning outcomes. Black and Wiliam (1998) characterise it as all actions performed by teachers and learners that produce feedback to adjust the teaching and learning process. This encompasses spoken questioning, group discussions, peer assessment, and practical demonstrations designed to facilitate learner achievement in basic education.

The core of formative assessment is establishing a feedback loop between teaching and learning. Eze (2014) underscores that it empowers learners by elucidating their strengths and places for enhancement. Immediacy is a distinguishing characteristic, providing real-time input that rectifies misconceptions prior to their entrenchment (Adewale, 2017). It is adaptable and casual, employing techniques such as observation, exit slips, or assessments by peers. In Nigeria, formative assessment underpins the continuous assessment (CA) framework of the National Policy on Education, facilitating ongoing evaluation of development (Obemeata, 2018). In addition to enhancing academic achievement, it promotes inclusivity, active learning, and self-regulation (Ojo, 2019), eventually acting as a catalyst for profound learning and problem-solving (Akinola, 2020).

The Concept of Learning Outcome

Learning outcomes denote the particular information, abilities, attitudes, and values that learners are anticipated to attain and exhibit as a consequence of organised educational experiences. They are quantifiable statements delineating the capabilities learners should possess upon the conclusion of learning, functioning as standards for curriculum development, teaching, and assessment. In primary education, learning outcomes include pupil abilities in literacy, numeracy, science, and ethical development, guaranteeing that instruction is intentional and focused on the learner. Okebukola (2015) defines learning outcomes as the "concrete evidence of what learners know, can accomplish, or value," highlighting that outcomes extend beyond teacher goals to demonstrable learner performance.

These outcomes are often classified into cognitive, affective, and psychomotor categories. Cognitive outcomes pertain to intellectual development, including problem-solving and critical thinking; affective outcomes focus on attitudes and values; whereas psychomotor outcomes encompass practical skills. The National Policy on Education in Nigeria emphasises basic education as the cornerstone for lifelong learning, literacy, creativity, and moral integrity (FRN, 2014). Moreover, learning outcomes enhance accountability by necessitating explicit, observable, and quantifiable objectives. Adewale (2017) asserts that clearly defined outcomes improve transparency in pedagogy and assessment, facilitating the monitoring of progress and the identification of areas requiring intervention. In this context, formative assessment delivers feedback, enhances

engagement, and encourages personalised instruction (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

Impact of formative assessment procedures on the academic achievement

Formative assessment is widely acknowledged as a vital catalyst for academic success, especially in primary school. Formative strategies facilitate teachers in identifying learning deficiencies and executing prompt interventions that enhance pupil achievement through constant feedback and focused instructional modifications. Black and Wiliam's (1998) foundational research demonstrated the favourable association between formative assessment and enhanced academic performance, a finding that has been corroborated by recent investigations. Andrade and Brookhart (2020) revealed that formative assessment procedures, including feedback loops and peer assessment, substantially improve learners' understanding of fundamental subjects by promoting active learning and metacognition.

Evidence from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020) indicates that formative measures are essential for enhancing reading and numeracy outcomes in varied educational environments. In Nigeria, where public schools frequently encounter issues of overcrowded classrooms and little resources, formative assessment methods provide effective strategies for enhancing academic performance via targeted instruction (Adedoyin, 2020). By providing pupils with consistent, constructive criticism, these assessments shift traditional teaching from knowledge transfer to learner-centred engagement. The cumulative effect results in enhanced exam performance, stronger conceptual understanding, and long-term knowledge

retention, rendering formative assessment essential for academic achievement.

Effects of formative assessment on learners' engagement and motivation

In addition to academic success, formative assessment profoundly influences pupil engagement and motivation in the educational process. Engagement denotes the active involvement of learners in classroom activities, whereas motivation propels their readiness to learn and persevere through difficulties. Research suggests that regular, constructive feedback enhances learners' ownership of their learning experience and increases their dedication to tasks (Schildkamp et al., 2020). Andrade and Brookhart (2020) contend that formative assessment cultivates a growth mentality, prompting learners to perceive mistakes as opportunities for improvement rather than as failures. This technique fosters intrinsic motivation and enhances self-efficacy.

Recent studies in African contexts indicate that formative methods, including self-assessment and peer review, augment learners' motivation and readiness to tackle challenging material (Mensah & Frempong, 2021). Formative assessment crucially offers opportunities to acknowledge gradual progress, so enhancing confidence among learners and mitigating disengagement in overcrowded classes. By integrating assessment into instruction, teachers foster a classroom atmosphere that prioritises effort, reflection, and enhancement. Consequently, formative assessment not only evaluates performance but also actively inspires learners, maintains engagement, and fosters comprehensive educational growth in ways that conventional summative methods frequently fail to support or sustain.

Challenge facing formative assessment practices

Notwithstanding its established advantages, the implementation of formative assessment encounters considerable obstacles, particularly in resource-limited educational environments. A significant concern is the insufficient capacity and training of teachers in the design and implementation of effective formative techniques (Adedoyin, 2020). Many teachers, especially in developing environments, persist in favouring summative approaches because to their familiarity and the systematic focus on high-stakes assessments. Large class sizes restrict teachers' capacity to deliver personalised feedback, thereby diminishing the efficacy of formative assessments (Kippers et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the implementation of formative assessment might be labour-intensive, resulting in a conflict between curriculum completion and the necessity for individualised feedback. Resource constraints, including insufficient instructional resources and technology, intensify these challenges, especially in public schools (Adebayo & Ogundele, 2021). Learners may experience anxiety when faced with constant testing, particularly if feedback is not provided in a constructive manner.

These challenges underscore the necessity for systemic reforms, encompassing teacher professional development, reduced teacher-pupil ratios, and supportive legislative frameworks that equilibrate summative and formative assessment objectives. Failure to resolve these obstacles may result in the underutilisation of formative assessment's ability to enhance learning outcomes, especially in situations such as Nigeria, where the advancement of elementary

education is crucial for attaining broader educational objectives.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey research methodology to examine the influence of formative assessment on the learning outcomes of upper primary school pupils in Educational Districts I and II in Lagos State. The design was deemed suitable since it allowed for data collection from a representative sample and facilitated the detection of the effects of formative assessment procedures on learning outcomes. The target population included all upper primary school teachers within the educational districts of Lagos State. Following by the application of a simple random sampling procedure, 10 public primary schools were selected from Districts I and II. From each of the 20 schools, 10 teachers were randomly selected, yielding a total sample of 200 participants.

Data were gathered with a carefully structured self-designed questionnaire segmented into two sections. Section A collected demographic data of teachers, whereas Section B included items assessed using a four-point Likert scale, concentrating on formative assessment procedures and outcomes. The instrument's face and content validity were confirmed via expert evaluation, and a pilot test in a different district yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.827, so affirming its reliability. The data were analysed utilising descriptive statistics, such as frequency, percentages alongside inferential statistics. Hypotheses were tested utilising one-sample t-tests at a 0.05 significant threshold with SPSS version 21.

RESULTS

Table 1: Participants' Demographics

| Characteristics | Options | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|-----------------------|----------------|------------|--------------|
| Gender | Male | 96 | 48.0 |
| | Female | 104 | 52.0 |
| | Total | 200 | 100.0 |
| Age | 20–30 years | 56 | 28.0 |
| | 31–40 years | 74 | 37.0 |
| | 41–50 years | 44 | 22.0 |
| | 51+ years | 26 | 13.0 |
| | Total | 246 | 100.0 |
| Teaching Experience | 0–5 years | 62 | 31.0 |
| Experience | 6–10 years | 72 | 36.0 |
| | 11–15 years | 40 | 20.0 |
| | Above 15 years | 26 | 13.0 |
| | Total | 200 | 100.0 |
| Highest Qualification | NCE | 38 | 19.0 |
| | HND | 32 | 16.0 |
| | B.Ed | 50 | 25.0 |
| | B.Sc /BA | 34 | 17.0 |
| | M.Ed/M.Sc/MA | 38 | 19.0 |
| | PhD | 863 | 4.0 |
| | Total | 200 | 100.0 |

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 delineates the demographic attributes of the participants. The sample consisted of 200 teachers, of whom 52.0% were female and 48.0% were male, reflecting a very equitable gender distribution. The majority of participants (37.0%) were aged 31–40 years, followed by 28.0% who were aged 20–30 years. This indicates that the teaching workforce in the research area was primarily composed of individuals who were youthful to middle-aged.

Concerning teaching experience, the majority of teachers possessed 6–10 years of classroom practice (36.0%), whilst 31.0% had fewer than five years, indicating a significant presence of relatively early-career teachers. Regarding qualifications, 25.0% of respondents possessed a Bachelor of Education degree, whereas 19.0% held either a National Certificate in Education (NCE) or a postgraduate diploma (M.Ed /M.Sc/MA). A lesser percentage possessed HND (16.0%) or PhD (4.0%). The demographic data reveal that the sample comprised a diversified and professionally trained teaching cadre.

Test of Hypotheses

The research hypotheses were tested with the use of Pearson Correlation, as shown below:

Hypothesis One

There is no significant impact of formative assessment procedures on the academic achievement of upper primary pupils.

Table 4.2: One-Sample Test

Test Value = 2.5

| | t | Df | Significance | | Mean Difference | 95% Confidence interval of the difference | |
|----------------------|-------|-----|--------------|------------|-----------------|---|--------|
| | | | One-tailed | Two-tailed | | Lower | Upper |
| Academic achievement | 4.231 | 199 | .042 | .017 | -.790 | -.5142 | -.0414 |

The one-sample t-test assessed the significance of formative assessment processes on the academic performance of upper primary pupils. The results demonstrated a statistically significant disparity between the test value and the sample mean, $t(199) = 4.231$, $p = .017$ (two-tailed). The null hypothesis was rejected due to the p-value being below the 0.05 significance threshold. This indicates that formative assessment techniques significantly impact pupils' academic performance. The confidence interval [-0.5142, -0.0414] corroborates this finding, signifying that the true mean difference remains consistently below zero and is not attributable to random variation.

Hypothesis Two

Formative assessment does not significantly improve engagement and motivation in learning among upper primary pupils.

Table 4.3: One Sample Test

Test Value = 2.5

| | t | Df | Significance | | Mean Difference | 95% Confidence interval of the difference | |
|----------------------|-------|-----|--------------|------------|-----------------|---|--------|
| | | | One-tailed | Two-tailed | | Lower | Upper |
| Academic achievement | 6.324 | 199 | .011 | .008 | -.697 | -.2414 | -.0525 |

The one-sample t-test results presented in Table 4.3 demonstrate a statistically significant difference between the test value and the observed mean regarding pupils' engagement and motivation in learning ($t = 6.324$, $df = 199$, $p = .008 < 0.05$). Given that the p-value is below the 0.05 threshold, the null hypothesis asserting that formative assessment does not significantly enhance engagement and motivation is rejected. The negative mean difference (-0.697) indicates that formative assessment significantly affects students' engagement and motivation, highlighting its efficacy as a pedagogical approach for fostering active involvement and sustained interest in learning.

Hypothesis Three

There is no significant challenge faced by upper primary teachers in conducting formative assessments.

Table 4.4: One Sample Test

Test Value = 2.5

| | t | Df | Significance | | Mean Difference | 95% Confidence interval of the difference | |
|------------|-------|-----|--------------|------------|-----------------|---|-------|
| | | | One-tailed | Two-tailed | | Lower | Upper |
| Challenges | 7.314 | 199 | .021 | .011 | -.822 | .0121 | .1414 |

The one-sample t-test indicated a statistically significant difficulty encountered by upper primary teachers when conducting formative assessments, $t(199) = 7.314$, $p = .011$ (two-tailed). The null hypothesis was rejected due to the p-value being below the 0.05 significance threshold. This signifies that teachers encountered significant challenges in conducting formative assessment practices. The mean difference (-0.822) and the confidence interval (0.0121 to 0.1414) indicate that these challenges were not coincidental but represent genuine difficulties faced by teachers, underscoring the necessity for focused interventions and support systems.

Discussion of Findings

The rejection of the first null hypothesis signifies that formative assessment methods significantly impact the academic performance of upper primary pupils. This finding corroborates Black and Wiliam's (1998) foundational research, which highlighted formative assessment as a catalyst for enhanced performance via continuous feedback and tailored training. Andrade and Brookhart (2020) discovered that methods like peer assessment and structured feedback loops promote active learning and enhance conceptual understanding. In environments like Nigeria, which are characterised by congested classrooms and limited resources, formative assessment is especially beneficial as it enables teachers to

address individual learning requirements (Adedoyin, 2020). OECD (2020) evidence further substantiates that formative assessments favourably influence literacy and numeracy outcomes. This study supports these viewpoints, demonstrating that formative techniques shift instruction from rote memorisation to learner-centred interaction, leading to enhanced accomplishment and greater information retention.

The second null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that formative assessment greatly improves learners' engagement and motivation. This finding supports Schildkamp et al. (2020), who noted that prompt and constructive feedback enhances students' sense of ownership and accountability for their learning. Andrade and Brookhart (2020) contend that formative techniques cultivate a growth mindset by prompting learners to perceive mistakes as opportunities instead of failures, hence enhancing resilience and intrinsic motivation. Mensah and Frempong (2021) revealed that formative methods, such as self-assessment and peer review, enhance learners' motivation and perseverance in challenging circumstances inside Africa. This study's findings reinforce existing research, demonstrating that formative assessment promotes active involvement in overcrowded Nigerian classrooms, where disengagement is frequently prevalent. By incorporating assessment into daily instruction, teachers not only analyse performance but also maintain pupil involvement, confidence, and motivation to learn, so enhancing both cognitive and affective outcomes.

The rejection of the third null hypothesis validates that teachers have significant challenges in implementing formative assessments. This

finding corresponds with Adedoyin (2020), who emphasised insufficient teacher training and the tendency for summative methods as enduring challenges in Nigeria. Kippers et al. (2018) similarly observed that big class sizes diminish the capacity for delivering personalised feedback, a difficulty reiterated by participants in our study. Additional concerns encompassed excessive workloads, insufficient teaching resources, and the urgency to fulfil the curriculum, which undermine the efficacy of formative techniques (Adebayo & Ogundele, 2021). These findings emphasise the urgent necessity for systemic reforms, encompassing ongoing professional development, curriculum reorganisation, and policy assistance to reconcile formative and summative requirements. Confronting these issues is essential for realising the complete potential of formative assessment in improving learning outcomes.

Conclusion

This study's findings demonstrate that formative assessment is crucial for improving the learning outcomes of upper primary pupils. The rejection of all three null hypotheses highlights the importance of formative practices in enhancing academic performance, maintaining engagement, and inspiring learners. The findings correspond with both global and local literature, confirming that formative assessment promotes enhanced understanding, learner-centred pedagogy, and more significant educational experiences.

The study simultaneously uncovered major challenges that teachers encounter in effectively using formative techniques, especially in resource-limited environments like Nigeria. If neglected, these drawbacks may constrain the transformative potential of formative assessment.

The study underscores the potential and limitations of formative practices, emphasising the critical necessity for systemic reforms, teacher support, and policy-driven interventions to establish formative assessment as a sustainable and influential element of basic education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following are recommended:

1. Government should establish ongoing professional development initiatives to enhance teachers' competencies in the design and execution of successful formative assessments;
2. Educational authorities should to incorporate formative assessment processes into policy frameworks in conjunction with summative methods;
3. Primary schools must be well equipped with instructional materials and technological instruments to mitigate implementation challenges;
4. Initiatives must be implemented to prevent overcrowding in classrooms, facilitating more individualised feedback;
5. Supervisors and administrators must offer consistent direction to ensure the effective implementation of formative procedures; and
6. Teachers must be equipped to provide constructive feedback that inspires pupils and eliminates anxiety.

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