# Field Report

# Knowledge, Implications and Challenges of Continuous Assessment (CA) in Nursing Education: A Pilot Study

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## Abstract

**Background:** Continuous Assessment (CA) has become a compulsory pedagogical technique in tertiary institutions across Nigeria. The knowledge, implications and challenges of CA in nursing education was investigated using a pilot study conducted at the Department of Nursing Science, Imo State University Orlu, Nigeria.

**Methods:** A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Seven (7) lecturers in the Department of Nursing Science were sampled. Structured questionnaires were directly dispensed by the lead investigator to the lecturers and retrieved upon completion. The responses were collated, categorized and presented in tables. The statistical analyses were done using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.

**Results:** Lecturers' knowledge about CA showed a grand mean of 3.93 which exceeded the criterion mean of 2.50. This implied that teachers showed good knowledge of CA, although the level of utilization was poor due mainly to teacher-related challenges. The respondents accepted all the items as their opinion on the implications of CA, with a grand mean of 4.00 which was greater than the criterion mean of 2.50. The challenges lecturers encountered in CA included insufficient time for teaching and assessment, over-populated classes, excess workload, lack of storage facilities for CA materials and lack of interest on the part of students.

**Conclusions:** The need for teachers to continuously assess students' academic progress during teaching and learning cannot be over-emphasized**.** In addition, regular trainings and workshops for lecturers will go a long way in improving their delivery of up-to-date techniques in continuous assessment.

**Keywords:** Knowledge, Implications, Challenges, Nursing Education, Pilot study.

## Introduction

Continuous Assessment (CA) is any method of activity that is meant to collect data about the knowledge, attitude and skills of a student or group of students. It is a method of obtaining information that is used to make educational decisions, give feedback about student's strengths and weaknesses and also judge the effectiveness of teaching strategies [1].

Furthermore, it is a constant analysis of the students' academic performance in order to ascertain if they are progressing or not. CA is adopted by educational institutions as an important tool, considering the increased need for students' assessment [2]. A study has shown that assessing students' knowledge acquired from lecturers or videos is not usually adequate; hence, assessing the students in various skills becomes very crucial to determine their capabilities [2]. Evaluating the competence of students in a learning environment helps in giving feedback which enhances learning, encourages students to master instructional materials and become more self-critical; thus, achieving success in their academic goals. Students tend to showcase their ability to comprehend what was taught when they are constantly assessed.

Continuous assessment is an evaluation aimed at assessing and determining how well students are able to perform in every aspect of the domain [3]. The purpose of CA is to examine students' level of knowledge, teaching strategies of teachers and the techniques of the school curriculum, plan and design [4].

Periodic evaluation of students helps to ensure that students who have studied hard, but are not good at sitting for examinations, are not disadvantage when compared with lazy students who engage in reading during examinations just to pass [5]. In the past, traditional method of assessment focuses only on the cognitive domain with little or no effort made to evaluate the effective and psychomotor domains [5]. This encourages students to read only during examination by memorizing lecture notes just for the purpose of passing examination which are forgotten thereafter. Based on this, CA was introduced in the Nigerian educational sector by the National Policy on Education in 1971. In pursuance of this policy, the National Universities Commission (NUC) allotted 30% and 70% to CA and examination respectively.

According to another study [6], the selection of learning methods has a huge impact on students' use of physical assessment skills while in clinical rotation; hence, it is required that student nurses learning processes related to the use of physical assessment should be explored in order to strengthen their confidence and promote patient-care in every health care context. More so, they opined that CA skills help nurses in detecting clinical deterioration and preventing complications through early intervention, care, and management. In addition, inculcating continuous physical assessment courses in nursing education will help to boost nurse's confidence, assertiveness and self-esteem in the clinical areas and work places.

According to a study [7], daily or weekly assessment of students brings about changes in the attitude and actions of students regarding their learning in the sense that it brings about their weaknesses on the long run, thereby persuading them to change by putting in more efforts to attain a reasonable goal in their academics. However, continuous assessment should be carried out in a controlled manner so that students will not be more interested in the grade than learning.

Consequently, to ascertain the knowledge, implications and challenges of continuous assessment in nursing education, a pilot study was conducted among lecturers at the Department of Nursing Science, Imo State University, Orlu, Nigeria.

## Methodology

### Study area

The study was conducted at the Department of Nursing Science, Imo State University, Orlu, Nigeria. The Department was established in 2006 in the Owerri main campus of the University which was later relocated to Umuna, Orlu community. It is bounded by the famous Orlu International Market (North), Umuowa Seminary School (South), Imo State College of Nursing and Health Sciences (West), and the famous Orie Umuna Market along Amaigbo road (East). The Department runs Bachelors, Masters and PhD programs.

### Study design

The Descriptive Survey Design was adopted for the study.

### Population of the study

The study population was comprised of the 7 lecturers in the Department.

## Sample and sampling technique

The sample size was same as the population; hence, no sampling technique was deployed.

## Instruments for data collection

Structured questionnaires were used for data collection. The questionnaires had two sections, A and B. Section A was for the respondents' demographic characteristics, while Section B contained questions designed to generate data to address the research objectives. Items were presented on a 4 point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agreed (SA = 4) to Strongly Disagreed (SD = 1).

## Validity and reliability of the Instruments

Draft copies of the questionnaires were validated by the Body of Validators of the Department of Nursing Science, Imo State University, Orlu, Nigeria to ensure face and content validity. The validators examined the objectives of the study in line with the specific items in the instruments and assessed the language used in developing the instrument. Necessary modifications were recommended by the validators and consequently effected by the investigators. The items in the questionnaires were arranged according to the objectives of the study.

## Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethical Committee of the Department of Nursing Science, Imo State University, Orlu, Nigeria. Thereafter, the respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and their right of anonymity was guaranteed.

## Procedure for data collection

The questionnaires were directly distributed to the lecturers by the investigators. The investigators explained the objectives of the study to the respondents and assured them of anonymity. All questionnaires were retrieved from the respondents on the same day. The responses were collated and arranged based on the study objectives and the criterion mean was set at 2.5, with weighted mean response of $\geq 2.5$ indicating the acceptance of the responses, while a weighted mean response of $<2.5$ indicated a rejection of the responses. The mean scores were extracted and presented in tables to answer the research questions.

## Data analysis

The scores obtained from the questionnaires were collated, arranged and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SSPS) version 22.

## Results

The criterion mean for the study was set at 2.5. Hence, weighted mean response of $\geq$ 2.5 showed an acceptance region whereas weighted mean response < 2.5 denoted rejection region. Table 1 represents the lecturers' knowledge about CA with a grand mean of 3.93. The grand mean response was higher than the criterion mean of 2.50. This gives the general conclusion that the respondents accepted the items as their opinion on the knowledge of the lecturers on CA. Specifically, the weighted mean response for all the items raised exceeded the criterion mean (i.e 4.00, 4.00, 4.00, 4.00, 4.00, 3.71, 4.00, 4.00> 2.5, respectively). Hence, the knowledge of the lecturers on CA indicates that CA could be defined as monitoring of learners' progress during teaching and learning, CA is a tool used by teachers to evaluate the competence of students in a learning environment, assessment in the psychomotor domain involves assessing the learners' ability to use his or her hands, comprehensive data is collected on students' performance in a systematic manner, CA provides much more extensively syllabus coverage than terminal assessment and by enabling on-going monitoring of students' performance, CA provides early warnings on student's weaknesses.

The determination of the implications of CA in nursing education showed a grand mean response (4.00) was higher than the criterion mean of 2.50 (Table 2). This implies that the respondents accepted all the items as their opinion. Specifically, the weighted mean response of the items was higher than the criterion mean (i.e 4.00, 4.00, 4.00, 4.00, 4.00> 2.5, respectively). Hence, the implications of CA are that the use of CA scores helps to guide the students and improve teaching skills, CA helps to disseminate information about the progress report of students to parents, learner and the Department, CA helps to identify students' areas of strength and weakness, CA scores have helped to improve learners' study habit and also ensure continuity of records by constant record keeping.

The challenges lecturers encounter in carrying out CA had a grand mean response of 4.00 which was higher than the criterion mean of 2.50 (Table 3). The respondents accepted the listed items as their opinion on the challenges lecturers encounter in the utilization of CA. Specifically, the weighted mean response of the items was higher than the criterion mean (i.e 4.00, 4.00, 4.00, 4.00,

4.00 > 2.5, respectively). This implies that the challenges lecturers encountered included insufficient time for teaching and assessment, over-populated classes which made CA very difficult, excess workload, lack of storage facilities for continuous assessment materials and lack of interest on the part of students.

**Discussion**

The findings of the present study showed a good knowledge of CA among the lecturers. There was an agreement that CA was vital in monitoring learners' progress during teaching and learning, CA is a tool used by teachers to evaluate the competence of students in a learning environment, assessment in the cognitive domain is associated with the process of knowledge and understanding, the affective domain applies to characteristics such as attitudes, motives and interests, and other personality traits, assessment in the psychomotor domain involves assessing the learners' ability to use their hands, CA is a systematic collection of data to determine student's academic performance, CA is a means of improving teaching materials and upgrading student's academic performance, CA provides early warnings on student's weaknesses. These findings are expected considering that most of the lecturers in the Department are nurse educators and have good knowledge of the various forms of assessment. This corroborates the findings of another study [8] which stated that teachers use CA to evaluate the progress of the learners.

The study further revealed that CA helps to guide the students and improve teaching, disseminate information about the progress report of students, learners, and school administrators. Furthermore, it helps to identify student's areas of strength and weakness, improves learners' study habit and ensures continuity of records by adequate keeping of records. These findings are in line with a previous study [9] which asserted that continuous assessment helps to reveal gaps, maintain record keeping of student's scores and guides both teachers and learners to improve in their teaching and learning process.

These findings clearly emphasize that lecturers make use of the assessment scores on individual basis to improve the students learning. For parents and guardians, the records of the performances of their wards will enable them to advice their wards in the proper direction especially during periods of vacation.

Finally, the study revealed that the challenges lecturers encountered are insufficient time for teaching and assessment, over-populated classes which made CA very difficult, excess workload, lack of storage facilities for continuous assessment materials and irregular utilization of CA in final grading of students. For successful implementation of CA, lecturers need to administer more tests, observe the learners more keenly to assess learning outcomes and keep more records on the learners; thus, imposing more workload, responsibility and demand on the part of the teachers. In addition, the task of CA which involves frequent testing and marking of papers, increases lecturers' workload and could probably lead to burn out syndrome.

## Conclusion

Despite the challenges associated with the implementation of CA, it is well known and accepted among the lecturers. However, there is need to create further awareness on the significance of CA in the assessment of the overall performance of students and forestall all impediments in the effective application of CA in nursing education.

## Recommendations

Although training will not provide the entire remedy to the challenges of CA, the training and re-training of lecturers will go a long way in improving and standardizing CA modules in nursing education. Furthermore, the regulatory bodies must insist and ensure, through appropriate implementation policies, that the application of CA is enforced in all nursing institutions. In addition, the mitigation of the challenge of excess workload highlighted in the present study, through the engagement of more lecturers in the training institutions, will provide a sustainable solution to the challenge of excess work.

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**Tables**

**Table 1: Lecturers' Knowledge of Continuous Assessment (n = 7)**

| S/N | Knowledge of Continuous Assessment | SA 4 | A 3 | D 2 | SD 1 | Total | Mean | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Continuous assessment can be defined as monitoring of learners' progress during teaching and learning. | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 28 | **4.00** | **Agreed** |
| 2 | Continuous assessment is a tool used by teachers to evaluate the competence of students in a learning environment. | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 28 | **4.00** | **Agreed** |
| 3 | Assessment in the cognitive domain is associated with the process of knowledge and understanding. | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 28 | **4.00** | **Agreed** |
| 4 | The affective domain applies to characteristics such as attitudes, motives and interests, and other personality traits. | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 28 | **4.00** | **Agreed** |
| 5 | Assessment in the psychomotor domain involves assessing the learners' ability to use his or her hands | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 28 | **4.00** | **Agreed** |
| 6 | Continuous assessment is a systematic collection of data to determine student's academic performance. | 5 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 26 | **3.71** | **Agreed** |
| 7 | Continuous assessment is a means of improving teaching materials and upgrading student's academic performance. | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 28 | **4.00** | **Agreed** |
| 8 | By enabling on-going monitoring of students' performance, CA provides early warning on student's weaknesses. | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 28 | **4.00** | **Agreed** |
| | **Grand Mean** | | | | | | **3.93** | **Agreed** |

SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY, 2023                     Criterion Mean = 2.5

**Table 2: Implications of CA in Nursing Institutions (n = 7)**

| S/N | Implications of CA in Nursing Institutions | SA 4 | A 3 | D 2 | SD 1 | Total | Mean | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Continuous assessment scores helps to guide the students and improve teaching skills. | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 28 | **4.00** | **Agreed** |
| 2 | CA helps to disseminate information about the progress report of students toparents, learners andschool administrators. | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 28 | **4.00** | **Agreed** |
| 3 | Continuous assessment helps to identify students' areas of strength and weakness. | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 28 | **4.00** | **Agreed** |
| 4 | CA score helps to improve learners' studyhabit. | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 28 | **4.00** | **Agreed** |
| 5 | CA helps to ensure continuity of records by constant record keeping. | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 28 | **4.00** | **Agreed** |
| | **Grand Mean** | | | | | | **4.00** | **Agreed** |

SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY, 2023

**Table 3**: **Challenges lecturers encounter in carrying out continuous assessment (n = 7)**

| S/N | Challenges of carrying out Continuous Assessment | SA 4 | A 3 | D 2 | SD 1 | Total | Mean | Remark |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------|------|-----|-----|------|-------|------|--------|
| 1 | Insufficient time for teaching and assessment. | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 28 | **4.00** | **Agreed** |
| 2 | Too many students in a class that continuous assessment is made very difficult to implement. | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 28 | **4.00** | **Agreed** |
| 3 | Work overload for both teachers and students | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 28 | **4.00** | **Agreed** |
| 4 | Lack of storage facilities for continuous assessment materials. | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 28 | **4.00** | **Agreed** |
| 5 | Lack of interest on the part of students | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 28 | **4.00** | **Agreed** |
| | **Grand Mean** | | | | | | **4.00** | **Agreed** |

**SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY, 2023**