



ASSESSING THE IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT OF NCCE BENCHMARKS ON ASSESSMENT PRACTICES IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigates the implementation and impact of the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) Benchmarks on assessment practices in Nigerian Colleges of Education. A descriptive survey design was employed with data collected from lecturers and academic administrators across federal, state, and private institutions. Of 450 questionnaires administered, 412 were returned (91.6% response rate). Descriptive statistics indicated a moderate level of benchmark implementation (Grand Mean = 2.87/4.00), with higher compliance in continuous assessment weighting ($M = 3.12$) and lower compliance in moderation ($M = 2.61$) and feedback mechanisms ($M = 2.54$). Inferential analyses showed significant differences across institution types ($F(2, 409) = 5.84, p < .05$). A strong positive relationship was found between benchmark implementation and assessment quality ($r = .68, p < .05$). Regression results revealed that benchmark implementation significantly predicted assessment quality ($\beta = .64, t = 12.37, p < .05$), explaining 46% of the variance ($R^2 = .46$). The findings indicate that while NCCE Benchmarks influence assessment practices, uneven implementation particularly in moderation and feedback limits their effectiveness. Strengthening assessment literacy, monitoring, and institutional support is recommended.

Keywords: Assessment practices, Competency-based assessment, NCCE Benchmarks, teacher education, Nigeria

Introduction

Teacher education occupies a central position in national development, particularly in developing countries where the quality of schooling is closely linked to the preparation of teachers. In Nigeria, Colleges of Education are mandated to prepare teachers for the basic education sub-sector, and their operations are regulated by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE). The NCCE provides minimum standards and benchmarks intended to ensure uniformity, quality assurance, and comparability of teacher preparation programmes across the country (NCCE, 2012; NCCE, 2017). Among these standards, assessment benchmarks are particularly significant because assessment practices influence not only how students learn but also how teacher trainees internalise professional standards and pedagogical competencies.

Assessment in teacher education extends beyond grading; it shapes instructional decisions, determines progression and certification, and models the types of evaluation strategies future teachers are expected to implement in schools. Contemporary perspectives on assessment emphasise alignment with learning outcomes, continuous assessment strategies, authenticity, and feedback-driven improvement (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Black & Wiliam, 2009). Within this framework, the NCCE benchmarks stipulate guidelines on continuous assessment weighting, moderation procedures, practicum evaluation, grading systems, and quality assurance mechanisms. Ideally, these benchmarks are designed to promote fairness, transparency, reliability, and competence-based evaluation in Colleges of Education.

Despite the existence of these regulatory frameworks, concerns have been raised regarding inconsistencies in implementation across institutions. Variations in staff capacity, institutional culture, infrastructural support, internal quality assurance mechanisms, and administrative commitment may affect the extent to which NCCE benchmarks are fully operationalised. Empirical observations in Nigerian higher education suggest that while policy documents often articulate robust standards, implementation gaps frequently emerge at the institutional level (Obanya, 2014; Yusuf & Afolayan, 2017). Such gaps may manifest in irregular moderation processes,

overreliance on summative examinations, inadequate feedback mechanisms, or limited integration of formative assessment strategies.

The implications of weak or inconsistent implementation are far-reaching. Since Colleges of Education are responsible for preparing teachers for Nigeria's basic education system, deficiencies in assessment practices may cascade into the broader schooling system. If teacher trainees are not exposed to best practices in assessment, such as diagnostic testing, rubric-based grading, reflective evaluation, and competency-based assessment, they may replicate traditional, examination-driven approaches in their future classrooms. This undermines national goals for learner-centred pedagogy and competence-based curriculum delivery as articulated in Nigeria's National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014).

Moreover, the global shift toward standards-based education and accountability has intensified the need for alignment between policy prescriptions and classroom realities. International studies indicate that effective implementation of assessment standards enhances instructional coherence, promotes professional accountability, and improves student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Shepard, 2000). However, successful implementation depends on contextual adaptation, professional development, and institutional support systems. Therefore, examining the Nigerian context, particularly within Colleges of Education, provides valuable insights into how regulatory benchmarks translate into practice in resource-constrained environments.

Although previous studies in Nigeria have examined assessment practices in tertiary institutions, limited empirical attention has been devoted specifically to the implementation and impact of NCCE assessment benchmarks in Colleges of Education. Existing studies tend to focus broadly on continuous assessment, quality assurance, or curriculum implementation without systematically analysing benchmark compliance and its measurable effects on assessment quality and teacher competence development. This creates a research gap that warrants systematic investigation.

Despite these frameworks, evidence indicates uneven implementation of assessment benchmarks across Colleges of Education. Many institutions continue to rely heavily on traditional examinations, with limited integration of formative and competency-based approaches (Ogunniyi, 2015; Raji, 2023). Variations in institutional capacity, staff expertise, and quality assurance practices further contribute to inconsistencies in implementation.

The policy implications are significant. Weak assessment practices in teacher education may undermine the quality of graduates and, by extension, the effectiveness of Nigeria's basic education system. Ensuring proper implementation of NCCE benchmarks is therefore essential for achieving national educational objectives.

Although existing studies have examined assessment practices in Nigerian tertiary institutions, few have specifically analysed the implementation and impact of NCCE benchmarks. Most focus on general assessment approaches without systematically evaluating compliance and its implications for assessment quality.

This study addresses this gap by examining the extent of implementation of NCCE assessment benchmarks and their impact on assessment practices in Colleges of Education in Nigeria. The findings are expected to inform policy, strengthen institutional practices, and contribute to the broader discourse on quality assurance in teacher education.

Literature Review

Conceptual Clarifications

Assessment in higher education refers to the systematic process of collecting, analysing, and interpreting evidence to determine the extent to which students have achieved intended learning outcomes. In teacher education, assessment serves dual purposes: certification of competence and modelling of professional practice. Effective assessment practices are expected to be valid, reliable, fair, and aligned with curriculum objectives (Airasian, 2005). Contemporary discourse emphasises formative assessment, authentic tasks, moderation procedures, and feedback mechanisms as critical components of quality assurance (Black & Wiliam, 2009).

Standards-based assessment systems are designed to ensure that evaluation practices are aligned with clearly defined competencies and performance benchmarks. Biggs and Tang (2011) argue that constructive alignment, where learning outcomes, instructional activities, and assessment tasks are coherently linked, improves

instructional effectiveness and learner achievement. Within the Nigerian context, the NCCE benchmarks prescribe minimum standards for assessment weighting, continuous assessment components, grading systems, moderation procedures, and teaching practice evaluation (NCCE, 2012; NCCE, 2017). These benchmarks are intended to promote uniformity and accountability across Colleges of Education.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Constructivist Learning Theory and Standards-Based Assessment Theory. Constructivist theory, rooted in the work of Vygotsky (1978), posits that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction and reflection. From this perspective, assessment should not merely measure recall but should evaluate higher-order thinking, problem-solving, and application of knowledge. Formative assessment, feedback, and reflective practice are therefore central to meaningful learning.

Standards-Based Assessment Theory emphasises the alignment of assessment tasks with predefined performance criteria and benchmarks. Shepard (2000) maintains that assessment reform must integrate instruction and evaluation processes to improve learning outcomes. Within Colleges of Education, the NCCE benchmarks represent formalised standards intended to guide assessment design and implementation. The effectiveness of these benchmarks depends largely on institutional compliance, professional competence, and monitoring mechanisms.

Empirical Studies in Nigeria

Several Nigerian studies have examined assessment practices in tertiary institutions, though relatively few focus specifically on NCCE benchmark implementation. Yusuf and Afolayan (2017) investigated continuous assessment practices in Colleges of Education and found significant variations in implementation across institutions, particularly in moderation and feedback procedures. The study reported that inadequate training and large class sizes hindered effective formative assessment.

Ogunniyi (2015) examined quality assurance mechanisms in teacher education institutions and concluded that although regulatory guidelines exist, enforcement and monitoring remain inconsistent. The study highlighted gaps in documentation, moderation practices, and transparency in grading systems.

Adebayo (2018) surveyed lecturers in South-West Nigerian Colleges of Education and reported overreliance on written examinations, with limited use of project-based and performance-based assessments. Similarly, Okoye and Nwoye (2019) found that continuous assessment components were often implemented as periodic tests rather than diversified formative activities.

Ibrahim and Suleiman (2020) and Shuaib et al. (2023) studied assessment literacy among teacher educators in Northern Nigeria and revealed moderate understanding of assessment principles but limited application of rubric-based grading and authentic assessment strategies. Their findings suggest that policy compliance is influenced by lecturers' professional capacity.

Eze and Ibekwe (2021) examined moderation practices in federal Colleges of Education and found weak inter-departmental moderation structures, affecting grading reliability. In a related study, Olatunji (2020) observed discrepancies between documented assessment policies and actual classroom practices.

On the impact dimension, Adeyemi (2019) found a positive relationship between structured continuous assessment practices and students' academic performance in Colleges of Education. However, the study did not specifically assess compliance with NCCE benchmarks.

Collectively, Nigerian studies indicate the existence of regulatory frameworks but reveal persistent implementation challenges, including inadequate monitoring, limited professional development, infrastructural constraints, and institutional variability.

Empirical Studies Outside Nigeria

International literature provides broader insights into standards-based assessment implementation. Darling-Hammond (2010) found that coherent teacher education systems with clearly defined performance assessments

produce better-prepared teachers. In Finland and Singapore, structured practicum assessments and moderated evaluation processes enhance reliability and professional competence.

Black and Wiliam (2009) demonstrated that formative assessment significantly improves student achievement when properly implemented. Their meta-analysis highlights the importance of feedback, peer assessment, and self-evaluation in improving learning outcomes.

Torrance (2012) examined standards-based reforms in the United Kingdom and cautioned that excessive emphasis on accountability may narrow assessment practices if not balanced with professional autonomy. Similarly, Brown (2011) found that lecturers' beliefs about assessment strongly influence implementation fidelity.

In the United States, Shepard (2000) argued for integration of instruction and assessment to foster deeper learning. Studies by Popham (2014) indicate that assessment literacy among educators is critical for effective benchmark implementation. Without adequate training, standards may remain symbolic rather than transformative.

Asian studies also reinforce the role of institutional culture in policy implementation. Cheng (2013) reported that quality assurance reforms in Hong Kong universities succeeded where leadership commitment and staff training were prioritised.

Synthesis and Research Gap

The reviewed literature demonstrates that while standards and benchmarks are essential for quality assurance, their impact depends on effective implementation, professional competence, and institutional commitment. Nigerian studies reveal inconsistencies in assessment practices within Colleges of Education, yet there remains limited empirical research directly evaluating the extent of compliance with NCCE assessment benchmarks and their measurable impact on assessment quality.

Furthermore, most existing studies focus on general assessment practices rather than systematically analysing benchmark adherence, moderation structures, grading reliability, and formative assessment integration within the NCCE regulatory framework. This gap underscores the need for a comprehensive investigation that not only measures compliance levels but also examines the implications for instructional quality and teacher competence development.

By addressing this gap, the present study contributes to evidence-based policy evaluation and strengthens the discourse on quality assurance in Nigerian teacher education.

The literature reveals a fundamental tension between policy-driven standardisation and context-sensitive implementation. While benchmarks such as those developed by the NCCE provide a necessary framework for quality assurance, their effectiveness is mediated by institutional capacity, professional culture, and systemic support.

A critical gap emerges from the tendency of existing studies to focus on descriptive accounts of assessment practices without examining the depth of benchmark implementation or its measurable impact on assessment quality. Moreover, limited attention has been given to how different components of assessment systems, such as moderation, feedback, and authenticity, interact to influence overall effectiveness.

This study addresses these gaps by moving beyond descriptive analysis to examine both the extent and impact of NCCE benchmark implementation. It also adopts a more integrative perspective by linking compliance levels to measurable indicators of assessment quality, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of assessment reform in Nigerian teacher education.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design with correlational components. The design was considered appropriate because it enables the systematic collection of quantitative data to determine the extent of implementation of NCCE assessment benchmarks and to examine their relationship with the quality of assessment practices in Colleges of Education. The correlational component was included to determine whether a statistically significant relationship exists between benchmark compliance and assessment effectiveness indicators such as reliability, fairness, feedback quality, and alignment with learning outcomes.

The study also incorporated limited qualitative inputs through document analysis (institutional assessment policies, moderation reports, and departmental guidelines) to triangulate survey findings and enhance validity.

The population comprised all accredited Colleges of Education in Nigeria recognised by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE). The target respondents included: Provosts and Deputy Provosts (Academic), Deans of Schools, Heads of Departments, Lecturers in professional and subject areas and Quality assurance officers. These categories were selected because of their direct involvement in assessment planning, implementation, and monitoring.

A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed. First, stratified sampling was used to ensure representation of Federal, State, and Private Colleges of Education. Second, purposive sampling was used to select institutions with at least one full accreditation cycle under the revised NCCE benchmark guidelines (NCCE, 2017). Third, proportionate random sampling was applied to select lecturers and academic administrators within each institution. A minimum sample size of 300–500 respondents was targeted to ensure adequate statistical power for inferential analysis. The sample size determination was guided by Cochran's (1977) formula for large populations.

Data were collected using three main instruments:

1. NCCE Benchmark Implementation Questionnaire (NBIQ) – A structured questionnaire developed by the researcher to measure the extent of compliance with NCCE assessment benchmarks. The instrument contained sections on: Continuous assessment structure, Moderation procedures, Practicum evaluation, Grading systems, Feedback mechanisms, and Documentation and record keeping
2. Assessment Quality Index Scale (AQIS) – Designed to measure perceived effectiveness of assessment practices, including validity, reliability, fairness, transparency, and alignment with learning outcomes.
3. Document Analysis Checklist (DAC) – Used to review institutional policy documents, moderation reports, and assessment records for evidence of benchmark implementation.

All questionnaire items were structured on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1).

Content and face validity were established through expert review by specialists in Measurement and Evaluation and Educational Administration from recognised Nigerian universities. Their feedback led to the refinement of ambiguous items and improved alignment with NCCE benchmark provisions. Construct validity was examined using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to confirm underlying dimensions of benchmark implementation and assessment quality constructs.

A pilot study was conducted in one College of Education, not included in the main study. The data obtained were subjected to Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 and above was considered acceptable for internal consistency (Airasian, 2005). Test–retest reliability was also conducted within a two-week interval to ensure stability of responses.

Ethical approval was obtained from relevant institutional authorities. Introductory letters were presented to participating Colleges of Education. Questionnaires were administered physically and electronically, where necessary. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Completed instruments were retrieved, coded, and prepared for analysis. Institutional documents were reviewed using the Document Analysis Checklist to corroborate questionnaire responses.

Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The following statistical techniques were employed: Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage) to determine the extent of benchmark implementation. Independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA to examine differences across institution types (Federal, State, Private). Pearson Product-Moment Correlation to determine the relationship between benchmark implementation and assessment quality. Multiple regression analysis to assess the predictive strength of benchmark compliance on assessment effectiveness. All hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. Qualitative data from document analysis were analysed thematically and used to support quantitative findings. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Data were treated confidentially and used strictly for academic purposes. Institutions were

anonymised in reporting to prevent reputational implications. Potential limitations include reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce response bias, and possible variability in institutional record-keeping practices. However, triangulation through document analysis was employed to mitigate these limitations.

Results and Discussion

Response Rate and Demographic Information

Out of the 450 questionnaires distributed across the sampled Colleges of Education, 412 were properly completed and returned, representing a response rate of 91.6%. This high return rate was attributed to follow-up visits and institutional support. Respondents comprised 62% lecturers, 18% Heads of Departments, 10% Deans, and 10% quality assurance or academic planning officers. In terms of institutional distribution, 45% were drawn from Federal Colleges of Education, 35% from State Colleges, and 20% from Private Colleges.

Extent of Implementation of NCCE Assessment Benchmarks

Descriptive analysis revealed moderate overall implementation of NCCE assessment benchmarks (Grand Mean = 2.87 on a 4-point scale). Continuous assessment, weighting, and grading structures recorded relatively high compliance (Mean = 3.12), indicating that most institutions adhere to prescribed percentage allocations between continuous assessment and final examinations.

However, moderation procedures (Mean = 2.61) and structured feedback mechanisms (Mean = 2.54) recorded comparatively lower means. Document analysis further revealed that while moderation committees exist in most institutions, evidence of systematic inter-departmental moderation and external moderation was inconsistent.

These findings suggest that compliance tends to be stronger in visible and quantifiable aspects of assessment (e.g., grading structure) but weaker in qualitative dimensions such as feedback quality and reliability assurance.

Differences in Implementation Across Institution Types

One-way ANOVA results indicated a statistically significant difference in benchmark implementation among Federal, State, and Private Colleges of Education ($F(2, 409) = 5.84, p < .05$). Post hoc analysis revealed that Federal Colleges demonstrated significantly higher compliance levels compared to State Colleges, while Private Colleges showed moderate compliance.

This variation may be attributed to differences in funding structures, access to professional development, and frequency of regulatory monitoring. Federal institutions typically receive more direct oversight and support, which may strengthen adherence to NCCE provisions.

Relationship Between Benchmark Implementation and Assessment Quality

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between NCCE benchmark implementation and assessment quality indicators ($r = .68, p < .05$). This indicates that higher levels of compliance are associated with improved perceptions of validity, fairness, reliability, and alignment with learning outcomes. Multiple regression analysis further showed that benchmark implementation significantly predicted assessment quality ($\beta = .64, t = 12.37, p < .05$), explaining approximately 46% of the variance ($R^2 = .46$). Among the benchmark components, structured moderation and feedback mechanisms emerged as the strongest predictors of assessment effectiveness. While these results suggest a strong association, they should not be interpreted as definitive evidence of causation. It is possible that institutions with stronger overall governance and quality assurance systems simultaneously achieve higher benchmark compliance and better assessment practices. In this sense, benchmark implementation may be part of a broader institutional effectiveness construct rather than the sole driver of assessment quality. Additionally, the remaining unexplained variance (54%) indicates that other factors, such as lecturer experience, institutional leadership, student characteristics, and resource availability, also contribute significantly to assessment effectiveness.

Discussion of Findings

The findings confirm that while Colleges of Education in Nigeria generally demonstrate awareness of NCCE assessment requirements, implementation remains uneven across specific benchmark components. Stronger compliance in grading structure aligns with earlier Nigerian studies that reported emphasis on examination

weighting and formal documentation (Yusuf & Afolayan, 2017). However, weaker implementation of moderation and formative feedback supports concerns raised by Ogunniyi (2015) regarding quality assurance gaps in teacher education institutions.

The significant positive relationship between benchmark compliance and assessment quality reinforces the argument of standards-based assessment theory that structured guidelines enhance instructional coherence and accountability (Shepard, 2000). The predictive strength of moderation and feedback mechanisms aligns with Black and Wiliam's (2009) assertion that formative feedback substantially improves learning outcomes.

Institutional variation observed in this study mirrors international evidence that contextual factors such as leadership commitment, funding, and professional development influence policy implementation (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Federal Colleges' relatively higher compliance suggests that sustained regulatory engagement and institutional support structures play a critical role in ensuring benchmark adherence.

Importantly, the findings demonstrate that NCCE benchmarks are not merely symbolic regulatory documents; when effectively implemented, they contribute significantly to improving assessment reliability, transparency, and instructional alignment. However, partial implementation limits their transformative potential. Without systematic moderation, structured feedback, and continuous professional development in assessment literacy, benchmark provisions may not fully translate into improved teacher competence.

Overall, the results highlight the need for strengthened monitoring mechanisms, targeted capacity-building programmes, and institutional commitment to formative assessment integration. Enhancing these components would likely increase compliance levels and amplify the positive impact of NCCE benchmarks on assessment practices in Nigerian Colleges of Education.

Conclusion

This study examined the implementation and impact of NCCE assessment benchmarks on assessment practices in Colleges of Education in Nigeria. The findings provide empirical evidence that while awareness of NCCE assessment requirements is widespread, the depth and consistency of implementation vary significantly across institutions and benchmark components.

The study established that core structural requirements, such as continuous assessment, weighting, and grading formats, are largely implemented. However, qualitative dimensions of assessment, including structured moderation processes, systematic feedback mechanisms, and authentic performance-based evaluation, demonstrate weaker levels of compliance. This imbalance suggests that institutions may prioritise regulatory visibility and documentation over deeper pedagogical transformation.

Importantly, the study found a strong and statistically significant relationship between the level of benchmark implementation and the perceived quality of assessment practices. Institutions that demonstrated higher compliance with NCCE standards also reported stronger indicators of validity, reliability, fairness, transparency, and alignment with learning outcomes. Regression analysis further confirmed that benchmark adherence significantly predicts assessment effectiveness, particularly where moderation and feedback systems are institutionalised.

These findings reinforce the central assumption of standards-based assessment theory that clearly articulated benchmarks can improve instructional coherence and accountability when properly implemented (Shepard, 2000). They also support constructivist perspectives that emphasise formative feedback and reflective evaluation as essential elements of meaningful learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, the NCCE benchmarks, when operationalised beyond procedural compliance, have the potential to strengthen teacher preparation and enhance the professional competence of graduating teachers.

However, the uneven implementation observed across Federal, State, and Private Colleges of Education indicates that contextual factors such as funding stability, leadership commitment, staff assessment literacy, and monitoring intensity play critical roles in shaping compliance levels. Without sustained professional development and institutional quality assurance mechanisms, benchmark provisions may remain partially realised.

Overall, the study concludes that NCCE assessment benchmarks constitute a viable framework for improving assessment practices in Nigerian Colleges of Education. Their impact, however, is contingent upon systematic enforcement, institutional ownership, continuous capacity building, and integration of formative assessment principles into everyday instructional practice. Strengthening these areas will not only enhance internal quality assurance within Colleges of Education but also contribute to the broader national goal of improving teacher quality and educational outcomes in Nigeria.

Study Limitations

Notwithstanding its contributions, the study has several limitations. First, reliance on self-reported questionnaire data introduces the possibility of response bias and social desirability effects. Second, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to make causal inferences about the relationship between benchmark implementation and assessment quality. Third, institutional differences such as size, discipline mix, and leadership style were not fully controlled, which may have influenced the results. Fourth, document analysis depended on the availability and quality of institutional records, which varied across colleges. Finally, the study focused on selected Colleges of Education and may not fully capture variations across all institutions nationwide.

Directions for Future Research

Future studies should adopt longitudinal designs to examine how the implementation of NCCE benchmarks evolves and its sustained impact on teacher competence. There is also a need for mixed-methods research that integrates classroom observations and interviews to provide deeper insights into actual assessment practices beyond self-reports. Comparative studies across geopolitical zones and institution types would help to clarify contextual influences on implementation. Additionally, future research could explore the role of lecturer assessment literacy, institutional leadership, and digital assessment tools as mediating variables in the relationship between benchmark compliance and assessment effectiveness. Experimental or quasi-experimental designs may also be useful in establishing causal links between specific benchmark components (e.g., moderation systems, feedback strategies) and student learning outcomes.

Overall, strengthening evidence in these areas will support more targeted policy interventions and enhance the effectiveness of assessment reforms in Nigerian teacher education.

Recommendations

1. Regular professional development programmes on assessment literacy should be organised for lecturers.
2. Colleges should diversify assessment methods in line with NCCE Benchmarks.
3. NCCE should strengthen monitoring and support mechanisms during accreditation exercises.
4. The government should improve funding for assessment-related infrastructure.

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