Ensuring Justice in Assessment of Learning among Nomadic School Children in Nigeria

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Abstract: *Nigeria is one of the Commonwealth countries with a high population of nomads, 3.1million of whom are school-age children. Nomads exhibit cultural inertia and child-labour attachment to their occupation and this lifestyle affects their children's formal education. However, the National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE) is saddled with the responsibility of mainstreaming of these children into the formal education system of Nigeria. For the sake of accountability, evidence is needed to show that curriculum objectives have been achieved. This evidence is often provided by assessment of learning in nomadic schools. The authors are of the opinion that, for justice sake, a one-to-one alignment of assessment modalities for both conventional and nomadic schools may likely paint a foggy picture of achievement of nomadic children. As our contribution to addressing this likely injustice, this paper presents context-based assessment procedures that take cognizance of the peculiar tasks of nomadic children in Nigeria.*

Keywords: Nomadic, Nigeria, Assessment, Justice

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act was promulgated by the national government of Nigeria in May, 2004. One key objective of UBE is to ensure unfettered access to nine (9) years of formal basic education. However, in order to meet this UBE objective of Nigeria which arose from Education for All (EFA) goals 2 and 3, as well as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), all groups of children must be included in reforms in the education sector. EFA Goal 2 on universal primary education states, "*Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality*"(FME, 2011,P.8). Some of the children who form part of the UBE population are nomadic. Turnbull (2010) defines a nomad as, a member of a community that moves with its animals from place to place. Nomads can be found in different parts of the world e.g. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Turkey, etc. According to Kelleher (2007) the Commonwealth is home to substantial nomadic and semi-nomadic communities. Such commonwealth countries include India, Pakistan and Nigeria. Others are Kenya, Ghana, United Republic of Tanzania, Botswana, Namibia, Uganda, Cameroon, and South Africa. Nigeria has 9.4 million nomads, with 3.1 million school-age children (Abbo, 2011).

There are three categories Nomads in Nigeria - nomadic pastoralists, migrant fisher-folks and migrant farmers. Nomads exhibit cultural inertia and child-labour attachment to their occupation. Their lifestyle thus affects their children's formal education. Even with the UBE in operation, all is not well with achieving "unfettered access" because Nigeria is home to the largest number of out of school children in the world; Nigeria accounts for almost a fifth of the worlds out-of-school children (Afisunlu, 2013). According to UNESCO (2012) early school leaving, results in lost opportunities, and Nigerian children suffer from this sad situation. Some of these children belong to the nomadic population due to their unique cultural characteristics and lifestyles which put them "always on the go".

The nomadic children have been considered as learners with special needs in education. Special education is a formal educational training given to people with special needs (Ntukidem, Asim & Eni, 2005). According to them, children and adults with special needs can be classified into three categories as follows:

i. The disabled: people with impairments (physical, sensory) and because of these impairments/disability cannot cope with regular school/class organization and methods without formal special educational training.
ii. The disadvantaged: the children of nomadic pastoralist, migrant fisherfolks, migrant farmers, hunters, etc. who, due to their lifestyles and means of livelihood, are unable to have access to the conventional educational provision and therefore require special education to cater for their particular/peculiar needs and circumstances.
iii. The gifted and talented: people with high intelligence quotient (IQ) and naturally endowed with special traits (in arts, creativity, music, leadership, intellectual precocity, etc.) and therefore insufficiently challenged by the regular school/college/university programmes. (p. 182.)

The issue of nomads and their formal education is not peculiar to Nigeria. The establishment of International Institute for the Study of Nomadic Civilizations, as an initiative of UNESCO underscores the global impacts of nomadic culture and civilization arising from the itinerant lifestyle. The idea for such a centre which was muted in 1992 by an international team involved in the silk route under the auspices of UNESCO, was due to the fact that it was felt that the right time had arrived for the international community to make a significant effort to deal with these matters in accordance with the possibilities and requirements of contemporary academic and scientific research (*https://en.unesco.org/silkroad/silk-road-institutions/international-institute-study-nomadic-civilizations*).

In Nigeria, the National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE) was set up by Act No. 41 of 1989, with the responsibility of mainstreaming nomadic children into the formal education system of the country. To actualize this mandate, NCNE was to:

- establish, manage and maintain primary schools for nomadic children;
- collate, analyze and publish information relating to nomadic education in Nigeria and obtain from the States and from other sources, such information as is relevant to the discharge of its functions under this Act;
- determine standards of skills to be attained in nomadic schools established by the Commission, and review such standards from time to time;

According to NCNE (2012: p. ii) "the advocacy for relevant education for migrant fisher-folk for instance, is based on the premise that a non-literate society whose experience of formal

education is improved is a boost for overall national development. It is a relevant educational system that would foster continuity between the home and school. Ultimately, education should enable nomads improve their socio-economic and spiritual well-being as well as maintain the good aspects of their rich culture which they have retained over the centuries. It should enable them know their rights and privileges as well as their responsibilities as Nigerians. The acquisition of these knowledge, skills and competencies are desirable for attitudinal change. This is what the newly adapted curricular in five subject areas – English Studies, Mathematics, Basic Science and Technology, Religious and Values Education as well as Pre-Vocational Studies is advocating". This research is therefore a contribution in creating a balance between nomadic culture and formal education, with emphasis on the evaluation component of the Basic Science and Technology Curriculum of nomadic schools.

Purpose of the research

The purpose of this study is two-fold; first it seeks to highlight the assessment modes of the Nigerian Nomadic Schools' Science and Technology Curriculum. Secondly it proposes (with justifications) context-based assessment formats and procedures, best suited to the day-to-day tasks of nomads. These concerns are based on the need to ensure justice in the assessment for learning (formative) and assessment of learning (summative) of vulnerable groups like the nomads of Nigeria.

Theoretical framework

This research derives its theoretical basis from the following theories:

1. True Score Theory.
2. McClelland's Achievement Motivation Theory

True Score Theory

This is a measurement theory. The main tenet of this theory is that a score (O) assigned to a student during testing consists of two additive components. This theory can be represented as a linear equation: $O = T \pm \mathcal{E}$. Here T is true ability (or the true level) of the respondent on a particular measure; while $\mathcal{E}$ represents random error. In more human terms this means that the variability of your measure is the sum of the variability due to true score and the variability due to random error (Trochim, 2006). Random errors in measurement can arise from various sources like, the nature of stimuli to which the learners respond, the testing situation, the test developer, etc. When teachers' competency in test construction is questionable, validity of the assessment outcome is dubious (Asim, Ijente, & Bassey (2010); Asim & Promise (2012); Asim, Ekuri & Eni, (2013)). However, errors can be minimized through:

- the use of culture-fair tests;
- improving teachers' competency in culture-fair tests construction.

Enhancing teachers' competency in construction and use of culture-fair tests assessment is what this study aims at achieving.

McClelland's Achievement Motivation Theory

David McClelland and his Associates in 1953 came up with the idea of a motivation theory that drives achievement. To them, achievement motivation is a learned motive to compete and to strive for success in situations in which one's performance can be evaluated against some standard of excellence. Trying to explain this theory, Shaffer (2005), said that in other words,

"high-need achievers" have learned to take pride in their ability to meet or exceed high standard. This sense of self-fulfillment motivates them to work hard, be successful and try to outperform others when faced with new challenges. The implication is that if nomads are assessed in a way that takes their day-to-day activity into consideration, this will make them interested in what the teachers teach. This intrinsic motivation may result in sustained learning likely to lead to the achievement of the objectives of nomadic education.

Method

Basically, document analysis method is adopted in this study, because the investigators were interested in studying the content of the curriculum. The structural unit of concern was the Nigerian Basic Science and Technology Curriculum of Pastoralists and Migrant Fisherfolks, with particular interest in the evaluation component of this document. The researchers considered document analysis most appropriate, because the outcome of the study would be an addition of context-specific assessment modalities, as well as a justification for their suggestion. In performing the document analysis, the "Objectives of Basic Science and Technology Curriculum" were used as criteria for judging the nature of appropriate assessment modalities to be adopted.

The Basic Science and Technology Curriculum is expected to enable the learners:

(i) develop interest in science and technology;
(ii) acquire basic scientific and technological knowledge, skills and attitude;
(iii) apply scientific and technological knowledge and skills to meet societal needs;
(iv) take advantage of the numerous career opportunities in science and technology to create wealth for themselves, their immediate communities and the nation at large; and
(v) prepare for further studies in science and technology.

Sampling

A multi-stage approach was adopted in sampling. First, a purposive sample of two (2) out of the four (4) themes that make up the Basic Science and Technology Curriculum for Nomadic Primary Schools (Revised: 2012) was done. The 4 themes are: *Basic Science, Basic Technology, Physical and Health Education and Computer/Information Technology*. The choice of these two themes was premised on the fact that science and technology are the drivers of the economy in this millennium. In order to select topics/content areas, stratified random sampling was adopted. The first step involved stratification of the Curriculum based on 2 thematic areas (Basic Science and Basic Technology) with 2 units per theme. Further stratification was on the basis of classes (Primary 4, Primary 5 and Primary 6). These stratifications resulted in 12 strata (i.e. 2x2x3.) From each stratum, the number of topics selected was based on the following considerations: (i) strata with 4 or 5 topics, only 2 topics were selected, (ii) strata with 2 or 3 topics, only 1 topic was selected, while (iii) strata with only 1 topic, were not selected. The selection resulted in a total of 17 out of 40 topics. The distribution of topics selected out of the total contained in the curriculum is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Selected themes, sub-themes and number of topics per class in the Basic Science and Technology Curriculum.

S/N	Theme	Sub Theme	Primary 4	Primary 5	Primary 6
1.	Basic Science	Learning about our Environment	1	1	2
		Living and Non-Living Things	2	2	2
2.	Basic Technology	Understanding Basic Technology	1	1	2
		You & Energy	NIL	2	1
TOTAL			4/11	6/14	7/15

Data Collection

Data collection involved the 17 sampled topics in the curriculum under scrutiny. For each topic, the performance objectives and evaluation guides where adopted. For the purpose of this study, suggested assessments which are context-specific and culture-based are given. Thus, examples of tasks were drawn from both the nomadic pastoralists as well as migrant fisherfolks environments. For instance, if the pastoralists are required to inspect the structure of different types of teeth of terrestrial animals, their fisherfolk counterparts are required to do same with aquatic animals. Justifications for the suggested assessment are also given, as shown in table 2.

Table 2: Nomadic school teachers' guide to culture-fair assessment

Topic	**Performance objectives**	**Evaluation guide in conventional curriculum**	**Suggested assessment for nomadic children**	**Justification for suggestion**
1. Changes in Nature (reversible & irreversible)	**Pupils should be able to:** State the differences between temporary and permanent changes	**Pupils to:** State two differences between temporary and permanent change.	**Pupils to:** 1. Describe change in the colour of grass during rainy and dry seasons. 2. Light a candle and observe what happens while it is burning and when it has completely burnt.	1. They are used to both rainy and dry seasons. 2. They sometimes use candle for lighting
2.Human body (our mouth)	**Pupils should be able to:** Locate the relative positions of teeth	**Pupils to:** State the uses of the different types of teeth in feeding	**Pupils to:** 1. Observe cows when they graze in the field, biting, cutting & chewing. 2. Observe each other's teeth. 3. Compare human teeth with cow/fish teeth	They handle terrestrial and aquatic animals in their occupational environment.

3. Water	**Pupils should be able to:** differentiate water from other liquids. Explain: evaporation, condensation and freezing.	**Pupils to:** 1.List two features that identify a liquid as water 2. State at least one change that would be observed when water is heated 3. State at least one change that would be observed when steam condenses.	**Pupils to:** 1. Explain two ways by which they can differentiate between kerosene and water. 2. Observe dew on leave, early in the morning- 3. Explain what happens when water is boiling and when it is cooled.	1.These are common liquids that they deal with daily. 2. Fishing or cattle rearing start early before sun rise.
4. Shape	**Pupils should be able to:** Fold and bend metal or cardboard paper to form an object.	**Pupils to:** Use cardboard sheet to construct a cylinder, cone and box.	**Pupils to**: Construct temporary shelters of different shapes using waterproof sheets and grass stalks or bamboos	Nomadic children assist their parents in making temporary shelters of different shapes in grazing grounds and fishing ports.
5. Environmental change(erosion & pollution)	**Pupils should be able to:** Identify, discuss and implement simple strategies for controlling erosion Define pollution and list some water and Air pollutants	**Pupils to:** 1. State 3 ways of controlling erosion 2. Describe pollution and list 5 air and water pollutants respectively 3. identify 3 sources of air and water pollution respectively	**Pupils to:** 1. Describe the odour of polluted air due to cow dung / decayed seafood. 2. Explain what they need to do to ensure that drinking water sources are not contaminated due to grazing/dumping of waste in the river. 3. One thing they can do to prevent the washing away of top soil due to grazing/running surface water.	They dispose animal and human wastes regularly and need to be aware of the consequences and need for control.
6. Reproduction in Plants	**Pupils should be able to:** Describe stages of development from flower to fruit.	**Pupils to:** List the changes that occur at different stages of development from flower to fruit	**Pupils to:** Plant certain seeds and note how they grow through different stages.	In addition to fishing and grazing, they do some form of subsistence farming.
7. Rocks	**Pupils should be able to:** List some important uses of rocks.	**Pupils to:** List three uses of rocks	**Pupils to:** Should collect different types of rocks and state the use of each.	Cracking nuts e.g. cashew of palm kernels are common among these groups.
8. Materials and Maintenance	**Pupils should be able to:** state the need for maintenance	**Pupils to:** State 3 reasons why maintenance is needed	**Pupils to:** 1. Explain why they should mend their shoes and umbrella. 2. Describe how they mend these items.	These are 2 very important items they use during rainy and dry seasons. Also they may be far from

				professional menders of such items and may have evolved their way of maintenance.
9. Energy conversion	**Pupils should be able to:** State the importance of energy conversions.	**Pupils to:** State at least three importance of energy conversion.	**Pupils to:** Explain 3 purposes served when they kindle fire at night	On a daily basis they use fire from kerosene stove or wood for cooking and keeping themselves warm.
10. Heat and Temperature	**Pupils should be able to:** Use the thermometer to measure the temperature of objects accurately.	**Pupils to:** Use thermometers to measure temperature accurately.	**Pupils to:** Observe how health personnel use the thermometer in measuring people's temperature.	They are occasionally visited by health workers for routine immunization and treatment.
11. Changes in our climate	**Pupils should be able to:** observe changes in our climate over a period of time	**Pupils to:** Observe changes in our climate over a period of time	**Pupils to:** Describe how they know that the harmattan season has started.	Fog covers the grasslands while heavy fog covers the waterways in the riverine areas.
12. Force	**Pupils should be able to:** 1. Demonstrate the effect of force on objects 2. State the advantage and disadvantage of friction	**Pupils to:** 1. Describe the effect of force on materials 2. Mention two advantages and disadvantages each of friction.	**Pupils to:** 1. Rub their palms together vigorously, and use it to touch their cheeks. 2. Observe the sole of a new shoe and an old one and explain what makes one look smoother than the other.	1. Rubbing palms vigorously together is a normal feature of keeping warm. 2. Nomads protect their feet with shoes, which may wear off due to long trekking.
13. The human body system: Blood circulation	**Pupils should be able to:** Differentiate among arteries, veins and capillaries	**Pupils to:** State two distinguishing features of the arteries, veins and capillaries	**Pupils to**: Observe and describe different blood vessels in a slaughtered cow or goat.	They regularly witness slaughtering of animals.
14. Air	**Pupils should be able to:** Demonstrate that air presses on every object	**Pupils to:** Use simple activities to demonstrate air pressure	**Pupils to:** 1. Blow air into cellophane bags, tie the mouth and press it down with their fist. 2. They should describe the effect of air in the bag.	Cellophane bags are very cheap and found everywhere. Traders use it instead of paper for packaging.

15.Primary and secondary colours	**Pupils should be able to:** Mix primary and secondary colours of identify the shades of colours produced.	**Pupils to:** Produce known colours from primary colours.	**Pupils to:** 1. Identify different colours of plants, tree barks, and flowers. 2. Mix pigments from flowers, leaves, and tree barks and describe the colours obtained.	1. They spend a great deal of their occupational time in the natural habitat. 2. They use leaves and tree barks for medicinal purposes.
16. Maintenance and safety.	**Pupils should be able to:** 1. Explain the meaning of maintenance. 2. State the importance of maintenance.	**Pupils to:** 1 Explain the meaning of maintenance. 2. State the importance of maintenance.	**Pupils to:** Let pupils explain how they prolong the life span of their occupational implements.	They are often far from city centres and may have evolved their maintenance strategy over time.
17. Simple Machines: Levers	**Pupils should be able to:** Collect and identify simple machines	**Pupils to:** Give meaning of : -machine -lever	**Pupils to:** 1. Try to balance 2 unequal loads on both ends of their herding stick. 2. Describe how people are made to sit in a canoe to ensure balance and prevent capsizing.	1. The pastoralists sometimes put their herding sticks across their shoulders to support their arms. 2. Fisherfolks perform these accident-preventing strategies of balancing their canoes daily.

Results and conclusions

Results of the analysis are presented in table 2. The first three columns are adopted from the Nomadic Education Curriculum. These were used as guides for generating columns 4 (the proposed assessment alternatives) and 5 (the justification for each alternative assessment). The nature of assessment suggested, depends on the daily or periodic activities of the different categories of nomads. The 17 selected topics from the combined primary classes 4, 5, and 6 curriculum of basic science and technology formed the sample. The outcome of this study is a package of context-based assessment modalities which can be used by internal and external assessors of basic science and technology among nomads. The outcome of this study shows that, irrespective of the peculiar nature of the nomadic life-style, tailor-made assessment arising from the existing curriculum can be used for them. This approach will make assessment less threatening to them, and they may be motivated to learn and achieve. It would not be out of place to add that, justice in assessment of any group of learners is possible.

Educational importance of this study

One of the mandates of the National Commission for Nomadic Education is to determine standards of skills to be attained in nomadic schools established by the Commission, and review such standards from time to time. This is an issue of accountability requiring tangible evidence

that curriculum objectives have been achieved, as well as empirical basis for the required periodic review of standards. For these major reasons, learning in nomadic schools must be assessed. The cultural inertia and child-labour aspects of their occupation may not allow them the same contact hours in the classroom as it happens in the regular school system. Therefore, it would be unjust to put them through the same assessment formats that apply in conventional schools, even if they operate the same curriculum.

There is also the realization that the society is pluralistic and the response of science teachers should be towards this pluralism (Okebukola, n. d.). Thus it would be wrong to assume a "one size fits all" paradigm in assessing science. The use of pre-structured concept maps have been found very useful in science teaching and assessment of low ability pupils in Nigeria (Asim, 1998), and even for teaching difficult aspects of lessons on HIV/AIDS (Asim, 2005).

Multiple choice test formats have assumed a key role in both school-based and external examinations globally, and in Nigeria, mainly as a result of large class sizes. However, teachers' competency in assessment of learning in science has been under scrutiny (Asim, Kalu, Idaka, & Bassey; 2007). Evidence from research suggests that teachers' competency in constructing one variety of multiple-choice item does not guarantee same ability in constructing other varieties of multiple-choice items (Asim, Ekuri & Eni, 2013). Focusing on alternative performance assessment for the nomads is not out of place. There have been numerous contributions on alternative assessment for students with disabilities, notable among such is the Performance Assessment System for Students with Disabilities (PASS-D) developed by the State of Florida (Taylor, 2006). The outcome of this study has shed light on workable assessment strategies that could be incorporated into the existing curriculum for a fair and equitable assessment of nomads and other disadvantaged groups.

Connection to the themes of the assembly

According to *(http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Justice*, justice is a concept involving the fair, moral, and impartial treatment of all persons. In its most general sense, it means according individuals what they actually deserve or merit, or are in some sense entitled to.
The peculiar circumstance of the nomadic lifestyle and their cultural inertia (NCNE, 2013), puts them "always on the go". However, they are part of the "All" in EFA mandate, and evidence is needed to show they are benefiting from the education they are provided. For justice sake we have proposed, and justified some context-based assessment modalities, which are mainly culture-related and suitable, best suited for the nomadic school-aged population. In approaching the issue of justice in assessment, certain concerns which are pertinent to assessment were considered, as given in box 1:

Box 1: A guide to choosing the most appropriate contextual guide to assessment of nomads

S/N	Area of concern	Justification	Contextual guide
i	Why do we assess a learner?	A myriad of reasons for assessment exist	Assessment for learning (formative, diagnostic) or assessment of learning (summative, placement, certification, etc.)

ii	Who should assess the learner?	Many and different persons can justifiably assess the learner	School-based teacher-made or external examination bodies
iii	What is/are the most appropriate assessment procedure(s)	Varieties of context-based modalities of measurements exists	Self-report, behavioral, or physiological instruments.

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