

## **Assessment literacy and practices of Literature-in-English teachers in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*The study investigated Literature-in-English teachers' assessment literacy and practices in Nigeria. The mixed method design was adopted, and the participants were 47 secondary school teachers selected from 47 schools in the Ibadan metropolis, Oyo, State, Nigeria. Teachers' Assessment Literacy Test ( $r=.78$ ), Class Assessment Checklist, and Interview Guide were used to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data were analyzed using the descriptive statistics, and the qualitative data were content analyzed. Analysis of data exposed teachers' inadequate knowledge of assessment and total neglect of assessment in their teaching-learning process. The frequency of teachers' practice of assessment was very low. Only 2% of the lessons taught within 10 weeks were guided with adequate formative or summative assessment; and 82% of the lessons were delivered with no assessment. Teachers used very few and easy methods of assessment that may not serve improvement purposes. They also have misconceptions about assessment. The results have implications for effective Literature-in-English pedagogy.*

**Keywords:** Literature-in-English teaching, assessment literacy, assessment practice, teaching-learning process

### **Introduction**

Teachers set objectives for every subject and topic they teach. Such objectives are usually part of the broader goals they are expected to achieve at the end of an academic term, year or program. To make the teaching and learning experience more effective, teachers need to activate students' prior knowledge or background experience and connect it to the new lesson. Such a connection follows one of the maxims of teaching, to proceed from known to unknown. Moreover, teachers do not wait until the end of instruction to ascertain the effectiveness of their teaching. Instead, they engage in different activities such as asking

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students oral questions at intervals, engaging them in various activities, or asking them to perform specific tasks. These help teachers to monitor students' learning progress. After teaching, they also verify if students learned anything, the extent of their learning, and the learning gap for further attention. The process of engaging in all these activities is known as assessment.

The National Task Force on Assessment Education for Teachers (2016) defines assessment as the process through which teachers gather reliable evidence of student learning to make education-related decisions. The process could be formal or informal, depending on the objectives teachers intend to achieve. Sometimes, they need concrete evidence of students' learning to make significant decisions (such as promotion) or for accountability purposes. Such assessment is called summative or assessment of learning (AoL). A second type is the formative, also known as assessment for learning (AfL), which is intended to monitor learning progress or modify an ongoing instruction. Most formative assessments are informal and can take the form of oral questions and answers, writing tasks, and different activities such as debates. Scholars suggest that it should not be graded so that students do not focus on grades (Shepard et al., 2020). Summative assessment can also be informal. For example, teachers can use it at the end of lessons to find out what students learned; in other words, whether they succeeded in achieving the goals they set for the lesson. Formal methods of assessments, such as examinations, usually involve writing and grading which are then recorded as concrete evidence of students learning.

Assessment complements classroom instruction and can lead to higher achievement (Brink & Bartz, 2017; Nkealah, 2019; Mellati & Khademi, 2018). Assessment enables teachers to understand better their teaching practice, including the challenges students face and how or what they can do to make teaching more effective. Therefore, it is not enough to assess students or to generate evidence of their learning. A key component of classroom assessment is feedback. Feedback should be valid, motivation-oriented, and constructive (Black & Wiliam, 2018; Reynolds, 2021). Constructive feedback enables students to see their learning gaps or mistakes and to understand where they are in the learning process, where they ought to be, and how to get to the desired level (of learning attainment) (Muskin, 2017). The feedback that is not constructive, which focuses more on students' shortfalls or mistakes, can demotivate rather than motivate them.

For effective assessment practice, teachers need to understand the concepts, types, principles, and different methods or techniques of assessment. In other words, they need to be

assessment literate to gather reliable evidence of student learning and use it to support their teaching. Assessment literacy is defined as the ability of teachers to plan and implement quality assessment tasks, interpret evidence and outcomes appropriate to the assessment purpose and type, and engage students themselves as active participants in the assessment of their learning (Looney, Cumming, van Der Kleij and Harris 2017: 2). Fulcher (2012) considers assessment literacy as relating to teachers' possession of the required "knowledge, skills and abilities...to design, develop, maintain or evaluate" either large-scale standardized or classroom-based tests, including familiarity with the test processes and awareness of the principles, concepts, ethics, and codes guiding the practice. Teachers without assessment literacy may not know how to use it in the classroom. As a result, such teachers may generate false evidence about student learning - or no evidence at all. Either way, it could affect the quality of teaching and learning and reduce learning outcomes.

This study investigated Nigerian teachers' level of assessment literacy and how they practice assessment in Literature-in-English classrooms. Evidence from literature suggests that how assessment is practiced in Literature-in-English classrooms in Nigeria has not received much attention. Emphases have been on teaching methodologies (Ezeokoli, 2016). Reports show that students fail Literature-in-English yearly in the Senior School Certificate Examinations (The West African Examination Council, WAEC, 2021). Hopefully, this study will offer new insights into how Literature-in-English is taught in Nigerian classrooms by paying attention to the assessment as an essential and indispensable component of effective teaching. Assessment literacy, as defined above, is broad due to its many components. Therefore, it is difficult to examine all its parts in one study. This study was limited to teachers' familiarity with the concepts, types, and methods or techniques of assessment. Assessment practice in this study was limited to how frequently teachers engage in assessment as part of their daily instructional practices and the common methods they use.

## **Literature Review**

### ***The Nature of Assessment in Literature-in-English***

The Nigerian National Policy on Education, NPE, (2014) recommends using formative and summative assessments in schools. As stated earlier, the formative type is primarily informal and is done while teaching is ongoing. It can also serve diagnostic purposes to investigate students' learning difficulties, usually at the beginning of a lesson or school term. Summative assessments are done both within (end of the lesson) and outside the classroom (as internal

and external examinations). The NPE also recommends continuous assessment (CA), a concept used synonymously in Nigeria with midterm tests. The end-on-term examination is allotted 70%, while the CA is 30%.

Like teaching, assessment is not a simple practice. Some peculiarities of Literature-in-English can make assessment more complex for teachers. The first peculiarity is its division into three genres - drama, prose, and poetry. Each genre has specific features and objectives that may determine how students will be assessed for better results. In drama, for example, understanding the settings and paying close attention to the dialogues between or among characters are central to understanding the text. The dialogues are usually condensed. In prose, however, what a character thinks, sometimes presented as streams of consciousness, may be more important than what they say.

On the other hand, poetry is differentiated by brevity, verse or stanza, and the extensive use of poetic devices. Successful assessment may depend on teachers' ability to use appropriate methods that enable students to focus on each literary genre's peculiarity. An assessment technique that works in drama (dramatization, for example) may not be so effective in a poetry class. That is not to say that one assessment method cannot be used across the genres. Teachers can adapt most techniques to suit any genre and attain desirable results.

Another feature of Literature-in-English that may make assessment a bit complex is its dual nature, entertainment, and education. Each literary genre has elements of entertainment. Drama, for example, was initially designed to entertain people on stage. This feature deserves attention because students may get caught up in the entertainment dimension of a literary text, forgetting to pay attention to the deeper meanings. There is the temptation to consider a student competent when they only retell the story without going further than that. Nevertheless, behind every story, scene or stanza lie layers of meanings, themes, and lessons of life that students are required to digest or critique. A holistic assessment approach can help students balance the two, to enjoy the reading and learn the lessons. Dramatic performance, for example, is entertaining, but following it up with peer assessment, feedback, or summary writing can take students to a deeper literary appreciation and criticism.

The third aspect of Literature-in-English that can be problematic in assessment is how to achieve the numerous and broad objectives stated in the Nigerian secondary school curriculum. The goals include acquiring healthy human values, cultural awareness, improving

language and creative writing skills, capacity for independent thinking, ability to appreciate literary texts, and readiness for the school certificate examinations (Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council, NERDC, 2009). Although the above goals are interrelated, they can overwhelm teachers. Therefore, there is the tendency to concentrate on one or more aspects and neglect the rest. Achieving them requires a lot of creativity and hard work by teachers. It also requires adequate knowledge of methods and approaches to assessment. Holistic assessment can be used to develop multiple skills simultaneously. For example, learning the positive values and cultures in a literary text can expand students' language skills. Moreover, improving their language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, and problem-solving) can enhance independent thinking and literary appreciation skills.

There are several methods and techniques of assessment that have been successfully used in Literature-in-English classrooms. While some may be genre-specific, most of them can be modified and used across the three genres. Portfolio assessment, for example, has been used across genres (Layfield, 2021). A portfolio is a compilation of individual students' works in files. It can be used to showcase samples of their works over time and keep track of their strengths, weaknesses, and learning progress. Assessment methods and techniques include peer and self-assessment, teacher and peer conferences, observations, group work and presentation, debate, quiz, essay writing, oral questioning, journaling, rubrics, and focus group discussion (Šaldová, 2017; University of Sheffield, 2018; Layfield, 2021). Peer and self-assessment can also be used across genres.

Peer-assessment promotes collaboration, reflective thinking, discussion, active participation in the classroom, and the ability to give and receive constructive feedback (The University of Sheffield, 2018; National Task Force on Assessment Education for Teachers, 2016). Self-assessment can help students to develop critical thinking skills as they reflect on their works and learn to accept their mistakes. Teachers could give students model works with which to compare theirs (in self-assessment) or those of their peers (in peer-assessment). Self-assessment is individualized and can be used to support introverted learners. Teachers who empower students to engage in self or peer-assessment could decenter themselves and create learner-centered classrooms.

Conferencing is another assessment technique and it involves discussing students' work one-on-one or in groups (Layfield, 2021). Teachers can engage in conferencing at intervals, because it demands much time. Students can also be grouped to perform some

assignments or tasks, which a whole-class presentation may follow. A typical example of group work is dramatic performance. Students can be grouped to perform specific acts or scenes in a drama text. A whole class can also prepare a drama and present it to the whole school. To make group work effective, the University of Sheffield (2018) states that teachers should establish clear criteria for measuring success, grade students fairly, and they need to be wary of freeloaders in the groups. Dramatic performance and debates can enhance language skills, especially speaking, listening, collaboration, and self-confidence.

More benefits could be derived from assessment if teachers use two or more techniques simultaneously or sequentially. First, it could give learners fair opportunities so that none is left behind. In other words, learners may be able to manifest their learning in different ways. It is also another way of accommodating individual differences and allowing them to develop their diverse talents. While students should develop all the language skills, some may be more talented or interested in one aspect than others. For example, some students may have passion for creative writing while others may have passion for public speaking. If assessment focuses on writing alone, some students may be left behind and unable to develop their talents. Therefore, using only one method or technique may put some students into disadvantaged positions, and evidence from the assessment may not give a true picture of what they are capable of doing or have learned.

### ***Assessment Literacy***

Assessment literacy is vast, and acquiring it is gradual and continuous. Assessment practices change over time as researchers and practitioners discover new methods or techniques to meet the current demands of learners in a constantly changing world. The principles of assessment also change with time. For example, there has been a shift from summative to formative assessment due to the need to make the classroom more learner-centered (Lindström, 2005, as cited in Lindqvist & Shuja, 2013). The National Task Force on Assessment Education for Teachers (2016) discusses what it means to be assessment literate and the expected attributes of assessment literate persons. According to the body, one becomes assessment literate by knowing "the basic principles of sound assessment practice" and believing "in their consistent, high-quality application" to meet student's diverse needs and act "assertively based on those values" (p. 3). The attributes include understanding the need to begin assessment with a clear purpose, plan the learning targets and the scoring procedure, and ensuring quality and valid assessment. Included also in the attributes is the

need to understand the primary role of giving constructive feedback to students and making assessment motivation-oriented.

Irrespective of how assessment literacy is defined, such teachers must understand the importance of assessment as an indispensable part of the teaching-learning process. They should also be able to plan and implement assessments, confidently interpret the results, give meaningful feedback to students, and guide their successive teachings with assessment information. It also requires that they are familiar with the principles, types, different methods, and assessment techniques. Current principles of assessment emphasize the need for proper planning, using multiple methods to recognize the full range of student achievement, and developing students' capacity for self-assessment. There is also the need to ensure that assessment is valid, fit to the purpose (reliable), sensitive, constructive, fosters motivation (through meaningful engagement of learners), and improvement-oriented (Assessment Reform Group, 2002; Muskin, 2017). Teachers should constantly update themselves with these principles to adequately respond to students' learning needs. They also need to plan assessment tasks and incorporate them into their lesson plans such that it is not done as an afterthought.

However, literature suggests that studies on Nigerian teachers' level of assessment literacy and practices are uncommon, and researchers that have attempted it were more concerned with science teachers. The shortage of research on assessment literacy could be due to the broad spectrum it covers. For example, in a survey carried out by Bandele and Oluwatayo (2013) to investigate Nigerian science teachers' level of assessment literacy, the focus was only on teachers' knowledge of assessment techniques. They reported that the teachers lacked sufficient knowledge of assessment techniques and used only a few. The teachers were also more concerned about formal than informal assessments.

Moreover, studies on teachers' assessment practices in Nigeria have tended to concentrate more on the termly continuous assessment (CA), otherwise known as midterm tests (Ale & Omirin, 2015; Patrick & Uvietesivwi, 2018). Although the CA entails "assessing students continuously" to ensure learning progress, it is generally understood differently in Nigerian, and practiced as periodic formal tests or mini examinations. It is unclear why and how this misconception came about. Perhaps the government's intention when it was introduced led to an interpretation that deviates from a universal understanding of the term. The Nigerian government introduced CA into the school system in 1998 by mandating schools to shift from using the results of end-of-term examinations solely to determine

students' learning outcomes (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1998). Schools were mandated to allot 30% to CA and 70% to examinations. With the above in mind, teachers give students formal tests at designated periods within the academic term to make up the 30% CA scores. Presently, most Nigerian secondary schools have "CA week" each term. All teachers are expected to test students formally within the period. Sometimes, the first CA week is followed by a mid-term break, and once students return, they take the second CA before the end-of-term examinations.

Building on the existing literature, the present study took a broader perspective by incorporating different aspects of assessment literacy, including how teachers conceptualize assessment, whether they could differentiate the formative from the summative type, and their knowledge about different methods or techniques.

Studies have shown that the more knowledgeable teachers are about assessment, the more capable they are in practice (Brink & Bartz, 2017). The familiar maxim that one cannot give what one does not have comes to mind. However, there are indications that training on assessment is grossly neglected in pre-service teachers' programs (Tsagari & Vogt, 2017). The researcher examined the present teacher education curriculum in a Nigerian university and found that no course is specifically on assessment at the undergraduate level (Bachelor of Education). There are only two related courses - GCE 203: Basic Statistics in Education (a 200-level course) and GCE 302: Measurement and Evaluation in Education Practice (a 300-level course) (University of Ibadan, Nigeria, 2019). The two courses are not sufficient to equip teacher trainees with basic knowledge of the components of assessment.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Assessment as an inseparable component of pedagogy is supported by the Transformative Learning Theory, TLT (Mezirow, 1991; 1997). The TLT describes how adult learners transform experience into new knowledge. Mezirow (1997) explains that adults acquire a coherent body of experience that becomes their frames of reference or "structures of assumptions" (p. 5). New information is interpreted with reference to past experiences and learning requires a readiness to make the needed shift or adjustment to accommodate new way of seeing things. Therefore, in TLT, learners move "from an unexamined way of thinking to a more examined and critically reflective way and hence a more dependable way of interpreting meaning" (Mezirow, 1999, p. 5). Christie, Carey, Robertson & Grainger (2015) states that transformative learning enable individuals challenge "current assumptions



on which they act" and to change them "if they find them wanting" (p. 11). The entire process requires continuous critical reflection.

Although the TLT is attributed to Mezirow, it has antecedents, including Paolo Freire (1970) who had criticized the "banking method" of instruction where professors deposit information on students. The banking method is an uncritical method of teaching because it presents learners as empty vessels to be filled in with bits of information. Mezirow (1997, p. 7) categorizes the learning process into four: elaborating an existing point of view; establishing new points of view, and transforming or changing the pre-existing point of view or the "habit of mind". Assessment can facilitate the four processes.

Teachers need to identify students' pre-existing point of view before they can elaborate it. Students come to the learning process with their past experience, pre-conceived ideas, including bias. Teachers' duties at the beginning of instruction include finding out, through AfL, where students are in relation to the new lessons to be taught and what they need to know. The process will enable them to establish the existing bias which could become an obstacle to learning. Through ongoing AfL, teachers could monitor whether and how students are shifting from their bias to accommodate new information. At the end, they also do the same as AoL. Transformation takes place as new knowledge is gained, bias is dealt with and learners are able to see things differently, including "becoming aware and critically reflective of our generalized bias" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 7). However, Halupa (2017) believes that transformative learning is not always easy because it requires teachers and students' willingness to transform. Unfortunately, "students may not be ready to engage in self-directed, reflective learning which TLT requires and teachers may not also be ready to change their pedagogical practices" (p. 1) which will lead to the needed transformation.

### **Research questions**

- 1 What are Literature-in-English teachers' levels of assessment literacy?
- 2 To what extent do teachers incorporate assessment in the teaching-learning process?
- 3 What methods of assessment do teachers frequently use in the classroom?

### **Method**

#### ***Research design***

The study adopted the triangulation mixed method research design (Creswell, Klassen & Smith, 2010). The design enabled the researcher to complement the quantitative data with the

qualitative for a stronger validity of the findings. An assessment literacy test and a checklist were used to collect quantitative data on teachers' level of assessment literacy and assessment practices, respectively. Interviews were used to further evidence teachers' knowledge and views about assessment.

### *Sample and Sampling Technique*

The participants were 47 Literature-in-English teachers from 47 public senior secondary schools in the Ibadan metropolis. The schools are situated in three Local Government Areas (Ibadan North, Ibadan South West, and Ibadan South East). Twelve of the teachers were interviewed.

### *Instrumentation*

Three instruments were used to gather the data: Teachers' Assessment Literacy Test, TALT ( $r=.78$ ), Class Assessment Checklist (CAC), and Interview Guide for Teachers. The TALT has 20 objective questions covering the concepts, types, methods, techniques, and principles of assessment (please see Appendix 1 for more details). Each item was awarded five marks (5% of the total scores), totaling 100%. Teachers' scores were used to rate their levels of assessment literacy, categorized as high (70-100), moderate (50-69), and low (0-49). To ensure the validity of the results, teachers responded to the questions in the presence of the researcher, and the test scripts were collected immediately.

The CAC was used to obtain information on teachers' assessment practices - frequency and methods used within ten weeks of teaching. It was administered on the 11<sup>th</sup> week of the academic term. To ensure that all the written assessments carried out by each teacher were captured, the class assessment exercise books of 10 randomly selected students from each class were collected, compared, and used to fill in the checklist. The ratings were as follows: 0-9(low); 10-14(moderate), 15 and above (high).

### *Methods of data analysis*

The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and the qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis by comparing participants' responses, establishing common ideas, and bringing out some themes.

## **Results**

*Research Question 1:* What are Literature-in-English teachers' levels of assessment literacy?

**Figure 1.** Teachers' Levels of Assessment Literacy

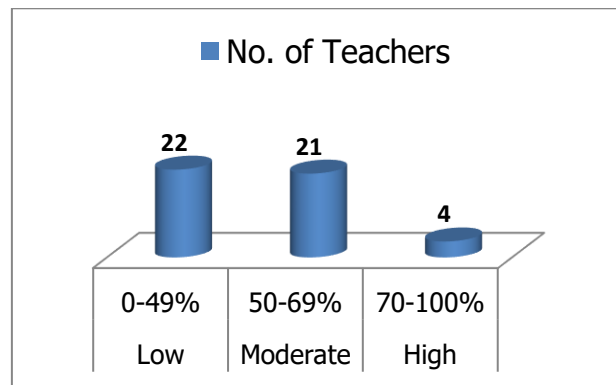


Figure 1 presents teachers' range of scores in the assessment literacy test. Twenty-two teachers scored between 0-49%; 21 scored between 50-69%, and four teachers scored above 70%. Therefore, from the results, it can be concluded that most Literature-in-English teachers in the Ibadan metropolis have low and moderate levels of assessment literacy.

*Research Question 2:* To what extent do teachers incorporate assessment in their teaching?

**Table 1.** Frequency of assessment practice by Literature-in-English teachers

Description	Distribution of Teachers' Assessment Practice in 10 Weeks					Total
	0 time	1-4 times	5-9 times	10-14 times	15+ times	
Frequency	0 time	1-4 times	5-9 times	10-14 times	15+ times	
No. & percentage of teachers	10 (21%)	17 (36%)	13 (28%)	6 (13%)	1 (2%)	47 (100%)
Summary and ratings of Ass. freq.		0-9 times (85%) <b>Low</b>		10-14 times 13% <b>Moderate</b>	15+ times 2% <b>High</b>	

Table 1 presents the distribution of teachers' frequency of assessment practices after ten weeks of classroom instruction (approximately 20 lessons per teacher). The distribution is as follows: 21% (no assessment), 36% (1-4 times), 28% (5-9 times); 6% (10-14 times and 2% (up to 15 times). This result implies that Literature-in-English teachers hardly assess their students in class. Therefore, the assessment component of the teaching-learning is missing in Literature-in-English classrooms.

*Research Question 3:* What assessment methods do teachers frequently use in the classroom?

**Table 2.** Frequency of Assessment Methods (AMs) used by teachers

S/n	Assessment Method used	No. of Teachers that used each AM	No. of Assess. Done	% of each AM used in 940 lessons taught	Remarks
1.	Note-checking	29	122	13%	Mainly used
2.	Essay questions	12	20	2%	Rarely used
3.	Summary of book chapters	8	14	1.5%	Hardly used
4.	Fill-in the gap questions	7	9	1%	Hardly used
5.	Multiple choice	2	5	0.5%	Hardly used
	<b>Total</b>		<b>170</b>	<b>18%</b>	
	Lessons without assessment		770	82%	Predominant
	<b>Total Lessons Taught</b>		<b>940</b>	<b>100%</b>	

Table 2 presents the distribution of assessment methods used by teachers in all the lessons taught in 10 weeks and the number of teachers that used each method. Note checking was used by most teachers (29 teachers). This was followed by essay writing (12 teachers), a summary of book chapters (8 teachers), fill-in-the-gap questions (7 teachers), and multiple choice questions (2 teachers). In terms of the frequency of teachers' use of different assessment methods, the distribution is as follows: Checking of students' notebook: 122 times (13% of all lessons taught); essay writing: 20 times (2%); summary of book chapters: 14 times (1.5%); fill-in the gap questions: 9 times (1%) and multiple choice questions: 5 times (0.5%). This result indicates that the number of times assessment was carried out is not commensurate with the number of lessons taught. Approximately teachers taught 940 lessons, but class assessments were carried out only in 18% of the total lessons. This result corresponds with the earlier one in Table 1, which also indicates that teachers' frequency of assessment practice is low.

### Content Analysis of the Qualitative Data

During the interviews, teachers were asked some structured questions. The questions included mentioning the types and methods of assessment they were familiar with, how their level of assessment literacy could be improved, and on what aspect of assessment they would like to be retrained if such an opportunity existed. Different prompts were used to make their responses robust. Some of their responses are embedded in the discussion of findings, while some are reproduced below.

Part of being assessment literate is that teachers know the importance of assessment. However, teachers face many challenges that make them unable to put their knowledge into practice. According to one teacher,

*It is not ideal to give assessment only at the end of the term. It is better to give [assessment] daily. Examination takes place after ten weeks, which means students being taught up to 10 topics or more.*

Despite the above and similar responses, teachers seem unable to do the needful due to several factors, including lack of textbooks, nonchalant attitude of students towards assessment and towards Literature-in-English. One teacher stated,

*It is not all students that respond to assessment questions. Some take it serious, while some have nonchalant attitudes. But for those that take it serious, you see some improvement after the assessment; they feel bad if they don't perform well. But some don't even care whether they perform well or not.*

A similar response was made by another teacher who said,

*If you give the students a take-home assignment, they will not do it. I gave them an assignment to read three chapters of the text during their midterm break. They came back without any of them reading it. So, the only method I use is the summative assessment.*

This last response shows that students' poor attitude makes some teachers not to practice formative assessment. However, some hidden factors, including an inability to read, poor attitude to reading, and shortage of textbooks, could affect student's disposition to read. Students will not read if they do not have the books, a point emphasized by another teacher who stated,

*We find it difficult to assess them because we, as teachers, know that these students do not have textbooks. You can only assess what you have just taught in a particular class, and it is a kind of one-way communication. It is the teacher that is reading, writing on the chalkboard, and it is also the teacher that is teaching the students what he/she has read. So, if you assess them, you only assess to fulfil all righteousness in the teaching methodology.*

The above response corresponds to earlier findings which reported that textbook shortage and unavailability of instructional materials are major challenges facing Literature-in-English teachers in Nigeria (Ugwu, 2021; 2022). It deserves urgent attention for improved teaching.

### **Discussion**

The findings from this study shed light on Literature-in-English teachers' level of assessment literacy, how frequently they apply assessment in the teaching-learning process, and the methods they use. The assessment test results indicate that many teachers have a low level of assessment literacy, while for some, it is moderate. Only a few are on the high side. Their limited knowledge was further revealed during the interview. Some do not understand the difference between summative and formative assessments. Some also do not know several methods of assessment. When asked to mention some assessment methods, one teacher interjected: *ah, I don't know the latest method of assessment that you are talking about.* Only two teachers mentioned formative and summative assessments. The rest gave irrelevant answers such as *questions by students, writing of notes, checking of attendance, and evaluation tests.* These responses suggest a high level of assessment illiteracy.

Similarly, when asked to mention the types of assessment, one teacher responded: *We use the formative and sumassive...suvassive assessments.* Another said: *I use diagnostic to know what they know.* Another teacher also said: *The one that is compulsory in school now is continuous assessment, that is, the CA. This is the one we usually use before the summative assessment. I use CA and assignment.* These and similar responses show teachers' poor conception of assessment in general. The first teacher found it difficult to articulate the term, "summative" in the above responses. The second teacher seems not to understand the use of diagnostic assessment. It is not used to "know what students know" but to identify their learning difficulties, and plan remediation, for improved learning. On the other hand, the third teacher does not know that the CA, as practiced in Nigerian schools, is summative. Teachers' limited knowledge about assessment aligns with an earlier finding by Bandele and Oluwatayo (2013) and Okonkwo (2013), who had reported that many Nigeria teachers lack adequate knowledge of assessment. Poor or faulty conception about assessment may lead to poor or ineffective practice.

Results from qualitative and quantitative data indicate that teachers' predominant way of assessing students is by checking their notebooks. Ideally, note-checking does not constitute assessment in the real sense of the word. Therefore, the researcher did not initially

list it as an assessment method. However, it was later incorporated for two reasons. First, poor and illegible handwriting is reported yearly as one of the causes of students' failure in WAEC examinations (The WAEC, 2021). Secondly, most teachers identified it as their common assessment practice during the interviews. Therefore, the researcher decided to investigate how teachers used the method. The finding is that they consider note-checking as part of the CA, therefore, it serves a summative purpose. Teachers do not comment on the legibility of students' handwriting, neither do they make comments to guide students on how to write better. Instead, they either checked the notes or simply wrote "seen". This practice was confirmed by one teacher during the interview. The teacher said: *I check their notes. Anyone that copies the note and the note is complete and the note is neat, I give him/her 10 marks.* Such practice can hardly lead to learning improvement. Students may copy the notes only for the sake of earning marks.

Another finding is that Literature-in-English teachers do not frequently assess their students, and those who do so use only a few assessment methods or techniques. The high rate of teachers who did not assess students for a whole term and those who did so only sparingly points to poor or inefficient pedagogical practices among Literature-in-English teachers. Therefore, it can be concluded that most teachers leave out the assessment component of the teaching-learning process. This can limit students' learning. This result is similar to earlier findings by Ugwu (2021) who reported that Literature-in-English lessons were not interactive, and that students were mainly passive, thus limiting their chances of learning.

Moreover, results from the qualitative data indicate that while some teacher lack sufficient assessment knowledge, others face challenges that make them unable to implement assessment. Those challenges require attention. Their neglect of assessment can equally be attributed to lack of or inadequate assessment training. Many of them indicated that they never had opportunities for in-service training, especially on assessment. One of them observed:

*Some of us have been on the job for up to 20 or 30 years, and if we do not go to seminars, our knowledge could become obsolete. The syllabus changes every four years.*

Moreover, all but one teacher indicated that the government needs to organize seminars, workshops, and other in-service training programs to upgrade their knowledge about

assessment, make them conversant with different assessment methods and techniques and so that they would remain relevant in their profession. Other views they expressed include that all teachers should become WAEC examination coordinators to enable them learn the marking guides, the expectations of the examination bodies, and how best to prepare students for the examinations. Although this last comment may encourage teaching with an emphasis on pen-and-paper assessments, it is not totally out of place, since one of the objectives of teaching Literature-in-English in Nigeria is to prepare students for the SSCE. However, there is a need to go beyond that, so that teachers will not teach to the test. One teacher emphasized the need for transformative teaching through self-improvement. According to the teacher:

*Teachers need to work on themselves; they cannot rely on their knowledge, [sic] what they have been doing for years.*

Teachers also made valuable suggestions on how to improve their assessment literacy. Some wanted training on assessment in general, while others said they would like to learn how to assess particular genres, especially poetry and drama. They also suggested training on methods of assessment, the WAEC standard of marking, so that they could adequately prepare students for the examinations, how to ask questions, and how to elicit the correct responses from students. One of them said:

*I would like to be trained on the methods of assessment, how to apply them, and to interpret the results.*

Another teacher stated:

*I would like to be trained on the assessment that makes the class lively, that will enhance students' class participation which will make me feel fulfilled.*

The last respondent seems to understand the value of assessment but perhaps is incapable of practicing it due to limited knowledge. The response suggests also that teachers see the need for transformative learning, which helps students and teachers. However, some teachers feel complacent and see no need for change. Such teachers want to preserve the status quo, irrespective of whether it is effective. For example, one teacher responded:

*I don't need anything on assessment unless there is a new one because I have been on the job for a very long time.*

The above response suggests that there are teachers who believe that there are perhaps no better ways of doing things - other than what they are already used to. There is a need to



transform such mindsets because the society is constantly changing. Knowledge is not constant. Approaches to literacy also have to change with the changing times. A transformative mindset is needed to accommodate new ways of knowing, doing things, and enriching one's learning experience. These are essential factors for more effective Literature-in-English instruction. Learners of yesterday may not be the same today. In spite of that last response, which was an opinion of only one teacher, the rest showed a willingness to embrace change if offered opportunities to enhance their assessment knowledge and practice.

### **Conclusion**

The vital roles assessment plays in the teaching-learning process makes it an important area of research. Although assessment literacy is broad and requires an ongoing learning process, teachers need at least to know the basics, including the types, principles, and several methods or techniques to enhance teaching. However, many Literature-in-English teachers have a low level of assessment literacy. Many of them do not practice assessment, while some do so sparingly. Since the assessment component is missing, their instructional practices cannot be effective. Consequently, they cannot make informed instructional decisions or give appropriate feedback to students because they have no evidence of students' learning. Students are left in the dark about their learning progress or limitations without classroom assessment and feedback.

The omission of the assessment component of the teaching-learning process is a gross neglect in Literature-in-English pedagogy in Nigeria. Without assessment, learners may not have the opportunity to undergo the four processes of learning as described by (Mezirow, 1997) and which leads to transformative learning experience. It is through the AfL that teachers get to know can learners' prior knowledge which should be the foundation for new learning. Similarly, through the AoL, they are expected to find out if the new knowledge they intended to impart through their teaching has been understood or assimilated by students and to what extent that had been done.

For better teaching practice and more learning, teachers need to imbibe a transformative mindset and teach or inspire their students to do the same. Teachers need to take responsibility as directors of the learning process. Although lack of textbooks and low motivation are visible challenges, they can do some improvisations. For example, they can ask students to copy the poems to their notebooks. They can use dramatic and other collaborative learning techniques where students who do not have textbooks can still

participate in the class. Students also need to take more responsibility for their learning. However, it is not enough to blame students for not doing their assignments and, therefore, abandoning the assessment practice. Teachers can go further by determining why students would not do their assignments. Such students may have challenges that teachers can help them to address or overcome. For example, students may refuse to read the text because they cannot read, are not motivated, do not have the textbook, or the language of the text may be too difficult for them. In such cases, giving them take-home assignments may not work, especially for students from non-literate homes. Teachers can also incorporate assessment techniques to bring fun into the classroom since literature is naturally entertaining.

The findings of this study have implications for quality teaching of Literature-in-English, the professional development of teachers, and teacher preparation programs. First, teachers need retraining, just as many of them expressed. Secondly, assessment literacy needs to be emphasized in the teacher-preparation programs. More courses on assessment could be developed; alternatively, the existing assessment-related courses could be broadened to offer pre-service teachers opportunities to be more assessment literate.

This study has shed light on the problems of Literature-in-English pedagogy in Nigeria, especially in the assessment component. Future research can build on the limitations of this study, including concrete ways teachers could implement assessment even when faced with challenges like a shortage of instructional materials.

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## Appendix 1

### Teachers' Assessment Literacy Test

1. A systematic process of gathering information to improve learning and to make learning and instructional decisions by teachers is called
  - (a) test and measurement.
  - (b) assessment.
  - (c) Criterion assessment.
  - (d) examination.
2. Constant formative assessment will most likely
  - (a) encourage learners to aspire for high scores.
  - (b) help learners to learn better.
  - (c) increase students' test anxiety.
  - (d) demotivate learners.
3. One advantage of the essay-type question over the multiple choice is that the essay-type
  - (a) is easy to construct.
  - (b) is easy to score.
  - (c) reduces ambiguity in scoring.
  - (d) increases objectivity in scoring.
4. A Literature-in-English teacher who wants to find out what students have learned based on what they have been taught over a period of time will use
  - (a) an aptitude test.
  - (b) achievement test.
  - (c) observation schedule.
  - (d) rating scale.
5. The West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) is an example of
  - (a) summative assessment.
  - (b) formative assessment.
  - (c) aptitude test.
  - (d) learning evaluation.
6. In Literature-in-English lessons, Femi has repeatedly failed poetry but scores high marks in prose and drama; the teacher can find out why he fails poetry by using
  - (a) an observation schedule.
  - (b) a test-retest assessment.
  - (c) item discrimination.
  - (d) a diagnostic assessment.
7. To reduce test anxiety among learners, Literature-in-English teachers should
  - (a) administer only paper-and-pencil tests to students.
  - (b) practice more summative than formative assessments.
  - (c) involve learners in assessment planning.
  - (d) assess learners only at the end of the term.
8. Which of these methods of assessment is formative?
  - (a) diagnostic test.
  - (b) end of lesson tests.
  - (c) end-of-term examination.
  - (d) continuous assessment (mid-term test).

9. A type of test that will most likely make Literature-in-English teachers more subjective in scoring is  
(a) True/False test. (b) multiple choice test. (c) short answer. (d) essay type.
10. If a Literature-in-English test administered on SS2 students is repeated after two days and similar results are obtained, that is to say, the results are consistent; the test is said to possess the quality of  
(a) reliability. (b) validity. (c) normality. (d) maximum standard.
11. A type of assessment done before and during lessons to check and improve students' learning is called  
(a) investigative assessment. (b) summative assessment.  
(c) norm-referenced assessment. (d) formative assessment...
12. A major purpose of feedback is  
(a) to point out students' errors and mistakes so that they can sit up.  
(b) to have a record of students' learning outcomes.  
(c) to identify students' strengths and weaknesses, and to improve learning.  
(d) to know how many students are serious in the class.
13. An assessment in which students' scores are graded and recorded for decision purposes (such as promotion) based on their performance is  
(a) formative. (b) Think-pair-share. (c) summative. (d) decision-based assessment.
14. A notebook in which students clarify what they learn when studying or during lessons is called a (a) rubric. (b) portfolio. (c) journal. (d) rating scale.
15. A major feature of summative assessment that distinguishes it from the formative is that  
(a) it is not used to rank students.  
(b) it demands immediate feedback.  
(c) it is usually done at the beginning of the lesson.  
(d) it is usually scored, and the results are sometimes recorded.
16. The most important goal of formative assessment is to  
(a) record students' learning outcomes for promotion.  
(b) group students based on their scores.  
(c) report students' progress to educational stakeholders.  
(d) modify teaching and improve learning.

17. A major feature that distinguishes formative from the summative assessment is that formative assessment
- (a) is not usually used to assign grades.
  - (b) is typically used to assign grades.
  - (c) makes the teacher take more responsibilities.
  - (d) is more difficult to prepare.
18. To recognize the individual differences of learners, Literature-in-English teachers should use
- (a) written feedback.
  - (b) different methods of assessment.
  - (c) checklist.
  - (d) only one method of assessment.
19. A major benefit of self-assessment is that it can lead to
- (a) less time being spent on assessment.
  - (b) better learning through deeper reflection.
  - (c) teacher-centered classroom.
  - (d) peer collaboration.
20. The use of only summative assessment results to make major educational decisions will most likely
- (a) facilitate the achievement of the goals of teaching and learning.
  - (b) promote teachers' commitment to work.
  - (c) increase students' motivation to learn.
  - (d) provide unreliable data about the school system.