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Research Article

Teachers' Assessment Literacy and Quality of Classroom Assessment Practices: A Mixed-Methods Evaluation in Imo State, South-East Nigeria

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Abstract

Teachers' assessment literacy is widely regarded as a foundation of effective classroom assessment, yet few studies connect what teachers know to what they actually do, especially in sub-Saharan African secondary schools. This explanatory sequential mixed-methods study evaluated assessment knowledge, skills and classroom implementation among teachers in Imo State, South-East Nigeria. In Phase 1, 320 secondary teachers from 24 schools completed an assessment knowledge test and a skills scale. In Phase 2, 64 of them were sampled for a rubric-based review of their assessment artefacts and observed practice, which they also self-rated. In Phase 3, 18 teachers were interviewed. Mean knowledge was 11.83 out of 20 (59%), lowest in assessment technology and artificial intelligence (43%) and fairness and ethics (53%). Teachers who had attended professional development scored higher (d = 0.79). Knowledge (β = .31) and skills (β = .25) predicted observed quality, but the model explained 35% of the variance. Teachers rated their own practice significantly higher than observers did on every dimension, most on quality of feedback (d = 1.34) and cognitive demand (d = 1.19). Interviews attributed the gap to examination pressure, thin training, workload and a view of feedback as marking. Literacy is necessary but not sufficient: improvement requires attention to context as well as knowledge.

Keywords: Assessment Literacy; Classroom Assessment; Teacher Knowledge; Feedback; Mixed Methods; Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Classroom assessment shapes what students learn, how they feel about learning and what teachers do next. Its quality depends heavily on teachers' assessment literacy, usually understood as the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed to design, use and interpret assessment well (Pastore, 2023; Schildkamp et al., 2020). Reviews show that formative practice is shaped by teachers' prerequisites, attitudes and school conditions (Schildkamp et al., 2020; Yan et al., 2021), and recent work emphasises that literacy now includes feedback and, increasingly, digital and AI-related competence (Boud & Dawson, 2023; Carless & Winstone, 2023; Lodge et al., 2023).

A recurring concern is that literacy does not automatically translate into practice. Teachers may know principles yet face constraints that limit implementation, and self-reports may overstate the quality of what happens in classrooms (Brown, 2022; Heritage & Wylie, 2020). Research on the knowledge–practice gap in African secondary schools is limited, and most evidence relies on self-report alone (Ayanwale et al., 2022).

In Nigeria, external examinations such as those of the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and the National Examinations Council (NECO) strongly influence classroom assessment. In Imo State, in the South-East geopolitical zone, it is therefore important to know both what teachers know about assessment and what their classroom assessments actually look like. Recent Nigerian studies have examined teacher feedback methods in junior secondary schools (Ferguson et al., 2026), assessment and feedback in the digital age (Edinoh et al., 2026), teacher education in Nigeria (Edinoh, Saidu, & Okpunukpang, 2024) and the use of artificial intelligence in assessment (Edinoh, Achor, et al., 2025; Edinoh, Ajewole, et al., 2025), but little of this work links teachers' assessment literacy to the quality of the assessments they actually set.

This study addresses the gap with a mixed-methods design and four objectives: (a) to measure teachers' assessment knowledge and skills; (b) to examine whether professional development is associated with literacy; (c) to determine whether knowledge and skills predict the quality of classroom assessment practice; and (d) to explore, through interviews, why implementation falls short of knowledge.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Assessment Literacy

Assessment literacy has evolved from a technical focus on test construction to a broader view that includes pedagogy, feedback, ethics, context and teacher identity (Brookhart & McMillan, 2020; Pastore, 2023). Professional learning in assessment is most effective when it is sustained and linked to classroom practice (Chen et al., 2020; Heritage & Wylie, 2020). Without such support, teachers tend to rely on the assessment habits they experienced as students and on examination formats (Schildkamp et al., 2020).

Quality of Classroom Assessment

Quality can be judged by the alignment of tasks with learning objectives, their cognitive demand, the clarity of criteria, the quality of feedback and the use made of results. Feedback is among the strongest influences on learning when learners can act on it (Wisniewski et al., 2020; Winstone

& Carless, 2020), and student-centred feedback approaches have improved achievement (Brooks et al., 2021). Clear criteria and rubrics also support learning and self-regulation (Panadero et al., 2023). Authentic and inclusive design matter for validity and equity (Ajjawi et al., 2024; Sokhanvar et al., 2021; Tai et al., 2023), and validity should be the central concern in the digital age (Dawson, 2021; Dawson et al., 2024).

New Demands: Digital and AI Competence

Generative AI and digital tools are changing assessment, creating new demands for teacher knowledge about validity, security and fair use (Bearman et al., 2023; Kasneci et al., 2023; Lodge et al., 2023; Swiecki et al., 2022). Evidence suggests formative assessment and AI present both opportunities and risks that teachers need to understand (Hopfenbeck et al., 2023).

Nigerian studies add local context. Work on teacher education in Nigeria has examined problems affecting its development (Edinoh, Saidu, & Okpunukpang, 2024), and research on training and retraining has considered its place in implementing the Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards in universities (Edinoh, Saidu, & Owojipu, 2024); both bear on how assessment competence is developed. Studies in schools have examined teacher feedback methods in relation to students' self-efficacy (Ferguson et al., 2026) and assessment and feedback under digital conditions (Edinoh et al., 2026), while studies of artificial intelligence in assessment have considered how it is perceived and used in higher education (Edinoh, Ajewole, et al., 2025) and in early childhood education (Edinoh, Achor, et al., 2025), in line with the new demands noted above. These studies point to the importance of teacher preparation and feedback practice, but they do not examine teachers' assessment knowledge and skills alongside the quality of their classroom assessment artefacts, which this study does.

Hypotheses

H1: Assessment knowledge and skills positively predict the observed quality of classroom assessment practice.

H2: Teachers who have attended assessment professional development have higher assessment knowledge and skills.

H3: Teachers' self-rated implementation is higher than observed quality.

The qualitative strand explored a research question: *RQ: What do teachers identify as enablers and barriers to implementing what they know about assessment?*

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was used (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Quantitative data were collected and analysed first (Phases 1 and 2), and interviews (Phase 3) were then used to explain the results. Findings were integrated through a joint display.

Participants and Sampling

In Phase 1, 320 secondary teachers from 24 public and private schools across Imo State's three senatorial zones (Owerri, Okigwe and Orlu) were selected using stratified random sampling. In Phase 2, 64 of them were selected using stratified random sampling by zone and school type for artefact review and observation. In Phase 3, 18 of the 64 were purposively selected for maximum variation in knowledge and observed quality. Table 1 gives the Phase 1 profile.

Table 1

Profile of Survey Respondents (N = 320)

Characteristic	Category	*n*	%
Gender	Female	187	58.4
	Male	133	41.6
School type	Public	204	63.8
	Private	116	36.3
Teaching experience	Under 5 years	59	18.4
	5–10 years	120	37.5
	Over 10 years	141	44.1
Attended assessment professional development	Yes	131	40.9
	No	189	59.1

Instruments

Knowledge. A 20-item multiple-choice test covered six domains: designing assessment tasks, grading and scoring, giving feedback, interpreting and using results, fairness and ethics, and assessment technology and AI (KR-20 = .78). **Skills.** A 16-item five-point self-rating scale covered design, scoring, feedback and data use ($\alpha = .89$). **Quality of practice.** Two trained raters scored each teacher's assessment artefacts (tasks, marked scripts and feedback samples from one term) and one observed lesson on a four-level rubric (1 = beginning to 4 = exemplary) across five dimensions: alignment with objectives, cognitive demand, clarity of criteria, quality of feedback and use of results (weighted $\kappa = .81$). Teachers self-rated on the same rubric. **Interviews.** A semi-structured guide explored enablers and barriers; interviews lasted 30–45 minutes.

Data Analysis and Ethics

Quantitative analysis used descriptive statistics, Welch's *t* tests, paired-sample *t* tests, correlation and multiple regression, with Cohen's (1988) *d* as the effect size. Interviews were analysed by reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) by two coders, with disagreements resolved

by discussion. School authorities approved the study, participants gave informed consent, and teachers and schools were anonymised.

RESULTS

Assessment Knowledge and Skills

Mean knowledge was 11.83 out of 20 (*SD* = 3.39), or 59%, and mean self-rated skills were 3.13 out of 5 (*SD* = 0.61). Knowledge and skills correlated modestly (*r* = .28), indicating that confidence and knowledge are only loosely related. Table 2 and Figure 1 show that knowledge was highest for designing tasks (74%) and lowest for assessment technology and AI (43%) and fairness and ethics (53%).

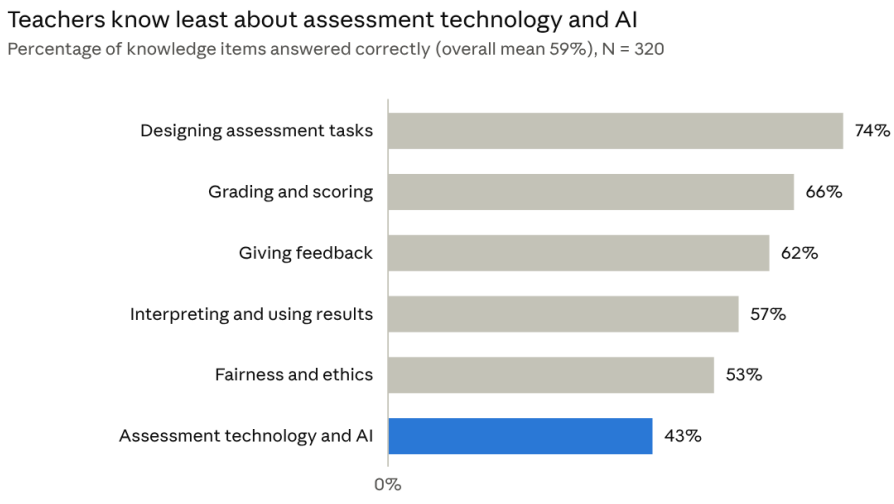
Table 2

Percentage Correct on the Assessment Knowledge Test by Domain (N = 320)

Domain	Items	% correct
Designing assessment tasks	4	74
Grading and scoring	3	66
Giving feedback	3	62
Interpreting and using results	4	57
Fairness and ethics	3	53
Assessment technology and AI	3	43
Overall	20	59

Figure 1

Percentage Correct on the Assessment Knowledge Test by Domain



N = 320

Professional Development and Literacy

Teachers who had attended assessment professional development scored higher on knowledge (M = 13.31, SD = 3.21) than those who had not (M = 10.81, SD = 3.15), t = 6.93, p < .001, d = 0.79, and rated their skills higher (3.26 versus 3.04), t = 3.31, p = .001, d = 0.37 (Table 3), supporting H2. Knowledge did not differ between public and private school teachers (11.93 versus 11.66, p = .484).

Table 3

Assessment Knowledge and Skills by Professional Development Attendance

Measure	Attended (n = 131) M (SD)	Not attended (n = 189) M (SD)	t	P	d
Knowledge (0–20)	13.31 (3.21)	10.81 (3.15)	6.93	< .001	0.79
Skills (1–5)	3.26 (0.56)	3.04 (0.64)	3.31	.001	0.37

Predicting the Quality of Classroom Practice

In the artefact review (n = 64), the mean observed quality was 2.41 out of 4 (SD = 0.49), between developing and proficient. Knowledge (r = .48), skills (r = .36) and professional development (r = .44) correlated with quality, whereas years of experience did not (r = −.06). In regression (Table 4), knowledge (β = .31, p = .009) and skills (β = .25, p = .030) were significant predictors, professional development was marginal (β = .23, p = .068), and experience was not significant. The model explained 34.7% of the variance, so most variation in practice was not explained by literacy, partly supporting H1.

Table 4

Regression Predicting Observed Quality of Classroom Assessment (n = 64)

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	P	VIF
(Constant)	2.29	0.08		28.63	< .001	
Knowledge (z)	0.15	0.06	.31	2.69	.009	1.31
Skills (z)	0.12	0.06	.25	2.22	.030	1.08
Professional development (1 = yes)	0.22	0.12	.23	1.86	.068	1.34
Experience (z)	−0.03	0.05	−.06	−0.60	.548	1.02

Note. R^2 = .347; adjusted R^2 = .303; $F(4, 59)$ = 7.85, p < .001.

Self-Rated Versus Observed Implementation

Teachers rated their own practice significantly higher than observers did on all five dimensions (Table 5; Figure 2), supporting H3. The overall self-rating was 3.19 against an observed 2.41. The largest gaps were for quality of feedback ($d = 1.34$), cognitive demand ($d = 1.19$) and clarity of criteria ($d = 1.18$); the smallest was for use of results ($d = 0.56$).

Table 5

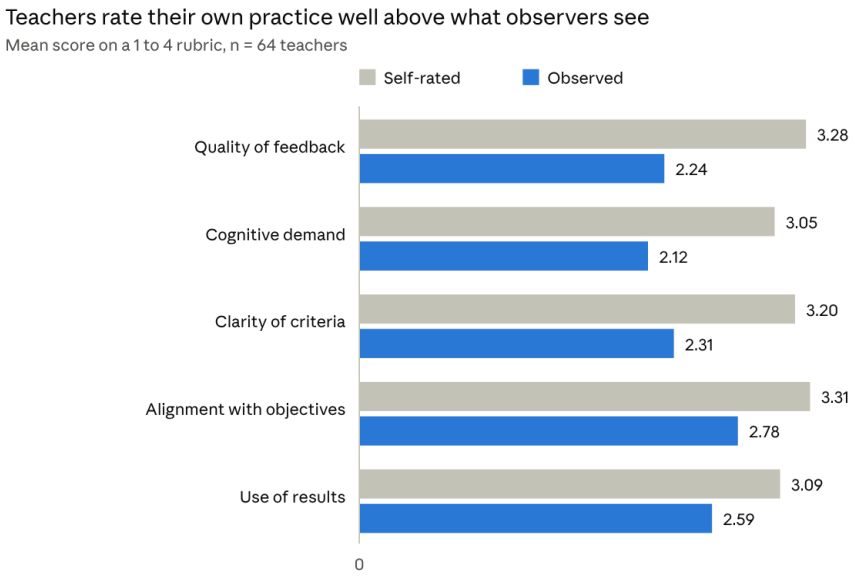
Self-Rated and Observed Quality of Classroom Assessment (n = 64; 1–4 Rubric)

Dimension	Self-rated *M* (*SD*)	Observed *M* (*SD*)	*t*(63)	*d*
Alignment with objectives	3.31 (0.49)	2.78 (0.58)	5.86	0.73
Cognitive demand	3.05 (0.53)	2.12 (0.56)	9.53	1.19
Clarity of criteria	3.20 (0.51)	2.31 (0.55)	9.43	1.18
Quality of feedback	3.28 (0.53)	2.24 (0.54)	10.70	1.34
Use of results	3.09 (0.52)	2.59 (0.67)	4.51	0.56
Overall (mean of dimensions)	3.19	2.41		

Note. All $p < .001$.

Figure 2

Self-Rated and Observed Quality of Classroom Assessment by Dimension (1–4 Rubric)



n = 64

Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of the 18 interviews produced six themes (Table 6). The most common was examination pressure, which narrowed assessment towards WAEC- and NECO-style items and explained the low cognitive demand seen in artefacts. Teachers also described limited training beyond pre-service basics, heavy workloads and large classes, a view of feedback as marking and correction, and scarce resources. A smaller group described colleague support as a way of improving.

Table 6

Themes From Teacher Interviews (n = 18)

Theme	Teachers, *n*	Illustrative extract (paraphrased)
Examination pressure narrows practice	15	"I set questions like the board exams because that is what the students will face." (T04)
Thin training, learning on the job	14	"Apart from college, I never attended a workshop on testing." (T11)
Workload and large classes	13	"With so many scripts, I can only tick and score." (T07)
Feedback seen as marking and correction	12	"Feedback means I mark and return the script with the score." (T15)
Limited resources and technology	11	"We do not have printers or devices to prepare better tasks." (T02)
Colleague support as a route to improvement	8	"When we plan together, my questions improve." (T09)

Integration of Findings

Table 7 integrates the strands. Quantitative gaps in cognitive demand and feedback were explained by examination pressure and a marking view of feedback, while the modest explanatory power of literacy was explained by workload and resource constraints. The marginal effect of professional development alongside the stronger effect on knowledge suggests that training raises knowledge more than it changes practice unless supported in the classroom.

Table 7

Joint Display of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Quantitative finding	Qualitative explanation	Meta-inference
Low cognitive demand in artefacts (observed 2.12)	Examination pressure; board-style items (15/18)	Context pushes tasks towards recall

Quantitative finding	Qualitative explanation	Meta-inference
Largest self–observed gap on feedback (d = 1.34)	Feedback seen as marking and correction (12/18)	Teachers may not recognise the gap
Training linked to knowledge (d = 0.79) but only marginally to practice	Thin, one-off training; no classroom follow-up (14/18)	Training must be sustained and classroom-linked
Literacy explained 35% of quality	Workload, class size, resources (13/18, 11/18)	Knowledge is necessary but not sufficient

Hypothesis Summary

Table 8

Summary of Hypothesis Tests

Hypothesis	Key evidence	Decision
H1	Knowledge β = .31, skills β = .25; R^2 = .35	Partly supported
H2	Knowledge d = 0.79; skills d = 0.37	Supported
H3	Self-rated higher on all five dimensions, p < .001	Supported

DISCUSSION

Teachers in this study had moderate assessment knowledge, with notable weakness in fairness and ethics and in assessment technology and AI, domains that are increasingly important (Bearman et al., 2023; Lodge et al., 2023; Swiecki et al., 2022). The link between professional development and knowledge is encouraging and consistent with research on effective professional learning (Chen et al., 2020; Heritage & Wylie, 2020), but its weaker link to observed practice supports arguments that one-off training seldom changes classrooms (Schildkamp et al., 2020).

Knowledge and skills each predicted quality, yet most variance remained unexplained. The qualitative strand shows why: examination pressure, workload, class size and resources constrain teachers who know better (Brown, 2022; Yan et al., 2021). The large gap between self-rated and observed practice, especially for feedback, suggests that teachers overestimate their practice, perhaps because feedback is understood as marking rather than as dialogue that students act upon (Boud & Dawson, 2023; Carless & Winstone, 2023; Wisniewski et al., 2020). This has implications for professional development, which should include calibration against exemplars.

The low cognitive demand of observed tasks reflects the pull of external examinations and is consistent with calls for more authentic and inclusive assessment design (Ajjawi et al., 2024; Tai et al., 2023). Teachers' reference to colleague support suggests that collaborative planning is a feasible, low-cost route to improvement in resource-constrained schools (Heritage & Wylie, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study indicate that teachers possessed a moderate level of assessment literacy, which was associated with better classroom assessment practices. However, a gap was observed between teachers' assessment knowledge and its practical implementation, as classroom practices did not consistently reflect their level of knowledge. Furthermore, teachers tended to overestimate their own assessment practices, suggesting a discrepancy between self-perceived competence and actual classroom implementation. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening teachers' assessment literacy through practical, sustained, and contextually relevant support. The study underscores the need to bridge the gap between assessment knowledge and classroom practice, particularly in Imo State and similar educational settings in South-East Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made, with particular relevance to Imo State and similar educational settings in South-East Nigeria:

i. **Provide Sustained, Classroom-Linked Professional Development:** Teacher professional development programmes should combine workshops with classroom-based coaching and follow-up support to help teachers translate assessment knowledge into effective classroom practice (Chen et al., 2020).

ii. **Integrate Fairness, Ethics, and AI Literacy:** Teacher education and in-service training programmes should incorporate fairness, ethical assessment practices, and artificial intelligence (AI) literacy, particularly in areas where teachers demonstrated lower levels of competence (Lodge et al., 2023).

iii. **Promote Effective Feedback Practices:** Teachers should move beyond assessment practices focused primarily on marking and grading towards feedback that actively supports students' learning and improvement. Training should include the use of exemplars to strengthen feedback quality and consistency (Boud & Dawson, 2023).

iv. **Encourage Collaborative Assessment Planning:** Schools should encourage teachers to work collaboratively in designing, reviewing, and moderating assessment tasks to promote consistency, shared understanding, and effective assessment practices across subject areas.

v. **Address Institutional and Resource Constraints:** Educational authorities and policymakers should consider structural challenges, including large class sizes, teachers' workloads, and inadequate instructional resources, when designing and implementing assessment literacy development initiatives. Professional training should be supported by practical improvements in the teaching and learning environment.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The artefact-review subsample was small (n = 64) and findings reflects data from a single state which limits generalisation. Future research should use larger samples, multilevel models, repeated observation and intervention designs testing sustained professional development.

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The author(s) declare that not applicable.

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Competing interests

The author(s) declare no competing interests.

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