CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS: ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

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Abstract
The paper discusses the issues and problems of continuous assessment in primary and secondary schools. It explains the meaning of continuous assessment as the mechanism whereby the final grading of learner’s cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning systematically takes account of their performance during a given period of schooling. It also cited the legal provision of continuous assessment in our educational system. The purposes of continuous assessment were highlighted to include finding out the extent of students’ knowledge, understanding and skills learnt. The students’ weakness and strengths which serve as a feedback to the teacher on where extra work needs to be done. The problems and weakness of continuous assessment were highlighted to include that some teachers do not posses the required competences for the implementation of continuous assessment. It was also observed that the task is weighing the teachers down. Teachers focus their greatest attention on measuring cognitive attainment rather than affective and psychomotor behaviours of the students. It was observed that majority of the teachers in our public primary and secondary schools exhibit a high level of incompetence in the use of statistical tools. The skill is necessary in presenting students’ performance in a neat and logical manner. The benefits of continuous assessment is that, it is guidance oriented since it involves data gathering over a long period of time, yields more accurate data for the teacher to modify instruction. It is recommended that government should mount more intensive seminars and workshops to educate teachers on the appropriate principles of continuous assessment. That teachers need to be professionally and attitudinally prepared to operate the system.
Educational assessment provides the necessary feedback education practitioners require to maximize the outcome of educational efforts. It is part of students learning. Teachers have always made judgments about the progress of their students from the assessment. The assessment of learners performance provides the objective evidence necessary in the decision making process. Cone (1991:653) stated that good measurement resulting in accurate data is the foundation of sound decision making. The major problems of assessment of learners have been in the approaches or methods. According to Alausa (1996) the question that has been bothering educational practitioners since time immemorial are:
1. Would a one-short examination adequately assess what a learner has learnt over a long period of schooling?
2. How would you grade a learner who happens to fall ill and could not write the final examination? To answer these questions, educational measurement experts and educational policy makers have come up with the concept of continuous assessment.

Legal Provisions of Continuous Assessment

In this modern age, continuous assessment has been widely considered as the most valid and reliable method of assessment leading to improved instructional method. The National Policy on Education (2004) provides that examination in our school system should be by continuous assessment. The NPE (2004) also stated that educational assessment and evaluation shall be liberalized by their being based in whole or in part on continuous assessment of the progress of the individual. What then is continuous assessment? Falayo (1986) defined continuous assessment as the mechanism whereby the final grading of learners in cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning systematically takes account of their performance during a given period of schooling. Prior to the institution of continuous assessment procedure of evaluation, one-short summative evaluation has been seriously criticized. Mkpa (1985) observed that it constituted a threat to learners who saw examinations as the sole determinant of their future academic and career destinies. Ohuche (1988:18) as well stated that teachers could not introduce innovation both in the teaching and evaluation of their students, partly because of the straight jacket syllabus followed by the external examining bodies. Therefore the continuous assessment system of evaluation was aimed at correcting the anomalies inherent in the one-short summative evaluation. Baker (1991) stated that the continuous assessment should involve a formal assessment of learners’ affective characteristics and motivation, in which they will need to demonstrate their commitment to tasks over time, their workforce readiness and their competence in team or group performance context. From these definitions, continuous assessment makes use of variety of instruments,
assessing various components of learning not only the thinking process but including behaviour and personality traits. The continuous assessment approach will capture the full range of learners’ performance. The teachers and administrators would be able to assess learners’ progress and also have time to correct their problems.

**Purposes of Continuous Assessment in the School System**

Assessment generally is done for a number of purposes. Assessment gives a clue to how much knowledge a learner has acquired. The assessment reveals the learners area of weakness and strength.

Murihead (1997) in his opinion noted that students are assessed with a view of finding out the extent of their knowledge, understanding and skills they have learned. Secondly, the knowledge of the students’ weakness and strengths serve as a feedback to the teacher on where extra work needs to be done and where there has been misrepresentation, which needs to be corrected. Obinayu (1997) calls assessment a discovering point, which needs hammering, and repetition. Grant (1978) is of the opinion that after examination those who have mastered the required skills should be shown the next stage, while those who made many mistakes can be taught again. Any common mistake should be included in another test. Questions which were poorly done in the previous test should be repeated, but differently. Yoloye (1988:50) indentified the following purpose of continuous assessment.

i. To obtain a truer picture of the child’s ability than would be obtained from a single assessment.

ii. To provide a continuous record of the student’s physical, social and personal qualities.

iii. To serve as a monitoring device giving feedback to the students about the effectiveness of his or her learning.

iv. To encourage teacher’s to implement the designed instruction objectives.

v. To diagnose the strength and weakness of the individual children and to apply corrective actions when lack of progress is observed.

vi. To help the teacher guidance counselor to give academics and psychological guidance to students as necessary.

Capper (1996:20) stated the rationale for a functional assessment as follows:

i. To find out if children are learning.

ii. To determine if there is need to change method of learning.

iii. To find out if children are having problems in learning.

iv. To find out if teaching is helpful.

v. To ensure that children are helped or assisted to learn.

vi. To prepare a teacher for discussion with parents, other teachers and community members.

vii. To know the learners better.

viii. To prepare teachers to determine if learners are ready to move to other topics, skills and concepts.

ix. To find out if learners are ready to move to next grade.

x. Assessment is an essential part of the teaching process.
Problems and Weakness of Continuous Assessment in Primary and Secondary School

Continuous assessment in most public primary and secondary schools is beset with a lot of problems. The practice is not really continuous assessment because its practice is still tied to formal test settings, which are frequently administered. It is still concentrated on lower level of the cognitive domain.

Yoloye (1972) observed in his made test analysis that vast majority of tests/examinations constructed by the teachers have tested only the knowledge category and little of the comprehensive. Okebukola (1985) confirmed that the other domains like affective and psychomotor are often not measured at all. Continuous assessment has been variously defined and its characteristics delimited by reputable educationists. Among the most comprehensive definitions is that put forward by federal Ministry of Education, science and technology (185:85) as mechanism whereby the final grading of a student in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of behaviour systematically takes account of all his performances during a given period of schooling. The continuous assessment with its attributes as embedded in the above definition has not been practice in Nigeria. Ezewi (1990) observed that problems exist in the implementation of continuous assessment in all subject areas. Ekwonye (1987) mentioned especially that teachers do not possess the required competence for the implementation of continuous assessment. Eme (1985) on the other hand observed that the task is weighing the teachers down. Kanno (1995) also reported that teachers focused their greatest attention on measuring cognitive attainment rather than affective and psychomotor behaviour. Yoloye (1972) itemized some of the following as the problems of implementing continuous assessment in schools.

1. Large Class Size: Nigerian classrooms are oversized especially in the urban cities many streams especially the junior classes. Cases abound where junior secondary one has 15 streams or over fifty (50) students each. In many cases, one teacher is assigned to teach all the streams under such condition it will be impracticable for the teacher to undertake a thorough assessment of the students in each stream.

2. He Also Talked of Time Constraint: Most schools allotted a total of two (2) hours 15 minutes to teach a subject a week, that is three periods of 45 minutes per period. In the context of full assessment, this is inadequate.

3. He Also Talked of Computational Skill on the Part of the Teachers: Majority of the teachers in our public secondary and primary schools exhibit a high level of incompetence in the use of the statistical models, which are necessary in presenting performance in a neat and logical manner.

Onwioduokit (2002) noted that one of the problems hindering the attainment of high level of continuous assessment in
school is disparity on the provision of learning facilities and trained manpower. Apart from the problems associated with teachers in the effective implementation of continuous assessment in schools, there is this problem of dodging of assessment by students. These problems effecting effective assessment could be traced to many quarters, the government, school authorities, teachers, students and the society.

Atting (2005) itemized these points as barriers to effective assessment such as:
1. Credibility of assessment in our contemporary society.
2. Bastardization of the system since some students are involved in grading and computation of result of colleagues.
3. Arbitrary award of marks by teachers.
4. Teachers not trained in educational assessment.
5. Assessment is focused pm certification at the expense of other purposes.
6. Parents and guardians arrange for their children and wards for a better mark.
7. Assessment focuses mainly on written works especially in cognitive domain leaving the affective and psychomotor domains.

Benefits of Continuous Assessment

The fundamental objective of the introduction of continuous assessment was to correct the defects of the past system of assessment which concentrated on one final examination. From the various definitions of continuous assessment already reviewed, continuous assessment is an assessment approach which involves the use of a variety of assessment instruments assessing various components of learning, not only thinking process but including behaviour, personality trait and manual dexterity which will give the wholesome picture of the individual.

Alausa (2005) said that one of the benefits of continuous assessment is that, it is guidance oriented since it involves data gathering over a long period of time, it will yield more accurate data reaching the teacher early enough to modify instruction. It plays a vital role in diagnosing and remediating areas of learners’ weakness.

Another advantage of continuous assessment is that it places at the center of all performance assessment activities. It encourages more teachers’ participation in the overall assessment or grading of his or her learner. As suggested by the Paris (1991) teachers must be given opportunities to select and review assessment so that they become involved and knowledgeable in the process. Through this approach, teachers would be able to integrate assessment and assessment results into instructional practice. According to Lewis (1997) with continuous assessment teachers must embed the assessment in their instructions, score the assessment and discuss standards for good learners work with colleagues, parents and learners. Continuous assessment is advantageous to the learner because it reveals the ability of the learner early enough to make necessary adjustment for improved performance on the part of the teacher, continuous assessment enables him or her to assess the
learner early enough and this will help the to integrate the feedback for improved instructional techniques for the benefit of the learner.

**Conclusion**
In the light of the review, the researchers observed that continuous assessment is not being practiced within the school system. What teachers do is continuous testing of students in the cognitive which is not continuous assessment. The task of implementation of continuous assessment is weighing the teachers down because of the large class size of Nigerian schools.

**Recommendations**
In review of the problems facing continuous assessment in the secondary and primary schools and following recommendations are made:
1. Government should mount intensive workshop to educate teachers on the appropriate principles of continuous assessment. The workshop should focus objectively on constructing and using assessment as tools.
2. For successful implementation of the continuous assessment, teachers need to assess both cognitive affective and psychomotor domains of learning.
3. Teachers need to be professionally and attitudinally prepared to operate the system. If the teachers are not adequately prepared for operating the system, it may lead to mere made up scores in the name of continuous assessment.
4. Continuous assessment involves a lot of record keeping. Teachers should learn to keep records meticulously over a long period of time so that the records will be easily retrieved when needed.
5. More professional teachers should be recruited to add to the ones already teaching so as to improve the teacher-students ratio to allow teachers to devote more time to both teaching and assessment.
6. The welfare of teachers should be of paramount importance to the government. This would boost their interest towards proficiency.

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