Introduction
Continuous assessment is the current strategy for education evaluation of students achievement in the teaching – learning situations in the Nigerian school system (Ughamadu, 1994). It is also invariably used to evaluate the educational system itself. In the National Policy on education (NPE, 1977 revised 2004), it is stated clearly in paragraph 7, that educational assessment and evaluation will be liberalized by basing them in whole or in part on continuous assessment of the progress of the individual. Subsequently, for the primary education level, the policy paragraph 15 (8 and 9) stated that Government plans that progress along the education cycle will be based on continuous overall guidance oriented assessment by teachers and headmasters. It also stipulates that the Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination will be based on continuous assessment and the results of the Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination. Highlighted in this paper are some problems militating against effective implementation of the practice of continuous assessment in Primary Schools. Recommendations are made for addressing these problems in order to achieve the cardinal objectives of the practice of continuous assessment in primary schools in Nigeria.
This paper argues that the practice of continuous assessment in primary schools is beset by a lot of problems and there is need for reforms and innovation to address some identified problems since one cannot say with any degree of precision that the implementation of continuous assessment in primary schools has been very effective and efficient.

Concept of Continuous Assessment

Continuous assessment can be seen as a systematic and progressive way of ascertaining the changes in the behaviours (affective, cognitive and psychomotor) of the learner during the period of schooling.

The Federal Government Handbook on Continuous Assessment (1985) defined continuous assessment as: a mechanism whereby the final grading of a student in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of behaviours systematically takes account of all his performances during a given period of schooling. Such an assessment involves the use of a great variety of modes of evaluation for the purpose of guiding and improving the learning and performance of the student. According to USAID (2003), continuous assessment is a classroom strategy implemented by teachers to ascertain the knowledge, understanding and skills attained by pupils. It further views continuous assessment as a process that occurs frequently during the school year and is part of regular teacher pupil interactions. Pupils receive feedback from teachers based on their performance that allows them to focus on topics they have not yet mastered. For the purpose of this study, we are going to use these definitions as working definitions.

Rationale for Continuous Assessment in Primary Schools.

The Federal Government Handbook on continuous assessment (1985) states the following reasons for the adoption of continuous assessment in our school system.

(a) To give the teacher greater involvement in the overall assessment of his/her pupils.
(b) To provide a more valid overall ability and performance.
(c) To enable teachers to be more flexible and innovative in their instruction
(d) To provide a base for more effective guidance of the child.
(e) To provide a base for the teacher to improve his or her instructional method
(f) To reduce examination malpractice

Characteristics of Continuous Assessment

According to Falayajo (1988); Ughamadu (1994) and Egbule (2002), continuous assessment is seen to be systematic, comprehensive, cumulative diagnostic and guidance oriented. These are explained below.

(a) Systematic Nature of Continuous Assessment

Continuous assessment is said to be systematic because it requires an Operational plan which indicates what assessments are to be made of...
the student’s performance, at what intervals or period during the school year. These assessments or measurement will determine the nature of instruments to be used.

(b.) **Comprehensive Nature of Continuous Assessment**
Continuous assessment is said to be comprehensive in that it makes use of a great variety of instruments e.g. tests, assignment, project, observation, rating scales, checklist, interviews, socio-metric method, questionnaires etc to evaluate the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of behaviours.

(c.) **Cumulative Nature of Continuous Assessment**
Continuous Assessment is said to be cumulative in that it not only specifies that there should be repeated measurements, but that all such measurements must be taken into account in presenting a picture of a student at any point in time.

(d.) **Guidance–Oriented Nature of Continuous Assessment**
Continuous Assessment is said to be guidance – oriented because information gathered from it is always used to guide the student’s further development. Such information is always useful to the teachers and the school’s counselor.

(e.) **Diagnostic Nature of Continuous Assessment**
Continuous assessment is said to be diagnostic since it involves continuous monitoring of students progress to identify each students strengths and weaknesses. With the knowledge of the weaknesses of students, remedial programmes could be planned for them.

Problems of Continuous Assessment in Primary Schools.
Many positive values have been associated with continuous assessment, and it has been acclaimed to be a worthy innovation in the school system. But some fears have been expressed. The system has some problems and in the views of Osafehinti (1984) cited in Ughamadu (1994), this could be attributed to the fact that it was produced without trial. Some of the problems of continuous assessment are expressed below.

According to Ughamadu (1994), one of the problems of continuous assessment is the comparability of standards which in not unconnected to the fact different instrument of assessment are used. Ezeudu (2005) opined that the grade obtained from continuous assessment cannot be compared because there are situations in which schools and students with the system differ considerably in terms of programmes offered, tradition, inputs, teachers’ qualifications, students abilities, entry behaviours etc.

Again, another problem of continuous assessment is record keeping and continuity of records (Federal
Government Handbook on Continuous Assessment. (1985) and Yoloye (1984). It is stated that continuous assessment cannot be meaningful except there is a meticulous keeping of accurate records for each student throughout the child’s period of schooling. Related to the problem of storage faculties which contributes in no small measure to the absence of data in schools.

Also another problem of continuous assessment is that much power is placed in the hands of teachers and this could be abused easily (Ughamadu, 1994). There is the fear that power of assessment which is the greatest instrument at the school system when placed in the hands of teachers could have the problems of objectivity on the part of its operation.

Furthermore, another problem of continuous assessment is that emphasis is still placed on the cognitive domain to the detriment of the affective and psychomotor domains. According to Ali (1990), some teachers originate and manipulate scores for the assessment of the affective and psychomotor domains. In some cases, teachers assess pupils at the cognitive level and from whatever score that is obtained, a ratio for the affective and psychomotor domains is deduced.

In addition, another problem facing the implementation of continuous assessment is population explosion in schools. Obe (2000) asserted that some teachers find it difficult to cope with the task of effective teaching of large number of pupils and adequate involvement in continuous assessment. In some primary schools, one can easily come across classes with upwards of 90 to 100 pupils being handled by one class teacher, and in such a case, it is extremely difficult to have effective and reliable continuous assessment scores.

Moreover, continuous assessment has not been able to stamp out or reduce examination malpractice in Nigeria. From what is known about schooling in Nigeria, the introduction of continuous assessment will increase examination malpractice at a higher level if care is not taken (Bajah, 1984) cited in Ughamadu (1994). The prevalent cases of examination malpractice in our different levels of education in Nigeria are a testimony of the fact that continuous assessment has not been able to reduce examination malpractice in Nigeria.

Finally, one of the problems of continuous assessment is that although the practice requires different instruments, test in particular and assignment are the most popular instruments in current use by the teachers. Besides, percentage is still the most popular form of score used in the school for recording and reporting pupils performances. This is in contrast with the directive of the Federal Government Handbook on continuous assessment which recommends the transforming of scores into percentile ranks and standard forms such as Z-score, T-score and stanines. T-score is the recommended standard score for use in continuous assessment. According to Ezeudu (2005), the reason that can be advanced for non-usage of Z-score,
Reforms and Innovation in the Practice of Continuous Assessment in Primary Schools: The way forward.

According to Kanno (1985) and Mkpa (1985), there is need for reforms, refocus and innovation in the practice of continuous assessment in primary schools, since it is beset by a lot of problems. These problems no doubt, has reduced drastically the benefits and objectives of continuous assessment in primary schools. In this connection, it is opposite to emphasize and point out that there is need for reforms and innovation in the practice of continuous assessment in primary schools if its objectives are to be achieved effectively and efficiently. These reforms, innovation and way forward find expression in the following:

a) In–Service and Pre-service Trainings of Primary School Teachers in the Effective Implementation of Continuous Assessment in all Ramifications.

Teachers should be sent to in-service and pre-service training in the areas of effective ways of keeping records, development and use of variety of evaluation instruments, and skills in the computation of continuous assessment scores. There is no doubt that when teachers are acquainted with skills in the computation of teacher’s class/school record book, pupils cumulative records card and transcript, development of the different evaluation instruments such as projects, checklists, rating scales, sociometric techniques, observation, etc. through in-service and pre-service training, seminars and workshops, the problems of record keeping, too much reliance on test and assignments and comparability of standards would be reduced effectively.

b) Acquaintance of Teachers with Skills of Computing the Cognitive, Affective and Psychomotor Domains of Learning.

Teachers should be acquainted with the skills in the computation of cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning. Although the standard score recommended for use in continuous assessment is the T-score, we are going to look at how simple percentage is computed before transforming such scores to T-score in primary schools. The three behaviour domains of cognitive, affective and psychomotor are allocated scores thus; the cognitive domain is allocated 60% for subjects that are not practical and 30% for subjects that are practical. The affective domain is allocated 10%. The psychomotor domain is allocated 30% for subjects that are not practical and 60% for subjects that are practical. This is added up to have 100%. We thus have for example in English language: Cognitive = 60%, Affective = 10%, psychomotor = 30% and total = 100%.

This is done for both tests and Examinations. If the weighted score of the test is 20% you multiply the total score i.e. 100% by 0.2 to have 20%. Thus to have the required percentage score of the test, you will multiply the total score i.e. 100% by the appropriate decimal points.

The affective domain contains characteristics traits such as punctuality, attendance in class, honesty, obedience e.t.c. The teacher should make sure that he
allocates 100% to all these traits before reducing to 10% by multiplying the 100% by 0.1. The psychomotor domain contains such characteristics traits such as handwriting, typing, public speaking, dancing, painting etc 100% should also be allocated to all these traits. This is further reduced to 60% by multiplying 100% by 0.6 or to 30% by multiplying by 0.3.

For the purpose of the promotion of pupils to the next class, the first term results carries 20%, second term 30% and third term 50% all totaling 100%. These scores are derived by using the methods explained above.

Moreover, continuous assessment carries 30% of the Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination. The final examination carries 70%. The 30% of the continuous assessment score covers the work of primary four, five and six. Out of the 30%, 5% is allocated for primary four, 12.5% for both primary five and six. To have the 5% allocated for primary four, you multiply the total score of 100% derived from the First, second and third term works of primary four by 0.05%. To have the 12.5% allocated for primary five, you will multiply the total score of 100% by 12.5%. You multiply the total score of by 1.25% to have 12.5% for primary six.

Finally, the scores are transformed to T-score. To obtain the T-score of a raw score, we apply the formula \( T = 50 + 10 \frac{(X - M)}{Sd} \). The formulae of the mean is \( x = \frac{E(x)}{N} \), While that of standard deviation is \( SD = \sqrt{\frac{E(x-x)^2}{N}} \).

c) There should be effective Utilization of Information Communication Technology (ICT) applications in continuous assessment process like comparability of standards through scores transformation processes.

d) Employment of more Qualified Teachers and Construction of more Classrooms by the Federal Government for Primary Schools.

The Federal and State Governments should construct more classrooms and employ more qualified teachers to meet the prescribed ratio of 1:25 by UNESCO for our primary schools. This will help to resolve the problem of over population in primary schools that is hindering effective implementation of continuous assessment.

Recommendations

1. For the proper achievement of the objectives of primary education in Nigeria, primary school teachers should be given intensive and continuous in-service and pre-service training on the implementation of continuous assessment.

2. Conferences, workshops and seminars should be organized regularly for primary school teachers on how to implement continuous assessments.

3. Primary school teachers should acquire skills in tabular and graphical presentation of data, computation of mean and standard deviation of scores and transformation of raw scores to standard forms like T-scores.

4. There should be effective utilization of Information Communication Technology (ICT) applications in continuous assessment process like
comparability of standards through score transformation processes.

5. The Federal and State Governments should endeavor to reduce the very high pupils-teacher ratio in primary schools to enable teachers to implement continuous assessment effectively. This should do by constructing more classrooms and employing more teachers.

Conclusion
In this paper, we have looked at the topic continuous assessment in primary schools in the context of the National Policy on Education. The concept of continuous assessment, its characteristics, rationale, problems and reforms and innovation were highlighted. Finally, recommendations were made.

References


