

# THE ROLE OF CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT IN EVALUATING THE PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENT OF STUDENTS IN EDUCATION: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS.

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## **Abstract**

*This paper examines the issue of continuous assessment in our educational system. It is the method that takes into consideration the child's cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains during his period of schooling. It is seen to be systematic, comprehensive, cumulative and guidance-oriented. The use of several instruments operational plan were discussed: test, questionnaire, observation, a few to mention. Also discussed are problems in the implementation such as problems of nparability of assessment, lack of commitment by teachers, misconception among others. The paper further examines prospect and suggestions that can enhance the development of continuous assessment in the country.*

One major innovation in our education system is the introduction of is assessment as an important component of evaluation. The National Policy on Education (2004) prescribed that:

*Education assessment and evaluation will be liberalized by basing them in whole or in part on continuous assessment of the progress of the individual (FME, 2004)*

It is observed that one of the distinctive features of the National Policy on Education in Nigeria is the introduction and emphasis on continuous assessment. This phenomenon which on one hand de-emphasis final or terminal examination as the only criterion for assessing the overall achievement of the students from primary to the University level, removes from assessment, the formal rigidly and narrowly cognitive

## Academic Scholarship

activity used in the terminal and annual examination. No discussion on education test and measurement in Nigeria therefore can be considered complete without reference to this new system of evaluation Continuous assessment. It is therefore a method of finding out students' performance in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains.

The purpose of continuous assessment therefore is to assess the totality of the learner in the teaching - learning setting. The assessment procedure entails decision making on our learners and educational system in general. Good measurement resulting in accurate data is the foundation of sound decision-making Cone and Foster (1991). It is worthwhile therefore to take a close look at this method of assessment which was introduced in 1981 and implemented nation wide at all levels of educational strata in 1992.

### **The Old System of Assessment**

Prior to the introduction of continuous assessment as a method of evaluation, there was an old system of evaluation which was in use. This system based assessment on a single examination which focused on the cognitive behavior domain. These were based on two broad groups of internal and external examination (FME 1985, Ohuche 1988).

The internal examination was the one conducted by each institution for its assessing the progress of its students. In primary schools, examination was conducted at the end of the term and the year. The decision taken is usually i the single examination.

The second group is the external examination conducted by agencies external to the students in the sense that they have not been responsible for teaching the pupils. Examples are the West African Examination Council, State and Federal Ministries of Education.

Furthermore, under this old system of assessment, the assessment of skills normally associated with each character and industry of the students are neglected. It is not possible to get the overall features of the person being assessed.

It is based on the weaknesses of this system that a new system of evaluation called continuous assessment has come to replace the old one.

### **The Concept of Continuous Assessment**

The concept of continuous assessment was introduced into Nigerian schools in the 1980s following the provision of the national policy on education 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 (FGN 2004).

Continuous assessment is a mechanism whereby the final grading of a student in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of behaviors take account in the systematic way his performances during a given period of schooling (Akem and Aduloju 2003).

Another definition by Airasian (1991) described continuous assessment as an assessment approach which should depict the full range of sources and methods teachers use to gather,

### ***Okwori Sunday Abel and Ihwakar Francis Terna***

interpret and synthesis information on learners. Information make teachers understand their learners, plan and monitor instruction and establish a viable class room culture. On their part, Baker and Stites (1991) opined that 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 work-force readiness and their competence in team or group performance contexts.

A formal definition of continuous assessment in National Policy on Education states that:

*It is a mechanism 'whereby the final grading of student in cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of behaviour takes account in a systematic way of all his performances during a given period of time during school. Such an assessment involves the use of a variety of evaluation instruments for the purpose of guiding and improving the learning and performance of the student (FME 2004 p. 12)*

The definitions given so far imply that the continuous assessment is systematic, comprehensive, cumulative and guidance oriented.

#### **Systematic Nature of Continuous Assessment**

Continuous assessment is systematic in the sense that it requires an operational plan. This plan involves what model of assessment to be adopted, the intervals measurement should be made and the weights to be given to different kinds of assessment. The advantage of this systematic nature is that students would no longer leave their academic work until the end of the term when they would prepare for the one-shot examination by all means as it was in the past.

#### **Comprehensive Nature of Continuous Assessment**

Continuous assessment is said to be comprehensive in the sense that it focuses on the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of behavior and makes use of variety of instruments to do this. Assessment in cognitive domain includes mastery of concepts, principle and academic achievement in school subjects, Behaviours to be assessed in the affective domain include attitude, feelings and emotions of students, student interests in learning, attendance to classes, willingness to cooperate \with others in group work, participation in class, attentiveness, punctuality, leadership qualities, honesty and discipline. The psychomotor domain deals with motor and manipulative skills. The skills to be assessed include basic fundamental movements, physical abilities, manipulative skill, skilled movements and non-discursive communications, musical skills among others.

Assessment of these three domains of behavior requires that a variety of assessment instrument such as tests, projects, questionnaires, checklists, interview schedules, anecdotal records, rating scales etc should be utilized to provide holistic picture of the learners.

#### **Cumulative Nature of Continuous Assessment**

Continuous assessment is cumulative in nature because it involves repeated measurement of learners' performance, the results of which are used for final grading of the learners. This means that decisions such as promoting a student to the next class, takes

Academic Scholarship

account of all the previous performances of the student in a cumulative way. There is continuity of assessment data in that each set of data adds on to subsequent ones in a given ratio.

**Guidance - Oriented Nature of Continuous Assessment**

Continuous assessment is guidance-oriented because information obtained can be used for learners' present and future development. Through continuous assessment students' areas of strengths and weaknesses are communicated to them and they are helped by teachers and guidance counselors to remedy their deficiencies. , Continuous assessment therefore is an assessment approach which involves the use of a variety of assessment instruments, assessing various components of learning, not only the thinking processes but including behaviours, personality traits and manual dexterity. Continuous assessment takes place also over a period of time. Such an approach is holistic, representing the learner in his/her entirety.

**Continuous Assessment Instrument**

The instrument for continuous assessment can be applied to assess the three major behaviours namely: cognitive, affective and psychomotor. The cognitive behaviours has to do with knowledge and mental skills while the affective behaviours include attitudes, values, beliefs, interests, interpersonal relationship and related behaviours. The psychomotor behaviours on the other hand involve manipulative i and body movement such as writing, dancing, singing, drawing, sewing, painting and other related practical activities. The collection of information on each characteristics, behavior, activity or skill of learners may require a different kind of instrument or technique and some of the instrument can be used to assess more than one domain of behavior.

Relevant instruments used in the implementation of continuous assessment in schools, include test, project, observation, interview, questionnaire, rating scale, check list and sociometry.

Table I presents these instruments and the various domains, of behavioural objectives they can be used for.

**Table 1: Continuous Assessment Instruments and Domains of Behavioural Objectives**

Instrument	Domains		
	Cognitive	Affective	Psychomotor
Test	√		
Interview	√	√	
Questionnaire		√	
Project	√	√	√
Observation		√	√
Rating Scale		√	√
Check List		√	√
Sociometry		√	√

## **Test**

A test is a specific instrument or systematic procedure for observing one or more characteristic of a student using either a numerical scale or classification scheme.

Cronbach (1970) in Agbe and Akem (2000), defined a test as a systematic procedure for sampling a person's cognitive behavior and describing it quantitatively.

According to Oladunni (1996), a test is an instrument used to measure a systematic sample of an aspect of the behavior from which a total aspect of the behavior is inferred.

Test therefore is an instrument to elicit a sample of behavior from a respondent. It produces a numerical estimate that has quantitative meaning on the person taking the test.

## **The Interview**

Interview techniques provide opportunity for direct face-to-face interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee.

Interview may be either structured or unstructured in nature. Structured interviews use an interview<sup>1</sup> schedule which contains set of questions to be asked in specific order. The questions are planned in serial forms which are to be followed during the interview.

The unstructured interviews are limited to a number of key questions. Here the interviewer did not prepare any set of questions to be asked.

## **Questionnaire**

A questionnaire is an evaluation instrument that is commonly used by individuals to rate themselves on a specific list of attributes. It is a planned written questions relating to particular topic usually intended to gather information from a number of selected representation.

A questionnaire can be structured or unstructured. In a structured questionnaire, options are provided to the questions or statements (items). In other words, the respondents are restricted in their responses to the items.

In the case of unstructured questionnaires, questionnaire options are not en. Instead, the respondents are free to provide their responses using any format that suits them.

The questionnaires are generally useful for monitoring effective learning outcomes. However, it has some limitation which borders on the tendency of the respondent to fake his responses and ability of the respondent to understand the questions or statements.

## **Project**

Project techniques are methods of obtaining behaviour samples that are viewed as providing at one time evidence on a host diverse aspect of personality structure and personality dynamics. The feature of these techniques is that it presents the examinee with ambiguous and unstructured set of stimulus materials.

The teacher can use it to introduce some basic terminology, concepts and diagnose student personality problems. Lindzey (1959) identified five types of

### Academic Scholarship

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project techniques as: Association, Construction, Completion, Choice or ordering and Expression.

#### **Observation**

Observation is one of the methods of assessing a number of changes that occur in the individual that can not be measured with paper-and-pencil tests. It is a direct method of obtaining information about an individual's typical behaviours in a typical situation. Observation techniques are good for data collection on attitudes, habits, beliefs and values, relationships and other social behaviours. This technique enables the teacher to detect errors as they occur in the class room. However, it is time consuming and needs to be well planned.

#### **Rating Scale**

A rating scale consists of a set of characteristics to be judged and some type : for indicating the extent to which each characteristics or trait is present. It **ides** a systematic procedure for obtaining the behavioural traits and reporting : bserver's judgment.

Rating scales are useful instrument for predicting and evaluating personality, attitudes and values.

#### **Check List**

A check list is a list of personality descriptions that the teacher observes as being present or absent in an individual student. It is a prepared list of statements relating to behavior traits, performance in some areas of life, of a group of people and students and as well as prediction of performance. The basic characteristic of checklist is it provides for a simple Yes and No judgment or identification of a behavioural trait which can be judged present or absent. It is useful for product evaluation:

#### **Sociometric Techniques**

Sociometric technique is a technique of assessing the pattern of social relationship in a group of students and finding out the extent to which a student is acceptable to his or her colleagues in a given situation. Sociometric technique is a method for evaluating social acceptance of an individual student and social structure of a group. It involves making a choice of companions for some group activities. The nature of choice serves as an index of social acceptance by peers. Also the analysis of the network of choice reflects the internal structure of the group.

It is evident from the forgoing that test results, interview, observational technique, questionnaire, project, rating scale, check list and Sociometric technique provide useful information for understanding of students better and for guiding their learning, development and adjustment.

#### **Problem of Implementation of Continuous Assessment**

Continuous assessment was introduced as part of the 6-3-3-4 system of Since the inception, there have been problems militating against its I implementation.

*Okwori Sunday Abel and Ihwakar Francis Terna*

One of the problems borders on misconception. Teachers and other persons educational system regard continuous assessment as continuous testing at the el f cognitive domain only. Continuous assessment is not continuous testing of the cognitive ability of students. What is practiced in many schools is continuous testing where teachers administer tests on students on a forth nightly or monthly basis. Some schools set aside specific days in the month for what is referred to as *continuous assessment testing*. Test scores are computed as continuous assessment scores for the term or school year. This approach does not differ from the old system of assessment. The mode of interpretation does not take into account other factors that may affect the student and the learning process. Furthermore, the affective and psychomotor domains are neglected. Thus the implementation of continuous assessment seems to have derailed from the plan of operation.

There is another problem of comparability of assessment scores between classes, within schools and across schools. Some teachers may be lenient while others may be strict. There could be differences in the quality of tests and other measurement instruments used in the quality of tests and other measurement instruments used in different schools. Under this situation, every teacher would set individual standard to the extent that the same scores obtained in different subjects or school may not be comparable in terms of standard.

Continuous assessment creates heavy work load for teachers. The classes are over-populated. The over-populated classes had made teachers ineffective in their assessment thereby leading to abuse of continuous assessment by assigning marks arbitrarily to the students. Ugodulunwa and Ugwuanyi (1999), reported that it is not unusual to find a student scoring very high marks on teacher's continuous assessment and such students still scoring very low mark in external examination. It is common to see continuous assessment scores that do not correlate positively crucial examination performance.

Lack of commitment by teachers: it requires absolutely dedicated and committed teachers to make it a success. Unfortunately, with the present condition of teachers, they are not quite sure of when their salaries will be paid not to talk of other allowances. Few of them find it difficult to commit their time to the demand of continuous assessment.

Shortage of assessment instruments: Many teachers lack the skill of instrument construction. A good number of teachers lack training in how these tests should be developed and constructed. Some rely on tests only. They therefore grope in the dark and label whatever they do as continuous assessment.

Inadequate record keeping: Continuous assessment can not be meaningful unless relevant records are accurately kept for each child through out his/her period of schooling. Sometimes, teachers are too busy with normal and extra class activities that they do not have the time to cumulate all the assessments. They seem not to be sufficiently motivated to care for such details.

**Prospects of Continuous Assessment.**

Notwithstanding the problems above, there is a firm belief that continuous assessment has a brighter future for the educational development of this country.

### Academic Scholarship

- It helps to minimize the issue of examination malpractices. This is because continuous assessment is cumulative and it involves repeated measurement of learners' performances the result of which are used for final grading of the learners. The anxiety on one shot type of examination is reduced.
- Continuous assessment helps to give a true picture of the students' performance or ability. The capability of the child throughout his period of schooling is obtained and this helps to enhance the credibility of the final results.
- Also teachers are encouraged to work harder as they become relevant in the final decision making of the child's results.
- It gives for the assessment of all aspects of the child. This encourages total development of the child.
- Also equally important is that study habit may be enhanced as preparation for continuous assessment requires constant focus on the part of the child.
- It can be used to assess the performance of the teacher and subsequently the school, particularly as trend in performance may emerge.
- The out come of assessment form very vital information for the counselor. Armed with reliable data, the counselor is thus in a good position to resolve some of the educational problems of the child. Relevant information is also used to assist the child with preliminary plans about his probable occupation.
- Continuous assessment provides room for the learner to learn new materials and also relate past events to present learning.

### **Conclusion**

Continuous assessment is a method of evaluation which takes into consideration the child's cognitive, effective and psychomotor domains. It is different from old system which measures only the cognitive domain. The importance placed on this new system ranges from minimizing examination malpractice, providing guidance services, teachers deeply involved in assessment to reducing stress and anxiety in examination among others. However, there are some problems accompanying it but hopefully they will be overcome in a distance time.

### **Suggestions for Enhancing Continuous Assessment in Education**

The following are suggestion on the use of continuous assessment to further enhance the educational development of the country.

- Test project, assignments, field trip should be used to motivate students to .ad to participate in school activities instead of using them as a form of punishment which will render the assessment unreliable.
- Teachers should be encouraged to take continuous assessment seriously because it provides more opportunities as the basic for decision-making. The parents, schools, students and the community depend on this opportunity to make objective decision.
- Teachers should keep accurate records for all children, their habits and attitudes, other social and physical activities.



**Okwori Sunday Abel and Ihwakar Francis Terna**

- The federal and state ministries of education and examination boards should embark on periodic workshops and seminars to adequately equip teachers on skills of item/test construction and continuous assessment report that have been developed.
- There should be monitoring committees at the Federal, State and Local Government levels to monitor and enforce the implementation of continuous assessment.
- The examination bodies, state and federal ministries of education should work out modalities for incorporating continuous assessment results for selection, placement and certification of pupils in the country.

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