

CONTINUOUS PROMOTION OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN RIVERS STATE AS A FORM OF ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

The study described the on-going continuous promotion in the primary school system as a mal to any form of assessment. It x-rayed the assessment systems that have evolved since the commencement of primary education in Nigeria and found out that continuous promotion is the weakest among all. It rationalized the introduction of continuous promotion as a means of eliminating examination malpractice and that teachers' inputs in the assessment of pupil are crucial and cannot be ignored. It established that continuous promotion is not an effective means of promotion because its practice neglects some assessment principles such as indiscriminate award of marks, none use of marking scheme and none attendance to assessment workshops. It went further to recommend that the continuous promotion should be abolished while the continuous assessment should be revived. It also submitted that the teachers who are the assessment officers need to undergo trainings while in teacher training institutions and as serving teachers.

Measures for promoting pupils in the Nigerian primary school system have differed from time to time. The changes in the promotion strategies are introduced for the purpose of ensuring quality education. Yet no one may confidently say that the Nigerian primary school system has witnessed significant improvement in her assessment strategies. The adoption of continuous promotion as a form of assessment strategy has attracted criticisms from the public and educators in particular. Its criticisms stem from the fact that it appears to be the weakest form of assessment if compared with the ones earlier introduced. It therefore can be described as a mal to any form of assessment. To substantiate on the preceding proposition, this discussion shall be based on the following:

1. The concept of continuous promotion
2. Justification of continuous promotion
3. Shortfalls of continuous promotion
4. Conclusion and recommendation

The Concept of Continuous Promotion

The term continuous promotion is not in common usage and its practice is not as old as the formal education in Nigeria. It is used to describe the system of assessment where the learner does not fail nor repeat a class from primary one to

JSS3. It is a system practiced in Rivers State Nigeria. On the other hand, it can be described as an erroneous understanding of school-based assessment (SBA) by teachers. This is so because continuous promotion emerged as a result of practicing school based assessment. School-based assessment as defined by Ogidi and Nwachukwu (2010:26) is that which

expands the form, mode, means and scope of assessment in the school in order to facilitate and enhance learning... The assessment base is broadened to include not only the child's readiness, capacity and interest to learn. These include the subject teachers, class peers parents, relevant education agencies (such as school inspectors) and the child.

The scope of school-based assessment as described by Ogidi and Nwachukwu was further explained by Iyoha and Obayuwana (2010) who observed that the Federal Government through her National Policy on Education (2004) stipulates that the assessment and evaluation of learners will be liberalized for proper assessment of the learners progress. In line with Iyoha and Obayuwana's observation, the teachers within the level of basic education and primary school in particular view school-based assessment as that which does not require total adherence to the provision of the National Policy on Education as regards assessment of pupils nor proper understanding of the concept and practice of continuous assessment.

School-based assessment has been subjected to a lot of abuse by the teachers because it appears that most of them lack the requisite skills required for proper assessment of children. If the teachers are yet to acquire the needed skills for SBA, and therefore practice continuous promotion it means that the teachers cannot boast of producing pupils who are sound in all ramification. The abuse of school-based assessment gave birth to the on-going continuous or automatic promotion of primary school pupils in Rivers State. Continuous promotion can therefore be defined as a shift from continuous assessment and school-based assessment principles to teacher-based assessment in which the principles of continuous assessment are neglected. It is indeed a mal to any form of assessment.

Justification of Continuous Promotion

The emergence of the UBE programme in 1999 among other things, targeted at eradicating examination malpractice and offering quality education. In this connection, the Rivers State Government (2005) noted that one of the maxims for the enthusiastic implementation of the UBE programme is to sanitize the school system in order to give a quality future to our children. Following the policy declaration of the state, the mangers of the UBE programme did not see any evil in the on-going continuous promotion of the primary school pupils. Owing to this line thought, Ganagana (2005:155) noted that

the UBE by its nature and focus, avoids stern competition and has less emphasis on examinations and test. It rather encourages co-operative learning, development of virtues, mutual exploration and interpersonal relationship between educationists, teachers and pupils as an embodiment of

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a whole system. If carefully implemented therefore, examination malpractice will have no place in our primary schools in Rivers State, and in other states of the Federation.

An interpretation of Ganagana's view of UBE and assessment means that the UBE programme gave birth to the on-going continuous promotion among primary school pupils in Rivers State. From this standpoint, it means that the teacher plays a significant role in the assessment process. Continuous assessment therefore, can be seen as a shift from the school-based assessment to teacher-based assessment. Rationalizing why the teacher needs to play a prominent role in the learners' assessment, Bello and Tijani (2006) noted that school-based assessment provides a means of testing aspects of attainment which may not be easily or adequately tested by writing time-limit examination papers. Bellow and Tijani's position may justify why the UBE programme heaped the burden of assessing the pupils on the teachers. Pushing the task of assessing the pupils to the teachers is one thing and effective assessment of the pupils is another issue. Attesting to the needs for teachers' participation in assessing the learners Adeyegbe (1993) explained that

it is undeniable that the assessment of students without any input from the classroom teachers who direct learning activities is incomplete. A more representative view of the students' capabilities is obtained through teachers' a capability is obtained through teachers' assessment in the classroom than from a single-shot examination.

Going by the accounts as rendered by Bellow and Tijani as well as Adeyegbe it can be understood that continuous promotion carried out in Rivers State is an erroneous form of school-based assessment. Since continuous assessment is borne out of the principles of school-based assessment which targets at reducing or possibly eliminating examination malpractice it can be understood to possess the advantage of rendering a comprehensive assessment. Contrary to this, observations have shown that those churned out through the continuous promotion form of assessment grossly engage in examination malpractice in both teacher made test and standard test. In line to this, Nworah (2006) lamented by saying that the trend of entering universities in Nigeria will get worse as many of the products of the UBE programme begin to seek university admission. Continuous promotion therefore has not only negated the principles of continuous assessment but has been besieged with several shortfalls.

Shortfalls of Continuous Promotion

Considering that continuous promotion can be declared as a teacher-based assessment one is forced to ponder if such system of assessment may be free from all forms of criticisms. It does appear that the change from one form of assessment to another may be due to the weaknesses noticed on each of them. Therefore, it may not be out of place to examine the shortfall of other forms of assessment that had existed before the introduction of the on-going continuous promotion in Rivers State.

The missionary schools adopted the summative or end of term assessment approach. The end of term test had received criticisms from many quarters. Nenty (1991:8) commenting on the ills of such examination explained that

Since the result of the test or examination was given at the end of the term or school year, there was not much opportunity for guidance by the teacher and meaningful correction or growth by the pupils. The results of these examinations went to parents in raw score form. This makes very little and sometimes distorted meaning. Such scanty information as an overall average and the position of the child among his classmates were also given.

Submission of Nenty's position implies that the one-shot examination was not guidance-oriented, had no room for monitoring pupils' progress, an uncoordinated assessment strategy and the best was not gotten from the learner. Following the abnormalities associated to one-shot test, an improved version of assessment known as continuous assessment was introduced. The systematic assessment apart from taking care of the shortfalls of the one-shot test, it also try to attend to the problem of what to teach, how to teach it and examine it. Infact is best described as the systematic and objective process of determining the extent of a student's performances in all the expected changes in his behaviour (Ezewu and Okoye, 1982). In this vein, Hartford (2003) asserted that assessment should be classroom based aiming at improving pupil learning rather than using it for selection purposes.

The positive remarks attained by continuous assessment notwithstanding, it still attract criticisms. Some of the weaknesses as noted by Asuru (1999) are:

1. It leads to harassing the students with several tests in order to provide data for the filling of the continuous assessment forms;
2. It is time consuming;
3. Insufficient education evaluators as resource persons to handle its practices; and
4. It has the problem of comparing standard scores among schools; and many more.

To improve on continuous assessment, the school-based assessment evolved. Its evolution may not also be described as that which did not positively impact on assessment of learners. Corroborating this position, McGaw (2006) defined school-based assessment as a classroom strategy implemented by teachers to ascertain the knowledge, understanding and skills attained by pupils. He however went on to say that school-based assessment can be counter-productive when stakes are high, driving attention to only the narrow and measurable and ignoring the important but unmeasurable. Succeeding the school-based assessment in Rivers State is the continuous promotion. Continuous promotion inherited all the weaknesses of the previous one-shot examination form of assessment, continuous assessment and school-based assessment.

The emergence of the school-based assessment is traceable to the on-going UBE programme and the commencement of the on-going continuous promotion cannot be divorced from the implementation of the UBE programme in Rivers State.

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Considering the nature of assessment since the adoption of continuous promotion as a form of assessment, in Rivers State, several persons have lamented on the poor quality of the school products. Besides WAEC (1990 and 1993) discovered that teachers appeared to be more generous in the award of marks to their students in the school-based assessment than what the students achieved in the external examination in all subjects investigated. Interpreting the WAEC declaration, it implies that quality is lacking in the assessment carried out by teachers. In the same vein, Amedehe (1998) found out that both teachers who receive instructions in measurement at teacher training institutions and those who did not, failed to follow basic principles of tests constructions. This goes on to confirm that the teachers who carryout the assessment in schools demonstrate high degree of unwillingness to carryout an effective assessment. This further means that, the scores awarded by teachers in the name of assessment is unreliable. By the time a test result is not reliable or lacks consistency in producing the same result over time, the test may not only be invalid but renders the assessment process and the entire educational system ineffective and weak.

Probing into the factors surrounding the weak nature of teacher-based examination or continuous promotion, several reasons are bound to manifest. Some of such reasons are:

1. The teachers who assess the pupils do not use marking scheme. Confirming this, Bello and Tijani (2006) reported that 20.6% and 39.4% of the teachers in Ghana and Nigeria respectively admitted that they had never used marking schemes in assessing some areas of the child's development.
2. Few percentage of teachers participates in in-service training on assessment. Such trainings are the UBE workshops/conferences, shell/ELF sponsored workshop for teachers, workshops sponsored by the ministry of education and some others.
3. Teachers engage in an unplanned assessment. Okoye and Ezenwu (1982:4) noted that

in some cases the assignments are given not because they have been systematically planned as parts of the teaching and learning but because the teacher just feels that she could not do any talking during a given lesson period, and so the noisy pupils should be occupied by asking them to solve problems in arithmetic or answer to comprehension questions after a reading passage.

The manner in which teachers carryout the assessment pupils to arrive at examination scores is unsystematic and therefore purposeless. It is therefore of little or no use for promoting pupils.

4. Teachers consciously upgrade pupils scores in the bid to buttress that learning is taking place. This is so because scores are assumed to be the reflection of the volume of learning that has taken place in the child and the extent the teacher is effective. This is confirmed by Vandervoort, Amrein-Beardsley and Berliner

(2004) who explained that the quality of a teacher in the classroom is the single most important factor in determining how well a child learns.

With this at the back of the mind of teachers, the teachers are bound to award frivolous scores to the children. Indeed this is the major problem to the use of the teacher based assessment. This factor greatly contributes to the unreliability of the classroom teachers scores which lead to continuous promotion of the primary school child.

Conclusion

There is evidence to show that the changes in the assessment process in the primary school system are intended to improve on the performance of the pupils and the educational system at large. If any system of assessment after the abolishment of the missionary one-shot examination was well implemented, the primary school graduates and the entire educational industry would have been described as good. The problem of assessment in the primary school system is not policy formulation as we can see in the introduction of continuous assessment and school based assessment. However, the introduction and practice of continuous promotion or teacher centered assessment is an evil wind that would do the educational system more harm than good. Therefore, the earlier, the system puts a stop to its use as a strategy or stop promoting pupils without following assessment regulations the better the entire educational system will be. Without doubt, the system will head towards a significant improvement.

Recommendations

In view of the fact that this study x-rayed the different assessment strategies adopted in the assessment of the primary school child since the commencement of primary education in Nigeria, the following recommendations are made:

1. The continuous assessment approach should be upheld as an assessment strategy.
2. Since teachers are the operators of the pupils' assessment, they need to undergo trainings while in teacher training institutions and as serving teachers on issues concerning assessment. The UBE board, Ministry of Education and companies need to sponsor on the job training for teachers in the area of assessment of pupils.
3. To ensure that the primary school system produces the world best, the assessment process or policy should create room for pupils to repeat classes if they fail since it is obvious that not all learners can pass and get promoted at the same rate.

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