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Regenerating Classroom Assessment at the Secondary School Level for National Development in Nigeria

By

M. O. OGUNBOYEDE

*Department of Educational Foundations and Counselling,
Adeyemi College of Education,
Ondo.*

Abstract

Assessment is a vital part of successful teaching because instruction needs to be calibrated according to student's knowledge, skills and interest. Tests, quizzes, and performance evaluations help teachers identify developmentally appropriate instruction. Although we believe that the primary function of assessment is to promote teaching and learning in the classroom, assessment has increasingly become a means of enforcing educational accountability and it reaches beyond the classroom. Commercial tests are used to measure mastery of the curriculum, non-referenced tests are used to compare students to national expectations, and criterion-reference tests are used to evaluate the attainment of teacher-made achievement tests. Hence, this paper examines the roles of classroom assessment in Nigeria as a way of achieving 'National expectations' through quality educational assessment. However, the paper observed that assessment practices at the secondary school level has not been professionally implemented according to policy guidelines over the years and this could be partly responsible for the failure of the Nigeria educational system bringing about reasonable national development. Therefore, the paper concluded by advocating for the regeneration of classroom assessment as a way of monitoring learning in an attempt to produce cultured and academically competent individuals that would be able to bring about national development in Nigeria.

According to Anderson (1981), the word 'assess' means to 'sit beside' or to 'assist the judge'. He asserted that it seemed appropriate in evaluation studies to limit the term assessment to the process of gathering data and fashioning them into an appropriate form that judgment could be made on the basis of the assessment. From the above, one can refer to classroom assessment as a process of thoroughly obtaining information about how a learner is progressing through his studies, with the aim of using such information to enhance his full potentials. Therefore, classroom assessment

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could be viewed as that method of finding out the extent of what the students have gained from learning activities in terms of thinking and reasoning abilities, character or moral development, knowledge and skill acquisition.

Moreover, the Federal Government of Nigeria, in a quest for a better system of assessment, that would enable Nigerian schools produce good quality graduates, adopted continuous assessment as a mode of educational assessment at all levels of education in Nigeria. This system replaced the old system of one-shot-type of assessment through which learners' achievements over a period of timer (end of term or academic year) were assessed by a single final examination.

The one-shot-type of assessment according to the West African Examination Council (W.A.E.C, 1989) is summative in nature and becomes threatening and anxiety provoking in nature. It was noted by W.A.E.C. (1989) that the "teacher was teaching almost exclusively for examinations". The Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (1985) also pointed out that there was high incidence of examination malpractice in the system because the single final examination was so crucial in deciding the future of the students. Hence, the temptation of ensuring success by all means (fair or foul) was very high. It was also the view of the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (1985) that, since decisions were taken at the end of the year, such decisions might be too late to be of help in improving pupils' learning. The reason was that at that point in time they would be going to other classes. While commenting on the one-shot-examination, Iyede (1992) emphasized that the system was largely responsible for the disproportionate number of school dropouts. These dropouts invariably turned miscreants and make our societies unsafe to live in as a result of their nefarious activities such as stealing, assassinations, thurgery etc. Therefore, continuous assessment was introduced to reduce such anti-social behaviours as truancy, lying, cheating in the examination halls, stealing, poor attitudes to schooling, low coverage of contents taught to learners, high failure rate, teachers incompetence in educational assessment and wastage in education among others.

Guidelines for Operating Continuous Assessment Policy in Nigeria

The Handbook on Continuous Assessment policy as published by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in 1985 discusses the strategies for operating continuous assessment (Ogunneye, 1991; Lawal, 1997; Ogunboyede, 2006). Three broad levels were identified. These are the school continuous assessment committee to oversee and handle effectively the operation of continuous assessment in each school, primary and post primary schools alike. Next is the coordination procedure at the local government level and the state government levels respectively (Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 1985).

Composition of the School Continuous Assessment Committee

In a secondary school, the following people are to constitute the school continuous assessment committee:

1. The Principal or Vice-Principal (Chairman)
2. The School Guidance Counsellor (where there is one)
3. Head of Science Department – member
4. Head of Arts Department – member
5. Head of Technical/Business Department – member
6. A member of staff with special training in Test and Measurement – member
7. The Examination Registrar (if not one of the above) – secretary

Functions of the School Continuous Assessment Committee

The functions of the school continuous assessment committee according to Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (1985) cited by Abbas (2000) include:

- A. Assigning duties in respect of continuous assessment to various teachers. Such duties include:
 - i. Preparing tests for individual class or groups of classes, the committee has to identify these tests and assign teachers or groups of teachers to be involved in their preparation;
 - ii. Administering tests and other instruments;
 - iii. Preparing school summaries of tests or instruments;
 - iv. Serving as contact persons to outside bodies, i.e., each school would need a liaison officer with outside bodies;
 - v. Assigning appropriate record keeping functions to teachers;
- B. Organization and supervision of record keeping and reporting.
- C. Organization of training and orientation programmes for new and less experienced teachers.
- D. Developing a timetable for periodic assessment of students in the school. In this regard, the committee has to decide on :
 - i. The frequency of assessment – weekly, termly and yearly based on the general pattern laid down by the ministry of education.
 - ii. The different types of assessment instruments that would be used at different time/periods.
 - iii. The kind of reporting (feedback) that must be made to students themselves, parents, schoolboards, and ministry and possibly to the general public.
- E. Ensuring availability of appropriate materials for assessment e.g. tests, inventories, record books and students' folders, rating scales, observation charts and checklist, etc.

- F. Facilitating cooperative development of assessment instruments among schools in the locality i.e. organization of joint development of evaluation instruments such as tests and rating scales and including item banks(question banks).

Hence, the school continuous assessment committee is to maintain quality of educational assessment at the secondary school level (Hyland, 1993; Gipps, 1994; Wolf, 1995; Mutanekelwa, 1997; Ogunboyede, 2006)

The Present State of Assessment at the Secondary School Level in Nigeria

Ogunboyede (2006) reported that continuous assessment committees were not in existence in our secondary schools in Nigeria which made the coordination of continuous assessment difficult at that level. No wonder why Ojerinde (2000) sees continuous assessment as continuous harassment at the secondary school level. Various researchers (Ogbazi, 1989; Ogunneye, 1991; Abbasi, 2000; Ojerinde, 2000; Ogunboyede, 2006) asserted that lack of good monitoring was a major problem facing the implementation of continuous assessment policy in Nigeria.

Presently, teacher – made test or internal assessment could not favourably predict external assessment such as SSSCE or NECO because their psychometric properties were not ensured [Ojerinde, 2000; Afemikhe, 2007].

At the school/classroom level teachers are involved in various assessment practices which provide information for taking decisions about the students such as promotion, retention or withdrawal. It could be noted that, we consider classroom teacher behavior as very much fundamental to the quality of education. In this connection, teachers should not only be competent in lesson preparation and delivery, they should also be highly competent in measurement practices. Generally, teachers make or mar the education of any society. Also, efficient job performance depends much on the extent to which teachers are literate in educational assessment. Ojerinde (2000) reported that teacher made tests in our secondary schools in Nigeria lacked validity and reliability. He further reported that secondary school teachers in Nigeria have turned continuous assessment into continuous harassment.

Therefore, assessment at the secondary school level does not really portray the true academic behaviour of students as many of the students are carrying academic record which they do not deserve. According to Ogunboyede (2006), this had led to the loss of self-confidence and integrity of secondary school education in Nigeria. This is one of the major reasons why our society is full of educational illiterates who have little or nothing to contribute to National development in Nigeria. Hence, classroom assessment in Nigeria needs to be revisited so as to bring back the lost glory to our educational system.

Regenerating Classroom Assessment at the Secondary School Level

Assessment information is necessary to ensure compliance with standards. Though assessment information is varied, different approaches can be applied in ensuring that standards are maintained and possibly enhanced. In this paper, the roles of classroom assessment in Nigeria as a way of achieving National expectations would be highlighted.

Classroom assessment when properly planned and administered would:

1. Give the teacher greater involvement in the overall assessment of his or her pupil;
2. Provide a more valid and reliable measure of the child's overall ability and performance than a single examination;
3. Provide basis for more effective guidance of the child;
4. Provide a basis for the teacher to improve his or her instructional methods;
5. Enable teachers to be more flexible and innovative in their instruction;
6. Provide the learner with knowledge of his achievement in relation to the stated objectives, thus serving as a reinforcement and enabling him to take whatever remedial action that may be considered necessary;
7. Provide a useful and objective basis for diagnosing the pupils learning difficulties; and
8. Reduce examination malpractice

Standards for Teacher Competence in Educational Assessment of Students

According to the National Council on Measurement in Education & National Education Association (1990), teachers should be skilled in:

1. Choosing assessment methods appropriate for instructional decisions.
2. Developing assessment methods appropriate for instructional decisions.
3. Administering, scoring and interpreting the results of both externally produced and teacher – produced assessment methods.
4. Using assessment results when making decisions about individual students, planning teaching, developing curriculum and school improvement.
5. Communicating assessment results to students, parents, other lay audiences, and other educators.
6. Recognizing unethical, illegal and otherwise inappropriate assessment methods and uses of assessment information.

Assessment is a central element in the overall quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. Well deserved assessment sets clear expectations and provides opportunities for students to self-monitor, rehearse, practice and receive feedback. Assessment is an integral component of a coherent educational experience.

Roles of Assessment

Roles of classroom assessment could be seen by this paper among others as:

- (1) **Assessment and quality of life:** - It is the assumption of this paper that the quality of life of members of every society is significantly influenced by two factors.
 - a. The extent to which every child in the society has the opportunity to education; and
 - b. The quality of human development process in practice in that society - here comes in assessment.

Assessment has the potential to aid education with respect to both factors. According to Nenty (2010):

'an etymological analysis of education and assessment reveals a rich and closer relationship between the two process than is usually credited. Education has not been successful in accomplishing its mission of "leading forth" and "causing to develop" the potential of every child mostly because the relationship has not been effectively utilized'

It is generally agreed that teaching, especially in the low levels of education, is seen more as facilitating learning than merely transferring knowledge. That is, it does not just transfer knowledge it first of all prepares the learner to receive it, imparts the knowledge through instruction, and then follow up to ensure that it has been imparted or has been received. A teacher, in that case, is more like a farmer, who to ensure a good harvest, does not just sows the seeds, but first of all, prepares the land, sow the seeds, fertilizes and tends the crops, kills weeds and makes sure that the crops grow well. Seen from this perspective, teaching involves ensuring human growth and development through the process of instruction.

- (2) **Assessment and identification of talents:** Assessment should serve as input into the very first or initial decision about education of the child in terms of his curriculum; teaching methods; psychological considerations, for example, motivation; which skills or special interest to encourage or given special opportunity to develop. It is through assessment that the child's potentials could be discovered.
- (3) **Assessment and human development process:** Quality of life is enhanced by efficiency in education as human development process. The level of this efficiency depends to a great extent, on the quality and effectiveness in the use of assessment by teachers involved in the development process. In other words, during this actual process of human development, assessment information is generated and used in variety of ways to improve administration, teaching and

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learning, and thus to enhance the likelihood of success by the learner. Thus assessment:

- a. Provides a useful motivation, as well as a formative or regenerative feedback to the learner to ensure his progress towards success.
- b. Provides feedback to the teacher with which to effect improvement in instruction ; set realistic human development objectives; evaluate the degree to which course objective have been met; provide opportunity to improve his professional skills; and provide counseling and guidance to the learner, and
- c. Enables constant monitoring and formative assessment, through which the administrator keeps the quality of human development process on track.

Conclusion

This paper concludes with the advocacy that classroom assessment at the secondary school level needs to be re-visited; we should go back to the operational guidelines of continuous assessment and implement it appropriately. Regenerating classroom assessment requires the operational guidelines of continuous assessment to be considered. This is the only way by which we can positively transform our society.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of this paper, the following recommendations are made:

1. As a matter of urgency, the various secondary schools in Nigeria should be mandated by the federal Government to inaugurate continuous assessment committee immediately in their schools, so that the implementation of continuous assessment policy could be properly monitored at the school level.
2. The continuous assessment committee should be made to follow the operational guidelines of continuous assessment in monitoring its implementation at the school level.
3. The school continuous assessment committee should be properly guided and monitored by the Area Evaluation Office in an attempt for them to be alive to their assessment roles.
4. The continuous assessment unit of the state ministry of education should be strengthened with personnel and enough funds to adequately monitor the effective implementation of continuous assessment policy within the state regularly and thoroughly.

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