CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT: SCOPE AND RELEVANCE

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Abstract
One of the principles of evaluation is that it should be continuous. Also, it should be comprehensive in that it should consider all the contexts and situations encountered during teaching and learning. This is what continuous assessment tends to achieve. Continuous assessment has come to be recognized as a critical evaluation method in our educational system. It considers everything the child does in school assessed through test, assignment, interview, observations, examination etc. beginning from the first day he enters a given course of study. It takes care of the assessment of learning in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. This paper examines the essence of continuous assessment with a look at its meaning, characteristics, instruments used in continuous assessment, advantages as well as the problems posed with a view to proffering possible solutions to the problems. It is hoped that this contribution will go a long way in helping to improve on the current situation as far as evaluation (continuous assessment) is concerned.

Educational assessment provides the necessary feedback required in order to maximise the outcomes of educational efforts. The assessment of learner learning provides objective evidences necessary for decision making process in education. As correctly pointed out by Cone and Foster (1991) “good measurement resulting in accurate data is the foundation of sound decision making”. There is little doubt among educational practitioners about the special value of assessment as a basic condition for effective learning. The major problems of assessment of learners have been in the approaches or methods. One would wonder why a learner is taught for a semester which last for about three months or even more and then given 1 hour paper or less to determine whether or not he or she knows the subject. This is a question that has been bothering educational practitioners since time immemorial. Would a one short examination adequately assess what a learner has learnt over a long period of schooling? How would you guide 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 came up with the concept of continuous assessment. Many educational systems all over the world have adopted this approach in assessing learner’s achievements in many subjects’ areas. An assessment procedure which entails decision making on our learners and educational system in general is worthy of a close look. This paper therefore takes a cursory look at the meaning of continuous assessment, characteristics, instruments used in continuous assessment, advantages and the problem that could be encountered in its practical application.

**Definition of Continuous Assessment**

Continuous assessment according to the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (1985) can be defined as:

- A mechanism whereby the final grading of a student in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of behavior 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.

Some Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) examination boards in Britain, according to Ipaye (1982) defined continuous assessment as “a process which deliberately allows for periodic assessment throughout the course and takes into account progress towards the goal as well as success in reaching it”.

Yoloye (1984) saw it as “a method whereby the final grading of students takes account in a systematic way of their whole performance during a given period of schooling”.

According to Odili and Ajuar (1995) “continuous assessment can be defined as a method of ascertaining what a student or pupils gains from schooling in terms of knowledge, industry and character development”. It takes into account all the child’s performances in tests, assignments, projects and other educational activities during a given period of term, year or during the entire period of an educational level.

Adedibu (1988) defined Continuous Assessment as a systematic and objective process of determining the extent to which changes have taken place in the students’ performance in the various areas of educational objectives (cognitive, affective and psychomotor).

Continuous Assessments are assessments evaluations that take place over a period of time. In other words, the student is assessed right through the learning process and not only after the learning process (Answers co-operation 2011).

Continuous Assessment of learner’s progress could be defined as a mechanism whereby the final grading of learners in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor
domains of learning systematically takes account of all their performances during a given period of schooling (Falayalo, 1986). Assessment in the cognitive domain is associated with the process of knowledge and understanding.

The affective domain applies to characteristics such as attitudes, motives, interest, and other personality traits. Assessment in the psychomotor domain involves assessing the learners' ability to use his or her hands (e.g., in handwriting, construction, and projects).

Airisian (1991) described Continuous Assessment as any assessment approach which should depict the full range of sources and methods teachers use to gather, interpret and synthesize information about learners; information that is used to help teachers understand their learners, plan and monitor instruction and establish a viable classroom culture.

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 workforce readiness, and their competence in team or group performance contexts.

From these definitions, one could infer that continuous assessment is a mode of evaluation and certification of learning outcome that takes into account the learners' performances in the area of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domain of educational objectives. It considers everything the child does in school assessed through test, assignment, interviews, observation, examinations, etc., beginning from the first day he enters a given course of study. It accumulates information obtained in respect of a child with a view of using them guide and shape his learning from time to time.

In another development, continuous assessment 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 dexterity. Continuous assessment also takes place over a period of time. Such an approach would be more holistic, representing the learner in his/her entirety. It begins the decisions that the teachers and administrators make on the learners regarding end-of-year grading and promotion.

**Characteristics of Continuous Assessment**

Continuous Assessment has four major characteristics which are that it is comprehensive, cumulative, systematic, and guidance-oriented.

**Continuous Assessment is Comprehensive**

It is comprehensive in the sense that it assesses every aspect of the learners' activities. For instance, it assesses cognitive, affective, and psychomotor activities in the learner. Also, in making assessment, it uses a variety of assessment instruments like test, assignment,
examination, socio-gram, checklist, rating scale, observation and even the notes the student copies. This is a major deviation from the former practice which assesses achievements in the cognitive domain only.

**Continuous Assessment is Cumulative**
Continuous Assessment is cumulative in the sense that there is continuity in the collection and assessment of data. Each score adds to the previous ones. That is to say, assessment mode of a students’ performance at the end of the term or year is based on cumulative scores from series of assessment instruments. This characteristic of continuous assessment requires that there should be proper keeping of records.

**Continuous Assessment is Systematic**
It is systematic in the sense that the teacher should specify well in advance what should be assessed, the time of assessment, varieties, and types of assessment (class, tests, essays, quizzes, projects, assignments). The teacher should also specify the criteria for assessment. The implication of all these is that there should be a plan to produce a programme of assessment. This characteristic according to Ipaye (1982) takes the sting (fear, anxiety, trepidation, intimidation etc) out of continuous assessment. It also makes continuous assessment less random and sporadic.

**Continuous Assessment is Guidance Oriented**
Continuous Assessment is guidance oriented in the sense that it provides information which can be used to guide the learners to grow and develop in the right direction. Diagnostic and formative tests are carried out from time to time within a course of study or a programme. Such tests provide the information needed to guide the learner. It may be too late to wait till the end of a programme to collect such information. By that time, some irreparable damages may have been done on the learners. Continuous assessment provides the opportunity to diagnose weaknesses on the part of the learner in time among others.

**Instruments Used in Continuous Assessment**
Instruments used in Continuous Assessment include:

**Tests**
Test is very suitable for assessing learning outcome in the cognitive domain. Test could be standardized or teacher made.

**Projects**
These are tests given to students or group of students to be completed on their own within a given period. This can also be used to assess cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains.

**Assignment**
These are specific tasks given to students in the course of teaching to find out how much they have followed in the lesson.
Project is a larger task compared to assignment. It can be used in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domain.

**Observation**
This is watching students perform some acts to see how much they have mastered it. For instance a student could be asked to draw a diagram of the speech organs while the teacher watch to see how well the student can do that. This is observation. It can be used in any of three domains.

**Rating Scales**
This is a list containing some of the behaviours the students are expected to have mastered in addition to a scale that shows the degree of mastery. The students can be placed on the scale and ticked based on the degree of mastery of the behaviour. It can be used across the three domains.

**Anecdotal Records**
These are records kept on the behaviour of a student. The students do not know about them and when it is kept. A teacher can keep record about a particular behaviour such as "intelligence" exhibited by a student, more records kept about that particular student on the same behaviour exhibited (intelligence) by one or more teachers can provide information for future assessment. It can be used across the three domains.

**Check List**
It is like a rating scale in the sense that it contains a list of behaviour the students are expected to have mastered. Check list has no scale, it only indicates that a behaviour is present or absent. In other words, it does not show the degree of presence or absence.

**Interviews**
These are oral questions we ask students to know how much they have mastered a given task and what they know about a particular issue.

**Questionnaires**
These are written down questions for respondents to answer or statements for respondents to agree or disagree with.

**Socio-gram**
This is used to assess social relationship. It is most suitable for assessing affective domains.

**Advantages of Continuous Assessment**
- One very important advantage of Continuous Assessment is that it is guidance-oriented. Since it involves data gathering over a long period of time, it yields more accurate data reaching the teachers early enough to modify instruction. This plays vital roles in diagnosing and remedy areas of learners’ weaknesses if properly anchored in what occurs in classrooms.
- Teachers should be involved in all final assessment of the pupils under their care. Continuous assessment gives the teacher greater involvement in the overall assessment of his or her students. That is to say, it encourages more teacher participation in the overall assessment or grading of his or her learners. It places teachers at the
centre of all performance-assessment activities. As suggested by Paris and Lawton (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. Teachers will be expected to incorporate assessment into larger learning frame work and possibly to provide evidence regarding how assessment information is used to inform and guide instruction for individual learners. According to Lewis (1977), with continuous assessment teachers must embed the assessment in their instructions, score the assessments and discuss standards for good learners work with colleagues, parents and learners.

- Continuous Assessments provides more valid assessment of the overall ability and performance. This is because it takes into account all the information and data about the students’ performance before decision is taken about the Students ability and performances.
- Continuous Assessment enables teachers to be more flexible and innovative in their instruction .It enables teachers to improve his or her instructional methods. This is because it provides information and data needed by the teacher on a formative basis, to assess the effectiveness of his or her instructional methods.
- Continuous assessment reduces examination malpractices. It makes students to develop good study habits by studying on a continuous basis rather than accumulating their works. By so doing, they are always alert and examination or test ready.
- Continuous assessment assists the student to identify right early their strengths and weaknesses. They can seek assistance to remedy their weaknesses.

Problems of Continuous Assessment
The problems associated with continuous assessment are numerous. One very important one is the comparability of standard. The availability of valid and reliable test which could be used in all schools is one of the problems of continuous assessment. According to Ughamadu (1991, 1992), this problem can be attributed to:

i. Variation in the quality of tests and other assessment instruments in use in various schools.
ii. Variation in the procedures for scoring and grading of different assessment instruments in different schools.
iii The standards used by different teachers during assessment of students work may not be the same.

For example if a teacher in one school awards a score of 60 percent to a student in a subject is there any guaranty
that another score of 60 percent awarded by another teacher to another student in another school in the subject is the same? This puts to question the concept of comparability of standards. Teachers are not properly trained to carry out continuous assessment. Many of them do not have the skills required to carry it out effectively. Workshops and seminars to improve the teachers’ skills are very scarcely organized by the school administrators and government. These workshops would help to solve the problem of identifying the appropriate instrument for continuous assessment and how to use them.

There is still heavy reliance on tests on the cognitive domain of educational objective to the detriment of the affective and psychomotor domains. Apart from the skills of test construction on measuring cognitive aspect of learning, teachers should also be able to measure the learners affective attributes such as attitudes, motives, interests, values and other personality characteristics otherwise, the characteristics of comprehensiveness is far from being attained. Affective characteristics could be as important as others associated with intelligence. They would assist the teachers and administrators to understand the learners better both in the process of education and in the practical affairs of everyday life. They would help to answer questions such as why learners perceived to have high academic abilities do not do well at school. They also provide clues about the interest patterns of learners which could be used in their placement in schools of higher learning and for employment purposes. According to Obemeata (1988), it is believed that anti-social behaviours such as truancy, lying, cheating and poor attitude to work could be corrected by providing affective education in schools.

For successful implementation of the continuous assessment approach, teachers need to give tests, which means more marking. Continuous assessment makes heavy demands on the teacher’s time, initiative, patience, objectivity, diligence, resourcefulness, carefulness etc. The teacher has to be initiative in clarifying his objectives in assessing the students, diligent and careful in record keeping and continuity of records, patient and resourceful in grading and transforming raw scores to facilitate decision making etc. All these could mean more work to the teacher, more demand on his or her time and more responsibility.

Another problem with continuous assessment is the issue of record keeping. It is known that record keeping in most school is not properly carried out. Learners’ records have to be adequately and meticulously kept over a long period of time. It is observed that there is paucity of storage facilities and space. Records should be properly stored and easily retrievable. Security of the offices and whatever is stored in them is not guaranteed. It is therefore necessary for schools to carefully keep cumulative records of each students performance.

Continuous assessment is time consuming. At this time of economic crisis that is often
characterized by galloping inflation, most teachers engage in other thing which they feel is more beneficial to them. Some of them have large stores in the markets where they buy and sell. Those teachers do so in other to survive. Time in this case is very scarce resource. Very little or no time is made available for continuous assessment by the teachers.

Most government schools are over populated. Population explosion in schools makes serious demands on the facilities, equipment and materials in the school system. This has also increased teachers work load. So there is little or no time for continuous assessment. Continuous assessment is very demanding in terms of financial resources and there is little or no provision of fund in the school budget to take care of continuous assessment.

**Conclusion**

This paper has explored continuous assessment. The problems of continuous assessment were reviewed. There is no doubt that these problems have caused so much obstruction to the successful implementation of this evaluation method in the schools, hence, the following recommendations which can be very useful in finding everlasting solutions to the problems thereby, ensuring a successful implementation of the continuous assessment approach.

**Recommendations**

From the foregoing therefore, the following recommendations are made:

1. There should be established procedures and practices so as to make test valid and reliable.
2. To make the results comparable across all the schools, teachers need to be equipped with skills of test construction and administration. This could be done through teacher training institutions so that teachers are equipped with such skills as part of their training and certification.
3. The Ministry of Education should organise workshops on test construction and administration as in-service training for serving teachers.
4. For successful implementation of the continuous assessment approach, teachers need to observe the learners more keenly to assess their affective outcomes. This means that they must be professionally and attitudinally prepared for operating the system. If they are not, it may lead to merely ‘cooked up’ scores in the name of continuous assessment. Thus, teachers should be encouraged to form favourable attitudes towards the practice. They should be made aware of the requirements of the system, its importance and how to implement it.
5. To ensure that cumulative records of students are properly kept, marks books or registers for learners should be used.
6. Governments should encourage teachers by regular paying of salaries, allowances and increment when due; promotions as at when due and improved conditions of service so that they will be more devoted to their
duties and, have time for continuous assessment.

7. Government should make provisions for over - populated schools by providing more facilities, equipments and materials needed to run the schools so that continuous assessment can be successfully implemented.

8. The government should ensure that schools are adequately funded. There should be provision for continuous assessment in the school budget so as to ensure success of its implementation.

References


