

## CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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### ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is Continuous Assessment in Nigeria; issues and challenges. The paper examines the meaning of continuous assessment, characteristics of continuous assessment, rational for adopting continuous assessment, implementing continuous assessment within school, phases of data collection in continuous assessment. It goes further to highlight keeping and reporting continuous assessment records, characteristics of a good continuous assessment records, implementation problems of continuous assessment, problems of assessing the non-cognitive Domain and the advantages of continuous assessment. Some of the challenges of continuous assessment include; as teachers assessment their own students, one cannot guarantee that the standards are the same across schools. That is so because the assessment instruments may focus on different topics and grading, there is shortage of assessment instruments and many teachers lack the skill of instrument construction, because the scores obtained in different assessments have to be combined, a problem arises as these scores may not be based on the same scale and it is poorly implemented because of the absence of proper monitoring programme among others. In conclusion, continuous assessment if well implemented will go a long way to minimizing the tendency and temptation to ensure success by all means orchestrated by the single final examination.

**KEYWORDS:** Continuous Assessment, Implementation Problems, Accessing Non-Cognitive Domain, Assessment Instruments

### INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004) stated 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. The policy also prescribed the central guidelines that should be adopted by states and schools nationwide and suggested the type of continuous assessment instruments that could be used to achieve the ideals and objectives of continuous assessment.

Continuous assessment (CA) was first introduced in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria in 1977, following the adoption of the National Policy on Education. Before 1977, assessment of learners' performance was purely based on one-shot examinations usually administered at the end of the term or school year. The introduction of continuous was to render assessment school based, improve evaluation of learners' attainment by ensuring that assessment is cumulative, systematic, comprehensive and guidance oriented (Obioma, 1984). In spite of this, observations continued to show that there are problems of the effective implementation of continuous assessment in Nigeria (Okpala, Onocha and Oyedeji, 1993). With the commencement of the implementation of the 9-years Basic Education Curriculum in September 2008 in Nigeria, the Nigerian National Council on Education has approved a new National framework for conducting continuous assessment in schools in Nigeria (NERDC, 2007). There is a plan also to improve the capacity of teachers on the effective implementation of the new Basic Education Curriculum (BED) and the new national framework on continuous assessment.

## **MEANING OF CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT**

Continuous assessment can be defined as a mechanism whereby the final grading of a student in cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of all his or her performance during a given period of schooling. One of the distinctive features of the new policy on education is its emphasis on continuous assessment. The Federal Government Handbook on Continuous Assessment (1985) defines continuous assessment as “a method of finding out what the pupils/students gained from learning activities in terms of knowledge, thinking and reasoning, character development and industry. Abonyi, Okereke and Omebe (2005) also defined continuous assessment as a method of assessment in which the teacher periodically or intermittently ascertains what the learner has gained in terms of knowledge, thinking, reasoning, character learning activities using various instruments like tests, assignments, projects, observation, interviews and questionnaires. This view is not complete because accurate record of the data so generated are further filled for the purpose of providing information to parents, guardians and other shareholders in education industry who can use it to facilitate further growth of the learner.

Continuous assessment demands that the teacher takes into consideration information obtained from all source about the child. It is usually well focused by being closely related to what was actually taught. Infact, the feedback mechanism that forms part of it ensures that educational goals are attained. It requires the use of tests, observation, interview, etc to get a general impression of who the child is and what can be done to assist him/her in areas of difficulty.

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT**

Continuous assessment, as defined above presents the following characteristics:

- Comprehensive
- Systematic
- Cumulative
- Guidance oriented

## **COMPREHENSIVE**

The focus in continuous assessment is on instructional objectives, that is, all areas of learning outcomes, knowledge, feelings and skill acquisition. These technically are referred to as cognitive, affective and psychomotor outcomes. All aspects of the child are important, a variety of tools and instruments like test, observation, project, interviews are used to collect information about the child to reflect the three domains. This means that in continuous assessment, the learner's progress in a course, interests, attitudes, work behaviour, adjustment and self-esteem will be assessed and reported upon using a variety of assessment instruments. In this way, it is possible to provide a holistic description of who the child is. It is as a result of this that continuous assessment is seen as comprehensive.

## **SYSTEMATIC**

Continuous assessment is systematic in the sense that it requires concerted planning which predetermines every action in the assessment process. The evaluation instruments are skillfully constructed with specific purpose in mind. The administration of the instrument is carefully planned well ahead of time so that nothing happens by accident. Statement concerning the nature of instrument and time of testing is determined and incorporated into the teachings and scheme of work ever before the commencement of teaching.

Keeping records of all assessment data are also well planned. Thus continuous assessment is systematic in that everything happen and because they have been scheduled to happen and not by accident.

### **CUMULATIVE**

Continuous assessment is cumulative because all the assessment data about a particular student at any point in a programme from the day he/she enters into a course of study up to the point in time is skillfully kept and subsequent discussion about a child takes into account all previous discussion about him/her. That makes it mandatory on every teacher to keep an up-to-date record on every student. Any decision about a child is not based on the result of a single one-shot. The accumulated records of the junior secondary school students should guide in determining what a student should do after the junior secondary school programme. In actual fact, the records for decision-making about a child both current and previous are pooled together for such decisions to be reliable and dependable.

### **GUIDANCE ORIENTED**

The information collected about a child has to be used to guide the pupil's further development. The pupils have to be assisted to make educational and career decisions, based on their performance and interest. The school on its part benefits as the information gathered can be used to improve teaching and learning.

### **RATIONALE FOR ADOPTING CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT**

The following constitute the bases for adopting continuous assessment in Nigerian schools.

- By the end of the course in primary or secondary education, children sit for an external examination. In certifying the child, the teacher has little or no input at all in the assessment procedure. This denies the teacher the opportunity to participate fully in the final assessment of his pupils. Worst still, these external examining bodies hire other teachers to mark and grade the students/pupils work. Since assessment is an integral part of teaching-learning process, it becomes necessary that the teacher should be involved in the final assessment of the pupils/students he/she has taught.
- One-shot external examination cannot be indicative of the overall ability of the child. An assessment that takes into account the child's performance throughout the entire period of schooling will be more valid, more reliable and more indicative of the child's overall ability than a single examination.
- The summary of results by the external examination bodies does not reflect all the assignments, class works, weekly tests and quizzes which the teacher has given the children. End-of-course external examination hampers the teachers' readiness and frustrates their willingness to introduce innovations into the teaching because a final external examination does not take account of such innovation. Teachers are suppose to be encouraged to be flexible and innovative.
- Assessment has been on the cognitive aspects of the child's behaviour, ignoring affective and psychomotor behaviour such as attitude, interest and industry of the pupils. Continuous assessment procedure takes care of this problem.
- Traditional approach to assessment procedure provides scanty information. This information does not indicate much and it does not give a true picture of the overall performance of the child. Continuous assessment gives more comprehensive information on the cognitive, affective and psychomotor measures of an individual if well implemented.

## **IMPLEMENTING CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT WITH IN SCHOOL**

The National Policy recognizes that government is aware that the administration of continuous assessment within schools will pose certain significant problems to both the teachers and the educational system itself. The policy further advocated training programmes for teachers who will be central to the achievement of continuous assessment and other objectives of school evaluation programme. There is the need to design an operational plan so that uniformity in both standards and record keeping across and within schools will be maintained. Such model is necessary so as to facilitate the transfer of student's records from school-to-school without much distortion to his/her previous records. It is expected that the students, teachers, guidance counsellor, principals and stakeholders in teaching-learning setting should be considered in the administration of continuous assessment.

### **PHASES OF DATA COLLECTION IN CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT**

Evaluation data for operating continuous assessment are obtained in three distinct operational points, better referred to as phases. These data are collected on the cognitive, affective and psychomotor abilities of the learners.

They describe the learner's interest, social economic background, motivation for learning, reasoning disorder if any, the needs and the intellectual ability of the learner. Schools need these entering characteristics of the learner to be able to plan for them effectively.

#### **PHASE ONE: ENTRY POINT**

In the primary education level, only entry phase is available, that is, primary one. At the secondary school level, two distinct phases are involved; JSI and SSI. The data collected at this phases describe purely the learners interest, socio-economic background, motivation for learning, learning disorder and needs and intellectual development as well as those that have to do with the school as a learning environment that is, school administration, cultural setting, nature of teaching staff and other non-tutorial personal.

#### **PHASE TWO: PASSAGE POINT**

Data generated at this stage border on the learner's cognitive, affective and psychomotor development as well as on the teacher, the teaching and learning processes, the planned learning experience and strategies. These evaluation data provide necessary information for monitoring the smooth implementation of continuous assessment as well as on the learner's progress.

#### **PHASE THREE: TERMINAL POINT**

This phase is the final point in which data is collected on the learner. In primary school, terminal point is primary six while in secondary school the terminal points are JSIII and SSIII respectively. The data collected at these points provide information on the learner's ability, aptitude, interest, attitude and manipulative skills. Assessment at this stage focuses on the extent the planned learning experiences have contributed to a positive change in the learner's cognitive, affective and psychomotor behaviours. Variety of instruments like achievement tests, questionnaires and attitudes scales, performance test for motor skills, checklists, observation schedules, anecdotal records and interview schedule are used to collect that assessment data.

## KEEPING AND REPORTING CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT RECORDS

All these assessment records need to be meticulously organized and kept to facilitate easy retrieval for counseling and decision making purpose.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT RECORDS

The characteristics of good continuous assessment kept in schools include:

- Different types of learner's records are kept in the school. The records must be accurate description of each learner.
- The record should protect the school against litigation incase the parent become unsatisfied with the report made on their wards.
- It should be completed and comprehensive enough.
- It should be simpler, organized under theme and presented in a language that is easily understood by every member of the teaching profession.
- It should be easily retrieved for decision making, counseling and stored in locked-up steel cabinets to prevent destructions if there are no electronic storage facilities.

### IMPLEMENTATION PROBLEMS OF CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT

Some of the implementation problems include:

- **Comparability of Standard:** Comparability of standards arise from the differences in the quality of tests and other assessment instruments used in different schools. The ways and manner assessment instruments are developed and administered in various schools could present problems in scoring and grading of achievement in various school subjects.
- **Record Keeping and Continuity of Records:** Continuous assessment cannot be meaningful except there is a meticulous keeping of accurate records for each students/pupils throughout the child's period of schooling. Since these records are expected to be cumulative from class-to-class and from school-to-school, there is the need for some uniformity in the kinds of records kept and the format for keeping such records. A child with the same level of education can move from one school to another because of parents transfer from one place to the other. This will lead to the transferring the child's records from the previous school to the new one.
- **Storage Facilities:** In continuous assessment, associated with the problem of record keeping is the storage facility for safe keeping of records. Most primary and secondary are poorly equipped for such a function.
- **Unqualified Personnel:** There are no qualified personnel to implement and operate continuous assessment. Many teachers do not possess the necessary skills in developing valid assessment instruments for the evaluation of behavioural outcomes in the three domains. Continuous assessment requires the overall ability of every child in terms of cognitive, affective and psychomotor.

- **Large Number of Students:** For effective assessment, the teacher needs to spend time on each child by helping and observing. The teacher has to teach less number of students per class. By this, the teacher will teach, assess and provide feedback to the children individually. Presently the number of students per class can be more than fifty. This makes it too difficult for teachers to teach and evaluate effectively, even if they have the competency.
- **Misinterpretation of Guideline**

Some principals and teachers think that assessments are limited to paper and pencil tests and examination.

Teachers can summarize pupils score, class work and assignments to make up a grade for a given period. Teachers seem to be confused in the amount of material content that should be covered by each test. In other words, should a test cover only the materials taught after an assignment has been made or should the test content be extended to the earlier and related materials taught after the preceding tests. Harbor-Ibeaja and Nworgu (1986) reported that most teachers opined that each test should include the earlier and related materials taught before and after each preceding test. This is necessary because a test limited in content to the materials taught after the last test would not give the students an opportunity to use knowledge which has been acquired before the last test. Besides, that would not make for an effective transfer of knowledge on the part of the students coupled with the need for adequate vertical integration of the subject content by the teacher.

### **PROBLEMS OF ASSESSING THE NON-COGNITIVE DOMAIN**

Practicing teachers find it easier to assess the cognitive with paper and pencil tests rather than non-cognitive. The instruments like likert-scale, inventory, questionnaires, attitudinal scale and observational schedules needed to gather evaluation data on the affective and psychomotor domain are not really available in the Nigerian secondary schools and primary schools. It means that if these teachers must assess these aspects of the learner, they must develop those instruments themselves.

### **ADVANTAGES OF CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT**

If continuous assessment is properly executed, it should be helpful in the following ways:

- As all aspects of the child are assessed; it would encourage total development of the child.
- Since preparation for continuous assessment requires constant focus on the part of the child, study habit may be enhanced.
- As continuous assessment forms part of the final assessment of students, teachers are encouraged as they feel relevant in the scheme of things.
- The fear of failure by children would be reduced and examination malpractices minimized if not completely eradicated.
- A true picture of the child's capability is obtained as all the performances throughout the period of schooling are used. This equally will enhance the credibility of final results that students obtain.
- It can equally be used to assess the performance of the teacher and subsequently the school, particularly as trend in performance may emerge.

## CHALLENGES OF CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT

- As teachers assess their own students, one cannot guarantee that the standards are the same across schools. This is so because the assessment instruments may focus on different topics and grading system.
- It is poorly implemented because of the absence of proper monitoring programme.
- Teachers lack the expertise required in analyzing assessment information, particularly those dealing with analysis and processing.
- Pupils see continuous assessment as requiring extra work and they therefore tend to dislike it.
- Generally, classes have become too large for proper execution of continuous assessment.
- Because the scores obtained in different assessments have to be combined, a problem arises as these scores may not be based on the same scale.
- Teachers' attitude towards continuous assessment is negative as they have to do extra work.
- There is shortage of assessment instruments and many teachers lack the skill of instrument construction and they would construct poor instruments.
- The need to accumulate all assessments requires that the records have to be available. Extra work of record keeping on the part of the teacher therefore becomes the norm rather than an exception.

Other occurring challenges against the smooth implementation of continuous assessment in our schools include:

- Non-availability of continuous assessment guidelines in schools.
- Lack of induction training and refresher courses for teachers on continuous assessment.
- Truancy and irregular pupils' attendance.
- Low morale on the part of teachers.
- Incompetence in the operation of continuous assessment.
- Lack of uniformity and standardization of continuous assessment practices.
- Teachers unethical behaviour in the award of continuous assessment marks.
- Parents ignorance on the usefulness of continuous assessment.

## CONCLUSIONS

In Nigeria, the purpose of advocating for continuous assessment may be inferred from the policy statement, but other important reasons may include the need to make assessment an integral part of the teaching-learning process. It is also adopt an assessment procedure which takes into account the learner's performance throughout the entire period of schooling and to encourage the teachers to be flexible and innovative in their teaching.

Continuous assessment if well implemented will go along way to minimizing the tendency and temptation to ensure success by all means orchestrated by the single final examination. Continuous assessment if well implemented can adopt an assessment procedure that will facilitate the appropriate guidance of the learner and at the same time enable the teacher assess his own instructional material. It can also assess the totality of the learner in the teaching-learning setting.

There is a need to have completely new assessment procedure that is significantly different from the conventional one-shot final examination procedure.

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