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Evaluation In Theory and Practice

Edited by
Dr. Adenike E. Emeke
and
Dr. Charles V. Abe

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EVALUATION
IN
THEORY AND PRACTICE

A Book of Reading in Honour of
Prof. Joseph O. Obemeata

Edited by
Dr. E. Adenike Emeke
Dr. Charles V. Abe

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Published by
PEN SERVICES,
No 2, Chief J. B. Ojo Street,
Saw Mill, Old Ife Road,
P. O. Box 22649, Ibadan.

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First Published 2005

ISBN: 978-34041-7-2

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Printed by Franco-Ola Printers 08038121859, 08052621188

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The Practice of Continuous Assessment in Primary Schools

Osokoya, M.M. & Odinko, M.N.

E-mail: modupeosokayo @ yahoo. com & moniquengozi @ yahoo. com

Introduction

The ultimate goal of every pedagogical interaction is noticeable or observable change(s) in the behaviour of the learner. We often state such expected desirable changes in form of objectives. In a unit lesson for example, we always have the evaluation section. In the evaluation section, we normally state some questions with which we wish to measure the learning outcome at the end of the lesson, i.e. to verify whether or not such behavioural changes have taken place. When we view classroom interactions in this way, we see that evaluation is a very important part of teaching and learning process. Continuous assessment is an approach to evaluation.

Continuous assessment (C.A) is a method of finding out what the students have gained from learning activities in terms of knowledge, thinking and reasoning, character development and industry. It is not only assessing the cognitive changes in the students but also affective and psychomotor gains. Different types of instruments (tools) may be used to do this. The tools include tests, assignments, projects, observations, interviews, sociometric techniques and questionnaires. The information so gathered will be used to help the child in his further development. Also accurate records from continuous assessment can be used for the purpose of feeding parents/guardians with information on their wards. Continuous assessment is a mechanism whereby the final grade of a child at the end of a week, or a term, a session of primary school education in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of behaviour systematically takes into account all the performance of the child during the given period.

As teachers of young children, we should not underestimate the importance of assessment of their learning stages; as Drummond (1998) says "the process of assessing children's learning by looking closely at it and striving to understand it is the only certain safeguard against

children's failure, the only guarantee of children's progress and development".

The Nigerian National Policy on Education laid strong emphasis on the use of continuous assessment in schools. It is worthy to note that certification at the primary school level since the take off of the 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria is expected to be based on continuous assessment rather than on one final primary school leaving certificate examination, which was the case in the past. Paragraph 17 (g) and (h) of the policy document clearly states as follows:

- (g) Advancement from one class to another in the primary school shall be based on continuous assessment.
- (h) The primary school leaving certificate shall be based on continuous assessment and shall be issued locally by the head teacher of the school (FRN, 1998).

With proper conduct of continuous assessment in our schools, the threat and anxiety associated with one end of term or promotional examination is minimized, thus eliminating the occurrence of malpractices. It provides a strong base for feeding parents and guardians with information on the educational growth of their wards. The teacher can also use the results of continuous assessment to review the pedagogical progress of a child.

There are a variety of techniques for carrying out assessment in the pre-primary and primary classes. Some of these techniques include oral or spoken (verbal), written, performance tests, practical tests, home work, project, class work, observation techniques, self reporting (in form of interviews, questionnaire, socio-metric technique etc.

The assessment may be recorded in different ways.

1. Use of numbers e.g. 45% or 70%
2. Use of grade e.g. A.B.C.D.
3. Use of words e.g. excellent, good, satisfactory, poor
4. Use of descriptive statements e.g. Kola shows interests in class work, Femi can recognize letters A to K, Vivian can recite rhymes, Dammy is good at organizing things.

The practice of continuous assessment as we have been discussing should not be on the cognitive or in the intellectual aspect alone, it should involve all other forms of assessment in affective and psychomotor domains. To do this effectively, use of tests may not be enough, other means of measuring students' behaviour must have to be devised, these includes project techniques, observation techniques, sociometric technique, and engaging in informal dialogue with the children.

In order to ensure the smooth administration of continuous assessment, the class teacher, cannot do it all, he/she needs the co-operation of head teacher or the head mistress (HM) and the school counsellor.

As parents, teachers, teacher trainers and educational researchers, one wonders if continuous assessment is being practiced in primary schools as it should be.

The Problem

The study sought to find out what the primary school teachers' perception of continuous assessment. It also found out the extent to which the primary schools are practicing continuous assessment in schools. Based on the stated problem, the following research questions were answered:

1. What is the general profile of primary school teachers in terms of their qualification?
2. What is the general perception of continuous assessment among the primary school teachers?
3. Is the perception of teachers a factor of experience in service?
- 4 (a) What is the extent of implementation, with respect to the respective technical characteristics of continuous assessment in primary schools?
 - (b) How is the general implementation of continuous assessment with respect to
 - (i) Keeping of records
 - (ii) Regularity of report preparation
 - (iii) Assessment of the respective domains.

5. What do the primary school teachers expect as benefits of continuous assessment to
 - (i) teachers
 - (ii) parents and
 - (iii) students
6. What do the teachers do to help students who may not be doing well?

Research Methodology

1. Sampling

All primary schools in the South-West region of Nigeria, namely Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti and Lagos states made up the population for the study. The inability of the investigators to get research assistants to go round all the States led to the choice of four representative States, Oyo, Ogun, Lagos and Osun States. Each of these States, made up a stratum, from which a proportionate number of schools were selected considering the type of school (public/private), location of school (Urban, rural). Majority of the schools were however taken from Oyo State. This is because the State capital, Ibadan, had been the historic capital of the old Western region of Nigeria which somehow make up the present southwest geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Secondly, with the exception of Lagos, Oyo State has more number of schools than any of the other States involved in the study. Through judgmental (type of school and location of school) and random sampling techniques, twenty schools in all emerged as the sample for the study.

Class teachers of primaries 3, 4 and 5 of the selected schools were made to respond to a short questionnaire designed by the investigators. In all eighty-seven (87) teachers took part in the study. The report cards of the students of these respective teachers were scrutinized. This means that the primary 3, 4, 5 students of all the twenty schools participated through their report cards.

2. Instrumentation/Data Collection

Two main instruments were used for collection of data. The instruments are 'Observation of Report Cards Form' (ORCF) and Continuous Assessment Practice Questionnaire (CAPQ).

In the 'Observation of Report Cards Form' the observer is to rate the report card on a 6-point scale (0-5) on features of the report cards based on each of the characteristics of continuous assessment.

There are four items on features of continuous assessment. The features are cumulativeness, comprehensiveness, systematic aspect and guidance orientation aspect. A short structured interview always follows the scrutiny of report cards. The investigators asked the teachers some specific questions on continuous assessment and how they help the students they may identify to be having problems through their regular and irregular performances. Questions were also asked on who fills the section on the three domains in the report card. Some of the questions asked in the questionnaire also featured in the interview to ascertain the reliability of the responses. The structured interview items were tested on eight teachers not included in the final sample to ensure validity and reliability. Inter-rater reliability of the interview items was estimated at 0.94 with Spearman's Rank Order Reliability formula.

The continuous assessment practice questionnaire is made up of fourteen items. The items have to do with the bio data, qualification and experience of the teachers (items 1-6). Items 7 - 11 have to do with the teachers' perception of continuous assessment while items 12 - 15 are on the practice of Continuous Assessment in the respective schools and what the respective stakeholders stand to benefit.

The validation of the instruments was done using six schools, 3 public and 3 private schools. Some items were reframed and re-administered to different sets of respondents to ascertain the reliability and content validity. The reframing and elimination of ambiguous items and comments from educational evaluation experts ascertain the face and content validity of the two instruments. The internal consistency of the scores obtained from the try-out of each of the two instruments was estimated using Kuder Richardson formula 21 (KR 21), whereby a reliability index of 0.82 was established for the ORCF and for the Continuous Assessment Practice Questionnaire, the reliability index is 0.76.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data gathered was done using descriptive statistics like frequency counts and percentages.

Results

Question One: What is the general profile of primary school teachers in terms of their qualification?

The highest qualifications of the teachers were distributed as follows:

B.Sc, Ed/B.A, Ed/B.Ed	= 16%
NCE	= 72%
Associateship certificate in Education ACE	= 12%

Question Two: What is the general perception of continuous assessment among the primary school teachers?

Majority of the primary school teachers generally regard Continuous Assessment as a good and necessary way of evaluating students' ability for the purpose of ascertaining the academic status of students and to know how much they have gained from their various learning experiences.

Question Three: Is the perception of teachers a factor of experience in service?

The teachers were grouped into three; those with less than five years experience were taken as being inexperienced, while those with five to being ten years experience were taken to be moderately experienced. Those with ten years and above were taken as highly experienced teachers. It was found that the inexperienced teachers' perceived continuous assessment as a good way of giving pupils tests in a periodic manner. The moderately experienced teachers see continuous assessment as a formative evaluation of pupils' performances though they don't usually follow up the result of the evaluation for adequate feedback/remediation. The highly experienced teachers see Continuous Assessment as an extensive way of keeping students' records and close monitoring of students performance on a regular basis. The latter group too is not following up the result for necessary remediation.

Question Four (a): What is the extent of implementation, with respect to the respective technical characteristics of continuous assessment in primary schools?

The responses of the teachers show that they are not oblivious of the special features of continuous assessment, though their responses exhibit their naivety of the technical terminology of the characteristics of continuous assessment. For the purpose of measuring the extent at which the schools are benefiting (through implementing the technical characteristics of continuous assessment), the schools were rated on a continuum of 0-5, with 0 indicating no implementation (no benefit) while 5 implies much implementation (maximum benefit).

Based on this rating therefore, some average scores emerged for the schools sampled. These ratings are presented below along with the teachers' responses, under the possible categorization.

a. Comprehensiveness

- i. Continuous assessment (C.A) gives a wider view of the students.
- ii. Continuous Assessment tests both the intellectual and social ability of a child.
- iii. Continuous assessment helps to assess a child's overall performance

Rating: 3

(b) Systematic

- i. Continuous assessment helps in determining a child's consistency.
- ii. Administration, scoring and interpretation of results in Continuous assessment are standardized.
- iii. Continuous assessment must be brief, concise and not ambiguous

Rating: 2.1

(c) Guidance oriented

- i. Continuous assessment helps to make necessary adjustment before the final examination.
- ii. Continuous assessment is to help the teacher to find out the learning problem of the children
- iii. Continuous assessment saves the pupils the problem that may occur during the final examination

Rating: 2.9

(d) Cumulative

- i. Continuous assessment measures the outcome and content of teaching-learning process.
- ii. Continuous assessment gives daily, weekly, fortnightly and termly port and sessional reports. They also agree that all these periodic reports may be collapsed as one at the end of the student's course in the school.
- iii. Continuous assessment is periodical, valid, reliable and efficient.

Rating: 3

However, it must be noted that some of the statements given by the teacher could not be distinctly placed under any of the technical characteristics.

Question Four (b): How is the general implementation of continuous assessment with respect to:

- (i) Keeping of records
- (ii) Regularity of report preparation
- (iii) Assessment of the respective domains.

The Table shows the states of the general practice of continuous assessment across the schools sampled.

Item No	Activities	Yes	%	Remarks
10	<i>Keeping of Records by</i>			
	i. Parents	65	74.7	
	ii. School	15	17.2	
	iii. Students	7	8.0	
11	<i>Regularity of Records</i>			
	Weekly	4	4.6	
	Fortnightly	3	3.4	
	Mid-term	54	62.1	
	Termly	24	27.6	
	Sessionally	2	2.3	
12	<i>Rating of Student in</i>			(Class teachers)
	Cognitive	87	100	others (2.3%)
	Affective	87	100	
	Psychomotor	85	97%	
13.	<i>Assessment Tools</i>			
	Tests/Examination	71	81.6	
	Homework	9	10.3	
	Rating Scale	-	-	
	Observational Technique	-	-	
	Test + Homework	7	8.0	
14.	<i>Progress Report</i>			
	Summaries or Yearly Report	3	3.4	
	Summaries of Terminal Report	84	96.6	

Question Five: What do the primary school teachers expect as benefits of continuous assessment to (i) teachers (ii) students (iii) parents

(i) Benefit to teachers.

Most of the teachers believe that continuous assessment will help to assess their own method of teaching. It will also enable them to know the different levels of their students.

(ii) Benefit to students

Most of the teachers believe that continuous assessment will enable the student to know his or her level of understanding and the aspects he needs to work harder on; in short the student is made to be aware of his or her true picture of ability.

(iii) Benefit to Parent

Most of the teachers believe that continuous assessment allows the parents to be aware of the progress of their wards.

Question Six: What do the teachers do to help students who may not be doing well?

Most of the teachers claimed that they occasionally organize extra lessons after normal school hours to help the students who are not doing well. However there is a slight difference in the regularity of such extra lessons with respects to public and private schools. There are more of such in private schools.

Discussions

It is encouraging to observe that a total of 88% (16% + 72%) of the teachers sampled have the minimum qualification of NCE as stipulated in the Nigerian National Policy on Education. This implies that the teachers have the prerequisite professional training to teach in the primary schools. It is therefore believed and expected that the teachers should have idea of what continuous assessment entails.

From the data gathered, the primary school teachers understand continuous assessment as a good and necessary way of evaluating student's ability for the purpose of ascertaining the academic status of students and to know how much they have gained from their various learning experiences. The Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Technology handbook, (FMEST 1985) defines continuous assessment as a mechanism whereby the final grade of a student in the

cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of behaviour systematically takes account of all period of schooling. Comparing the definition with the teachers' understanding of the assessment procedure, it is clear that the teachers have basic understanding of what continuous assessment is all about. Continuous assessment though as observed by Emeke (1996) was introduced into the Nigerian educational system in 1977; it is evident that continuous assessment has been in practice in primary and secondary schools before then in a very rudimentary form. This however does not mean that the teachers are now in full support of continuous assessment practice along with its attendant technical steps.

Emeke (1999) also revealed that many teachers though of secondary schools, believed nothing is wrong with the single end of term assessment of students.

The rationale behind the use of continuous assessment in schools is to avoid determining the success or failure of a child through his performance in just one examination but rather taking into consideration his steady efforts towards the final certificate. Continuous assessment should be comprehensive, cumulative, diagnostic and systematic. If well practiced, the fear of examination will be removed or reduced to the barest minimum such that parents, teachers and students will not have to be thinking of ways by which the students could excel in examination by all means. What we find out however, from the result is that the teachers are not implementing the assessment procedure as to benefit from the laudable characteristics of continuous assessment; the highest score out of five (5) is three (3), (see answer to question four (a)). It is interesting to note that some schools visited had no report of continuous assessment. These schools could only show the investigators what looks like double folded papers where they write the students' cognitive performance in the schools' respective subjects at the end of the terms. Such schools cannot even bring out a record of students' past performances. It was also reported in Emeke (1999) that 52.50% of teachers sampled on the practice of continuous assessment in secondary schools do not use record book. The progress report summaries (see table one) are what many of the teachers used to report students' performances on a terminal/sessional basis. The teachers are aware of special features of continuous assessment as revealed in the answer to research question 4 (a), except that they are not fully aware of

the technical features of the assessment procedure neither do they understand how to carry it out effectively. In addition the teachers are not prepared for the task. In his study, Oderinde (2000) found that the schoolteachers do not perceive continuous assessment as something that could reduce examination malpractice; they would rather blame the learner and the parent. The teachers forget that if they do their own work well, a lot of positive changes can be achieved in our educational system, though this again is debatable. After all what we have as answers to question 5 point to the fact that the teachers themselves know the dividends of continuous assessment. The problems of the teachers are both psychological and non psychological in nature. Theoretically, the teachers, especially the younger ones, know so much about continuous assessment as we have it in the national policy and some other educational handbooks. The problem is that they are not ready to put it into practice. This is a common problem in our educational system, having sound theory but poor implementation. We need to appeal to all stakeholders so that we can have maximum benefit from educational theories and policy statements.

The various techniques by which we can carry out continuous assessment as stated earlier include Testing or Examination, Project, Observation and Questionnaire. The project method can be made use of in the teaching/learning of Elementary Science for example, project method as a technique of continuous assessment can measure the cognitive, affective and even the psychomotor domains. The teacher, while teaching elementary science can ask the students to carry out some activities like planting of beans in tins, either on individual or group basis. An assessment in this way must be based on thorough knowledge of the students for it to be comprehensive. It was however found out in this study that testing and examination, sometimes along with homework are the only means of assessing students. The guidance oriented nature of continuous assessment is not put into use as well, since most of the teachers interviewed agreed that they seldom follow up the students performance; about 22% of the teachers agree that they do some re-teaching only when majority of the students are not doing well. In her study (Emeke (1996) reported that about 88% of the teachers agree that they do not follow the teach-assess-reteach method as demanded by continuous assessment's techniques and administration. It was revealed that over 60% of the teachers find the process of continuous assessment cumbersome, difficult

to operate, laborious and time demanding. Interesting, too, it was found that about 85% of the teachers believed that the non-payment of allowance for the extra labour which continuous assessment entails is the major problem facing its full implementation.

Conclusion

The introduction of continuous assessment into the educational system in Nigeria is a laudable innovation nonetheless evidences abound that the assessment procedure is not totally new when it was introduced in 1977, but the innovative difference can only manifest itself if it is practiced well. Various researches have pointed out the poor implementation of this component of the 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria and this is one of the reasons why our educational system has not been relevant and functional as expected. Teachers, no doubt are strong pillars of every educational system, these teachers need be encouraged to effectively practice the continuous assessment procedure if the nation really wants to reap the numerous benefits of this system of assessment. The teachers should also be exposed to regular in service training on the effective implementation of continuous assessment. The policy, Paragraph 17 section (h) of the Nigerian National policy even categorically states that 'the primary school leaving certificate shall be based only on continuous assessment and shall be issued locally by the head teacher of the school' (FME 1998). With this in place, it shows that no amount of continuous assessment in primary schools shall be too much, and every stakeholder in the Educational industry should see to its effective and efficient implementation.

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