

JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN EDUCATION  
ISSN 119-135X  
Vol. 2 No 2 - Dec 1998

ISSN 119-135X JOURNAL OF  
RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN LIBRARY

ISSN 1119 - 135X JOURNAL OF  
RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN LIBRARY

**Vol. 2 No 2 - Dec. 1998**

# Journal Of Research in Education

Vol.2, No. 2. Dec. 1998

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## CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT (C.A.) PRACTICES IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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*Abstract - In this paper, attempt was made to give the definition of and rationale for Continuous Assessment in Nigerian Secondary Schools. The origin, concept and characteristics of C.A were also highlighted. The operational techniques and short-comings of C.A practices in Nigerian Secondary Schools were discussed. Finally, recommendations to help ameliorate the existing problems in continuous assessment practices in Nigerian Secondary Schools were suggested.*

### *The Antecedents of Continuous Assessment Practice*

In recent years, the experiences of examination malpractices and waste in education have compelled educationists all over the world -- including Nigeria to become so concerned about the undesirable side-effects of the one-time term-by-term or yearly summative test or examination. Some educationists in Nigeria have therefore identified a number of problems associated with our former system of evaluation of students' achievement in schools, some of which are listed below:-

- (1) The threat factor of single examinations is such that candidates are tempted to engage in irregular practices in an effort to pass the examination at all cost;
- (2) Single final examinations do not pay attention to the process variables in the instructional phase which determine success or failure in the final examination;
- (3) The use of single examinations to evaluate several years' work introduces a certain lack of reliability and validity into the results because unexpected fluctuations in the circumstances of the learner or the examination administration may distort results in unpredictable ways;
- (4) Assessment is mostly directed to the thought aspect (cognitive domain) of learning activities;
- (5) The reporting system whereby the raw-score and overall average are used make interpretation and comparison of results difficult. Thus, the information provided to parents or guardians is usually scanty.

The continuous assessment is therefore, the most recent development in the effort to reform evaluation in school and it aims at solving all the problems listed above.

The idea of continuous assessment as the current curricular renovation officially came into the National Policy on Education in 1977. The implementation was expected to have begun since 1980 but did not materialise until the beginning of the 1982/83 academic session, in some secondary schools in Nigeria. Precisely, the final decision to start the new secondary school system as entrenched in the 6-3-3-4 policy on education in Nigeria was unanimously taken at a meeting of the National Council on Education (N.C.E.), which took place in Jos from 16th to 19th April 1982. As a

follow-up to this decision, the Head of State of defunct Nigerian Second Republic, Alhaji Shehu Shagari, publicly launched the new scheme on the 8th of September, 1982, to mark the beginning of the 1982/83 academic session. At the initial stage, only the 41 Federal Government Colleges and 10 other states in the Federation embarked on the new educational structure as envisaged. Later, five other states joined their counterparts to embark on the new educational structure in 1984. Lastly, the other states which did not join for political reasons were forced to do so by the promulgation of decree 16 of 1985 that made the implementation of the new educational system mandatory in all states of the country. By 1985 therefore, every state in Nigeria has embarked on the implementation of the secondary school components of the 6-3-3-4 system while the Federal as well as the State Universities had been making preparations for the transmission into the 4-year degree programme.

## ii: *Continuous Assessment Defined*

Continuous assessment has been given several shades of meaning and interpretation by some eminent Nigerian Scholars. Falayajo (1981), referred to it as a system of assessment which is carried out at predetermined intervals (usually coinciding with some identifiable units of instruction or level of the educational system) for the purpose of monitoring the progress or otherwise of the students and the general performance of the education system. Bajah (1984), defined continuous assessment as continuous updating of judgement about performance in relation to specific criteria which will allow, at any time, a cumulative judgement to be made about performance upon these same criteria. Yoloye (1984), defined continuous assessment as a method of evaluating the progress and achievement of students in educational institutions. It aims to get the truest possible picture of each student's ability and at the same time helping each student to develop his or her abilities to the fullest. It is a method whereby the final grading of students takes account in a systematic way their whole performance during a given period of schooling.

Despite some slight variations in the above definitions, it can be seen clearly that some characteristics of continuous assessment are either specifically mentioned or implied in the definitions. Five of such characteristics are hereby highlighted:

### (a) *It is systematic;*

Continuous assessment is said to be systematic because it evolves as a result of judicious and concerted planning. The planning indicates that measurement are to be made, at what time intervals, and the instruments to be used in the measurements.

### (b) *It is objective;*

Continuous assessment if properly operated should be objective. A pupil's report under continuous assessment is supposed to be compiled by different teachers at different times, with the pupil in different moods and going through different activities. The average of such observations and evaluation is likely to be more objective than

that obtained by a single teacher in a snap – examination.

**(c) It is cumulative;**

Continuous assessments is cumulative since any decisions to be made at any point in time on a pupil takes into accounts all previous decisions made on the pupil.

**(d) It is comprehensive;**

It is comprehensive because all the expected changes are assessed and reported upon. Its practice does not neglect as in former case, areas of learning other than cognitive domain.

**(e) It is guidance – oriented**

Continuous assessment is guidance - oriented because the information obtained is used to guide the learners and the system as a whole.

Some evaluators – Falayajo (1981), Yoloye (1982) and Bajah (1983) believe that essentially, continuous assessment contains all the features of what is generally described as ‘formative evaluation’. It is a periodic evaluation for the purpose of diagnoses and remedial action. In addition however, it requires that results of the periodic evaluation form part of the final assessment of the individual.

Furthermore, it is intended to cover not only cognitive learning but also affective and psychomotor domains.

**Importance of Continuous Assessment**

The process of teaching and learning in any educational system is incomplete without assessment. The twin task of teaching and learning are always been assessed. Ezewu (1985) viewed teaching as comprising of three major inseparable components

of preparation of lesson plan,

- (1) Execution of lesson plan, and
- (2) Assessment

The importance of assessment may be better understood if we look at the roles of educational assessment in general. Thorndike and Hagen (1977) in describing the role of educational assessment, said; “The role of educational and psychological assessment procedures can be no more than to provide some of the information in terms of which decisions may be made. We hope they provide useful information, and provide it better than can alternatives”.

**Assessment is therefore imperative in making the following decisions –**

- (1) Instructional decisions
- (2) Curricular decisions
- (3) Selection decisions
- (4) Placement and classification decisions
- (5) Interest decisions

(6) Personality characterisation decisions

(7) For certification

It is the realization of the indispensable roles of assessment in decision making in particular and educational practice in general that made the Federal Government in the Hand-book on continuous assessment to describe assessment as an integral part of teaching. Hence, the bulk of the task of implementing the continuous assessment practice is on the teachers.

In Nigeria, many writers have expressed high hopes about the introduction of continuous assessment. For instance, there is much hope that the newly introduced continuous assessment would improve students' performance. But Yoloye (1980), made the assertion that continuous assessment may not after all do the trick of improving students' performance for many of the factors which influence learning are not controlled by teachers. Bajah (1984), holds the view that from what is known about schooling in Nigeria, the introduction of continuous assessment will increase examination malpractices at a higher level if care is not taken.

One of the major implications of the above sample of opinion and comments is that it should be noted that no experience is precisely the same for all involved because of differing backgrounds, values and perceptions.

#### *Implementation of Continuous Assessment Practice in Secondary Schools*

Continuous assessment is designed to take place on at least four main levels –

- (1) at the school
- (2) in the local government area
- (3) in the state or province
- (4) and at the national level

At whatever level continuous assessment is to be implemented, it is suggested that a committee be set up to oversee the programme. At the secondary school level such a committee should include the principal or vice-principal, the heads of subject units and the laboratory technician. In a workshop on continuous assessment, the Educational Evaluation Unit, Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria (1979) identifies the following points in relation to the work of the school committee:

- (1) receiving specialised training on continuous assessment
- (2) training other teachers on how to use continuous assessing strategies
- (3) assessing students achievement in the areas of cognitive development, manipulative skills and attitude
- (4) identifying students with learning difficulties and designing remedial measures that will correct or limit such difficulties
- (5) providing the principal with the trend of students performance from term to term or year to year
- (6) reporting to parents, guardians and others interested in instruction the results of continuous assessment in terms of student performance

- (7) revising from time to time the existing instruments on continuous assessment
- (8) developing better and more valid evaluating instruments
- (9) assessing special interests, attitudes and aptitudes of students for counselling purposes.
- (10) assigning various duties relating to continuous assessment to teachers.
- (11) overseeing the keeping of various records
- (12) ensuring the availability of appropriate records
- (13) developing a time-table for assessing the students in the school, and
- (14) facilitating cooperative development.

In order to evaluate the practice of continuous assessment in the secondary schools, especially in Oyo State, the extent to which the above points or duties of the school committee is put into practice will be used. In making judgement, the writers' wealth of experience as teachers have been employed.

To start with, school committee on continuous assessment do not exist in schools. However, what is in operation in most schools is the examination committee that comprises the Vice-principals, Heads of Department and the Guidance Counsellors; and their main duty is to draw up time-table for terminal examinations, collate examination questions and draw-up time table for the supervision of examinations. No specific emphasis is given to continuous assessment. However, there are also the organisation of some fortnightly tests given to students and recorded as 30% of the total term's work, which is wrongly perceived as continuous assessment (C.A.) scores. The fortnightly tests were wrongly perceived because teachers were not given adequate information of what continuous assessment practice is. Secondly, the tests merely tested the cognitive area of learning and lastly, the tests were not given at the end of the completion of a unit of a course but haphazardly. Revisions should be given after the tests but teachers usually dictate the correct answers and so, there is no way of identifying students learning difficulties or designing remedial measures that will correct such difficulties.

On the side of the local inspectors of education, they supply record books to schools but there is no forum for the training of teachers in the best way to fill and keep records.

Lastly, parents are only given scanty information about their children. This is because most teachers neglect the filling of the areas of punctuality of students, and that of the moral and attitudinal behaviour of the students.

On reviewing the 14 items listed under the work of the school committee, the only area they could be said to have done perfectly well is item (5), which states that the committee should provide the principal with the trend of students performance from term to term or year to year. But that is not continuous assessment of students achievement.



### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

In conclusion, what is being perceived as continuous assessment in Nigeria is never near what it should be. To really practice continuous assessment in the secondary schools in Nigeria, what needs to be done is to correct the wrong ideas of teachers about continuous assessment and to motivate them to have the right attitude towards its practice. To do this, the following recommendations are given:-

1. pre-service training for student-teachers in the teacher training colleges on continuous assessment practice
2. in-service training for teachers already in the field since most of them do not have teacher-education background. That is to say that induction course that will last for a minimum of two weeks should be made compulsory for all teachers and they should be remunerated monetarily. If possible, participants should be assessed at the end of the course and certificates be awarded to successful candidates.
3. Neighbouring universities and/or colleges of education lecturers should be employed to train ministry officials, who will now join hands with the competent teachers to train the others.
4. Regular orientation in the form of seminars or workshops should be organised for teachers on new developments in the implementation of continuous assessment.
5. A statutory continuous assessment committee should be set up in all schools as earlier described.
6. The continuous assessment committee should monitor properly the way and manner tests and assignments are administered and recorded. These scores should be used to counsel students. It should also serve as a corrective feedback mechanism for both the students and the teachers.
7. Time table or fixtures for conducting tests and assignments should be given to every member of staff in advance to enable them have their scores ready in time. A situation where teachers are asked to conduct tests at odd times of the term should be discouraged.

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