
Implementation of Continuous Assessment in Nigeria

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Abstract: *Continuous Assessment is a comprehensive assessment of the student's performance or ability in his/her cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains all through the schooling period. In Nigeria it was meant to stop the practice of using one-short examination to assess the performance of students at the end of a school programme and also to assess students' performance in cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning. For it to be effective Continuous assessment has to be systematic, comprehensive, cumulative, formative, diagnostic among other characteristics. The objectives of Continuous Assessment are to reduce the tension created by examinations and the instances of examination malpractice, to account for performance throughout the period of schooling among others. Factors militating against effective Implementation of continuous assessment could be traced to the learners, teachers and the education authorities. The following suggestions were recommended for improving the operation of CA in Nigerian schools: CA activities should be monitored and evaluation report made available by those concerned to relevant groups and individuals, teachers should give honest report to avoid misleading the students, teacher education should be CA inclusive, CA records and storage should be done using technology among other recommendations.*

Key words: *Continuous Assessment, implementation, Nigeria, examination*

Introduction

Continuous assessment was introduced into Nigerian education by the Federal Ministry of Education (FRN, 2004). Due to series of examination leakages and related malpractices, there was the need for modification of examination mode to assess the child's work continuously throughout the course and wholly certify him on the basis of this, or combine such continuous assessment in a predetermined ratio to the results of a back-up examination (Ale and Omirin, 2015). Prior to the introduction, there had been a practice of using only the end of term/session examination to assess the performance of students at the end of a term or session which Yoloye (1980) calls a one-shot pen and paper examination. Continuous assessment was introduced as a means of redressing the anomalies in the evaluation procedures at all levels of Nigeria's educational system. It was also expected that the new system would lay greater emphasis on assessing performance in other domains of learning outcomes than the cognitive. Therefore, continuous assessment as endorsed in the national policy on education (FRN, 2013) is the current method for the evaluation of student's achievement in the Nigerian education system. Like any other educational programme, there are factors militating against it and there is also a way forward. This paper will look at how continuous assessment implementation in Nigeria could be enhanced under the following sub-headings:

- Defining Continuous Assessment
- Characteristics of Continuous Assessment
- Objectives of Continuous Assessment

- The importance of continuous assessment
- Factors militating against effective Implementation of continuous assessment
- The Way Forward on the Implementation of Continuous Assessment (CA) in Nigeria

Defining Continuous Assessment

Continuous Assessment (CA) is defined as an on-going, diagnostic, classroom-based process that uses a variety of assessment tools to measure learner performance (Kapambwe, 2010). while Ale and Omirin, (2015) define continuous assessment as a function for building up cumulative judgment about a student's learning activities in terms of knowledge, reasoning and character development and industry. According to National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) continuous assessment is defined as a mechanism whereby the final grading of a student in cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains takes account of all his/her performances in a schooling period. This therefore means that Continuous Assessment is to assess students in cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. Although teachers find it easier to assess the cognitive domain, Alause (2006) states that a teacher should be able to measure the learners affective and psychomotor attributes such as attitudes, motives, interest, values and so on.

Yoloye (1984) referred to continuous assessment as a method of evaluating the progress and achievement of students in educational institute. It aims to get the truest possible picture of each student's ability, 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 systematic way of their whole performance during a given period of schooling. What this implies is that as the learner progresses in a course of study, assessment of his performance will be undertaken and the result recorded and added to his final examination result. This is what will constitute his/her result for the course. For instance in the primary or secondary school, what constitutes the termly result will be the sum of the continuous assessment results and the termly examination result. In summary, Continuous Assessment can therefore be defined as a comprehensive assessment of the student's performance or ability in his/her cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains all through the schooling period.

Characteristics of Continuous Assessment

The Major Characteristics of continuous assessment according to Olatunji, Akanwna and Nwahunanya (2004) are that a Continuous Assessment (CA) should be systematic, comprehensive, cumulative and guidance-oriented. While Maduabum (2005) added that it should also be formative, diagnostic and prognostic.

Continuous assessment is said to be systematic in the sense that it requires an operational plan, the measurements to be made of the pupils or students' performance, at what time interval[s]: the taking and filling of records and the nature of tools or instruments to be used in measurements. This operational plans are made known to stakeholders in the teaching and the learning process such as teachers, ministry of education official and parents. For instance, at the Nigeria primary and secondary school level, continuous assessment takes place two times within the term before final terminal examinations and this is known to all involved.

Continuous assessment is comprehensive in the sense that it covers all aspects of learning in which desirable changes are expected to take place which are the cognitive, affective and psychomotor. Repeated measures of performance in these domains ensure that an overall or comprehensive assessment is maintained.

Continuous assessment is cumulative in the sense that any final grading should be taken into consideration in whatever decisions to be taken on the learner such as promotion to the next class, going on to other courses etc. this require the keeping of up-to-date or cumulative records on each pupils within the school's students should be a guide in determining what a student should be a guide in determining what a student should do after completing the junior secondary school programme.

Continuous assessment is guidance oriented because it is a formative type of evaluation which goes on as the learner proceeds in his/her academic career. The feedback received from this evaluation is used for guidance purpose. The result reveals the learner's areas of strength and weakness to the teachers, parents and even to the students themselves. The teachers thus use the information to help the students solve their academic problems and also guide them to choose their career based on their academic performance for instance, if a student has shown consistence interest and ability in English language, literature, History, Civic education and government he may be encouraged to pursue course in law or mass communication (Olatunji, Akanwna and Nwahunanya, 2004).

In addition to the above-mentioned features, continuous assessment is also formative diagnostic and prognostic. Continuous assessment is a formative process. It enables teachers to assess learner's progress before the end of his course. Teachers can use continuous assessment information to modify work. Learners use continuous assessment results to improve their performance. To be diagnostic, the information obtained from continuous assessment should help teachers to identify learner's problem. Information from continuous assessment data can prognostic which means it helps the teacher or guidance counselor to be able to predict or precast learner's future performances (Maduabum, 2005).

Objectives of Continuous Assessment

The aims and objectives of Continuous Assessment are laudable and practicable despite the present realities. They are:

- i. To improve teaching and learning and to collect school based marks to be added to the final examination marks for certification and selection. This confirms the assertion by Ipaya in Ibe (2016) that Continuous Assessment is the continuous collection of marks or grade over a period of time and its aggregation into final grades.
- ii. To account for performance throughout the period of schooling. It is not surprising therefore to find teachers testing their pupils weekly, at the end of each unit or module etc To provide guidance for meaningful learning and career choice. This is true of formative assessment of the learner in all aspects of learning and educational domain. A consistent and comprehensive collection of students' performance in the cognitive affective and psychomotor all through their stay in school could aid in guiding them for choices in their career and learning. formative assessment, if properly implemented in schools, is a powerful means to improve student learning and provide career guidance.
- iii. To provide data for the choice of instructional method and materials. Proper collection and records of Continuous Assessment provides the teacher a data to analyze the needs of the learners in terms of their levels of assimilation and understanding. This will in turn inform the teacher on which instructional method and materials to apply in teaching the students.
- iv. To reduce the tension created by examinations and the instances of examination malpractice. With continuous assessment, students are provided with several opportunities to succeed as the marks are spread across domains over time.

The importance of continuous assessment

Continuous assessment is to be commended compared to the old practice of assessing the performance of an individual on a once-and-for all assessment often referred to as the one-shot' examination. The reasons in support of continuous assessment are many:-

- i. It minimizes tension and malpractice during examination: according to Maduabum (2005) it is believed that continuous assessment will reduce 'examination fever'. With continuous assessment everything done in class matters so that the student has to take his studies seriously at all times which in effect means an enforcements of good study habits. This desirable attitude will make him surer of his success and consequently less dependent on dubious means of passing examination.
- ii. Through the scores obtained from continuous assessment, the learners are made aware of their areas of strength and weakness. With this knowledge they will work harder in preparation for the coming test or examination.
- iii. It will also afford the learners the opportunity to get immediate feedback on their performance without waiting for the end of year or term examination.
- iv. Teachers will get feedback about their performance in the discharge of their duties. It will make them more flexible and innovative in their teaching as they are prone to changing their methods and teaching strategies from time to time.
- v. The learner through instruction is properly guided even in career choice. Continuous assessment does this because through continuous assessment the learner makes his career choice and weak area are taken care of in the course of instruction.
- vi. Major areas of assessment have always been directed to cognitive domain only. This involved reproducing facts, theories, principles and others that have been learnt by the child. The assessment of other domains [affective and psychomotor] is neglected especially in such difficult areas as interest, attitude and industry of the children. He is not encouraged in creativity and problem solving situations that are part and parcel of his performances. The continuous assessment that encourages the comprehensive information about the child takes care of these lapses.
- vii. A final examination taken at the end of a programme cannot show a true overall assessment procedure that should measure the learner's ability comprehensively throughout his entire period of schooling. Such assessment procedure stands to be more valid and reliable about the learner's programme than a single examination.

Factors Militating Against Effective Implementation of Continuous Assessment

Factors militating against effective Implementation of continuous assessment could be traced to the learners, teachers and the education authorities.

- i. Abuse by teachers: although teachers test their pupils weekly or at the end of each module or at an agreed period of the term, these tests are sometimes used as a disciplinary tool to check noise making, absenteeism, truancy etc. At this juncture, continuous assessment in practice ceases to be a tool for aiding learning. Ale and Omirin, 2015 would rather call it "continuous testing" which is contrary to the definition of continuous assessment.
- ii. Irregularities among teachers: in Nigeria continuous assessment is typically based on teacher-made test, which are less valid and less reliable standardized tests. Every teacher in each school assesses pupils in his class. This approach may introduce subjectivism into

- evaluation of pupils performance. For example some teachers may rate their pupils so high while other may rate them so low. Indeed, a students may pass or fail continuous assessment for other reasons than writing the correct or the wrong answers respectively.
- iii. Lack of commitment on the part of the teachers: some teachers are not committed to the course of Continuous Assessment. Some as a result of laziness and insincerity hardly operate continuous assessment of student's progress. When it is time to present any of such records the teacher would just record scores arbitrarily to students. This no longer justifies the purpose of Continuous Assessment.
 - iv. Lack of skill for test construction: a good test should be able to test the three domains of learning which covers the cognitive, psychomotor and affective. The use of the table of specification is a veritable tool in this regard. Abonyi (2011) lamented that apart from the skill of test construction, measuring affective and psychomotor aspect of continuous assessment is almost to the neglect. He went on to say that measuring the cognitive of learning at three or four weeks interval is what teachers understand as continuous assessment.
 - v. Learners also contribute to the lack of proper implementation of Continuous Assessment in schools. By not attending school regularly, the learner makes it difficult for the teacher to have a full knowledge of the student straits. Absentee students make it difficult to keep full and proper records of Continuous Assessment test more so when they are absent on the day of the test. Ifiokobong (2015) observe that pupils see continuous assessment as requiring extra work and they therefore tend to dislike it
 - vi. Insincerity and dishonesty: this is commonly found among students who do not want to write test and examinations independently. Examination mal-practice in all its forms does not allow the true records of students' performance to be known. This will adversely affect the evaluation of the true position of the Continuous Assessment Programme and by extension, affect the entire school curriculum programme.
 - vii. The education authorities who oversee and administer the activities of schools and teachers also contribute to the problems of continuous assessment implementation. Not keeping to the agreed teacher-pupil ratio in the primary and secondary schools (1:15; 1:25) is counter-productive to the programme (UNESCO 2009). Large students' enrolment in Nigerian schools and high teacher-pupil ratio hamper effective implementation of continuous assessment in most Nigerian schools. It is often difficult for teachers to effectively operate continuous assessment in classes that have student population that more than doubles its expected capacity.
 - viii. Inadequate man-power: Most often there are not enough teachers and guidance counselors in schools. These are the people who use the results of CA to guide students in their learning and choice of career but often guidance counselors are compelled to teach subjects, and teachers are so over-worked that majority of them have relapsed into operating only end-of-term or session evaluation without continuous assessment.
 - ix. Inadequate provision of materials: Very often, teachers in Nigerian schools do not have adequate material resources that are required for operating continuous assessment. For example, stationary, records and materials for safe keeping of CA resources are in short supply.
 - x. Irregular payment of teachers and guidance counselors: nonpayment of teachers' salaries in some states of Nigeria is no news at all. Promises to pay them the arrears are often met with disappointment neither does promotions come so often, and the general conditions

of service are very poor. These variables make effective operation of CA to continue to be elusive in Nigerian schools.

- xi. Poor storage facilities: in this era of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) some schools still store their records and materials in places where rain, termites, fire or vandals may damage them. This is very archaic.
- xii. Ineffective monitoring and follow-up programmes: the Federal Ministry of Education in Nigeria using has not been able to enforce the CA program as it should be. Continuous assessment data are not provided and when they are, they are not used for the final evaluation of learners' performance at terminal examinations like WAEC. Despite the limitations there is still hope for a way forward. There are factors that could enhance the implementation of Continuous Assessment in Nigeria.

The Way Forward on the Implementation of Continuous Assessment (CA) in Nigeria

The following suggestions are recommended for improving the operation of CA in Nigerian schools

- Total evaluation of the curriculum implementation Process: the curriculum process has evaluation as an integral aspect to complete the cycle. Therefore the curriculum planners should find out through relevant statistical instrument the level of success made in the implementation of approved curriculum. This will help them to know whether to go back to the drawing board or not and what to actually do on the board as it concerns the entire curriculum process generally and CA implementation in particular.
- ❖ Monitoring and evaluating the CA programme: it is not enough to introduce a programme into the system without monitoring its execution. The Federal Ministry of Education in Nigeria should be able to come with proper schedule on how it monitors and evaluates the CA programme in the 36 states of the country and Abuja. There should also be statistical records on the progress or otherwise of the programme in each state and then the states will take it to the Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and then subsequently to individual schools. This calls for proper record keeping and commitment.
- ❖ Uniformity of CA report instruments: CA report schedule for schools, LEAs and State Education Authorities should be uniform so that once a staff is trained on its operations, (s)he could do it anywhere, transfers or promotions not being a setback. This will also make interpretation and use of the records easy.
- ❖ Transferable CA report: CA report given to pupils/students should be transferable from one school to another. This is necessary to enable pupils/students on transfer from other schools to have a continuous record of their performance. This again stresses the need for a uniformed report card.
- ❖ Honesty and integrity of teachers: Continuous Assessment is about giving a true report of the performance of a pupil/student in the three domains of learning (cognitive, affective and psychomotor). This report can be used by the teacher-counselor or any other relevant personality to counsel or direct a pupil/student on his/her learning or career. When a teacher falsifies this record for any ulterior motive, the future of the pupil/student could be marred because the counsel or direction based on available records will be misleading. Teachers are therefore required to be honest and of dependable integrity on their jobs seeing that the future of their pupils/students are partially in their hands.

- ❖ Collaboration: CA should be seen as a team work where everyone has an input to make to make a whole. Teachers in their different areas of specialization, the school administration and other adhoc staff have to work together to realize a complete report on the pupil/student.
- ❖ Teacher-pupil ratio: the class population should be such that the teacher can manage effectively not only in teaching but in knowing the pupil/student one by one and be able to give adequate and veracious report on them especially on the affective domain of learning. Education authorities, school administrations and Proprietors of schools should ensure that the optimum teacher-student ratio of 1:25 and teacher-pupil ratio of 1:15 is maintained.
- ❖ CA Department and Staff: There should be CA department and staff at all levels of education ministries. The Federal Ministry of Education (FME), State Education Authorities, LEAs and all primary and secondary schools, should have staff who oversee the implementation of CA and make available comprehensive records and reports to those who require them.
- ❖ Use of CA by examination bodies: CA is not to be a mere school record, one of the objectives was to have CA scores as part of a pupil/student final scores in all the subjects for certification at the end of a school programme or course. Therefore the various examination bodies should set up CA department within their establishments and ensure that continuous assessment result is added to student's final scores in any subject.
- ❖ CA report should be total: what makes total learning going by Bloom's educational objectives are the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning. CA report must not be just on the cognitive which has always been the case but must capture the affective and the psychomotor traits in a pupil/student.
- ❖ CA in Teacher education: the course content of all forms of teacher education must have an in-depth learning of the operations of CA to equip teachers at the entry point on comprehensive operations of CA. Teachers on the job should be assisted to attend conference, seminars, and workshops in order to keep abreast of the trends in the teaching learning process and particularly in CA..
- ❖ State of the art record keeping and storage: in this era of information and communication technology, stories of how flood and fire destroyed office (CA) records should not be heard. Teachers and all the staff involved in CA should know how to record and store CA information using modern technology. This will hasten the retrieval process so that generations unborn would easily avail themselves of such records when need be. Accessibility is another benefit all involved stand to gain whence records and storage are technology driven. Such records could be accessed across the globe anytime, anywhere.

Conclusion

Continuous Assessment (CA) was introduced in the Nigeria educational system to redress the anomalies in the evaluation procedures in all levels of Nigeria's educational system. It was meant to stop the practice of using one-short examination to assess the performance of students at the end of a full year or school programme. It was also expected that the new system would lay emphasis on assessing performance of students in cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning. CA is actually laudable though it has so much factors that militate against

it. These factors are not insurmountable. The paper has proffered the way forward on the implementation of CA in Nigeria.

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