

Problems of Implementing Continuous Assessment in Primary Schools in Nigeria

Atsumbe Bernard N. and Raymond Emmanuel

Department of Industrial and Technology Education, Federal University of Technology, Minna – Niger State.

*E-mail of the correspondence author: atsumbe@yahoo.com

Abstract

Although there have been a general outcry about the various problems hindering the implementation of continuous assessment in schools, nobody seems to have come out objectively to identify these problems. Therefore this study was design to identify these problems and proffer solutions. Five research questions and one hypothesis were stated. Primary school Teachers and their Headmasters from Niger and Kogi States constituted the subjects. A 26 – items questionnaire organized into 5 categories was used. The data was analyzed using chi-square (χ^2). Findings showed that Teachers deliberately set simple C.A. test, some are overloaded with as much as twelve subjects, children cheat to pass C.A. test, no financial or material stationeries support from the Government and lack of uniformity of standards in different schools. Recommendations include adequate financial and material support, training for Teachers in special subject areas, constant workshop or seminars for Teachers. The need for inspectors to go round and ensure that standards are maintained and the need for Teachers to be properly remunerated were also mentioned.

Introduction

Continuous assessment is defined as a mechanism whereby the final grading of a student in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of behavior takes account in a systematic way, of all his performances during a giving period of schooling. Such an assessment involves a great variety of modes of evaluation for the purpose of guiding and improving the learning and performance of the student (Federal Ministry of Education, 1988).

Prior to the institution of the continuous assessment, the primary and secondary schools in the country based their assessment and promotion of learners on the result of the promotion examinations that usually came up at the end of each academic session. Through the result of such one-shot examinations, summary judgments were passed on the Childs learning and achievement.

While teachers taught almost exclusively for the purpose of passing these examination and students started with cheating of diverse sorts to pass the examinations, more daring learners, usually the more insecure student, were all out for live papers (Ipaye 1982). This was the genesis of the large scale examination malpractices which characterized the years between 1970 – 1978 in the history of Nigerian education.

Prior to this time, the idea of continuous assessment had been muted at the curriculum conference of 1969. It would seem, however, that the alarming rate at which examination leakages and malpractices gathered momentum during the decades, 1970-1980 inspired the recommendation in the National Policy on Education first published in 1977 and revised in 1981 that continuous assessment should be started for the educational programme at all levels.

It is expected that if the continuous assessment is adopted, not only will much of the current examination malpractices be largely eliminated but also more meaningful learning will result. The overall portrait of a pupil's performances can be presented more reliably, more comprehensively and more systematically.

Nwana (1979) observed that if the programme of continuous assessment must be effectively utilize in our primary schools, teachers must of necessity demonstrate the ability to construct the various instruments and employ the various techniques of collecting evidence on learner products. Above all, they ought to be able to interpret the meaning of scores and grades awarded to students in the various measuring instruments. Thus, teachers should demonstrate competences in the construction of test of various sorts, questionnaires. Checklist and rating scale necessary for assessing cognitive, effective learning outcome.

Success in implementing the continuous assessment programme largely depends on the number of other factors. Not only must the teacher be vast in the act of constructing meaningful assessment instrument, in addition they ought to be able to utilize the result of such assessments in improving the

school curriculum in the area of teaching and learning. The teachers who are supposed to employ this system ought to be interest in and committed to the programme.

Problem of the Study

The success of the continuous assessment programme could lead to improved standard of teaching-learning in our schools. For the programme to be successful the problems standing on the way to its effective implementation must first be identified and then eliminated. What are these problems? How can they be identified? On the basis of the identified problems, what recommendations can be made toward improving the situation?

Research Questions

In order to accomplish the objectives of the study, the following research questions were put forward to guide the investigation.

1. What teacher factors constitute problems in implementing the continuous assessment (CA) programme in the primary school?
2. What learner factors constitute problems in implementing the CA programme in the Primary Schools?
3. What government factors constitute problems in implementing the CA programme in the primary school?
4. What problems are associated with the collection and utilization of evidence on pupil's progress?
5. What problems of uniformity of standards are encountered in the CA in the primary schools?

Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was formulated to facilitate the analysis of data obtained from the questionnaires:

There is no significant difference in the frequency of responses identifying each of the items within each category as constituting a problem to continuous assessment and the frequency of responses holding contrary views.

Subjects

The subjects used for the study consisted of a total of five hundred and forty-eight (548) primary school (grade II) teachers drawn from Niger (243) and Kogi (305) states. Out of the sample from Niger State 130 and 113 subjects were drawn from rural and urban school centres respectively. And for the sample from Kogi State, 162 and 143 subjects were drawn from rural and urban environments respectively. Thus, a total of 292 and 256 subjects were randomly selected from rural and urban centres respectively. Out of the total number from Niger State, there were 43 headteachers while the subjects from Kogi State contained 37 headteachers. Thus, the sample effectively represented the two states.

Data Collection Instrument and Method

The researchers interviewed (20) primary school teachers and three (3) headteachers not included in the sample for information on various possible problems associated with the CA programme of evaluation in the primary school. The information supplied by them was used to develop a questionnaire consisting of 26 items organized into 5 categories: (1) teacher-centred problems; (2) learner-centred problems; (3) government centred problems; (4) problems of collecting and utilizing evidence; (5) problems of items suggested and problems associated with each of the five categories. Respondents were expected to indicate on a 4-point scale whether they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed with statements made in the questionnaire regarding the existence of those problem areas.

After the questionnaires had been constructed in agreement with the research questions and validated by 3 experienced colleagues in the Department of Education, the researcher pretested the questionnaire on a sample of thirty primary school teachers who did not participate in the study. Their responses showed that the items were not only valid but also unambiguous.

The questionnaire was administered to the sample during their hours. They filled in the questionnaire at the same time and where a few people needed some clarifications, these were made. The percentage return of the questionnaire was 100.

Data Analysis Plan

In order to analyse the data obtained with respect to the research questions and hypothesis, the frequencies of responses made by respondents for each questionnaire items were calculated. The frequencies of responses under strongly agree and agree were pooled together to stand for positive response-agree, while the responses under disagree and strongly disagree were pooled for negative response – disagree. Using the chi-square the data was analysed to determine whether there were significant differences between the frequencies of positive and negative responses. The null hypothesis related to each questionnaire item was rejected or upheld at the 0.05 level of significance. Since the analysis involved 1 degree of freedom, the special Yate's correction formular for chi-square analysis was used.

Findings

The table below summarizes the analysis of items related to the research questions and hypothesis.

Summary Table of Chi-Square Analysis of Frequency of Positive and Negative Responses to Items Relating to Identified Problems of Continuous Assessment in Primary Schools

Problem Category	S/No	Specific Problems	Frequencies		X ² at 1 df and 0.05	Significance	Decision
			Agreed	Disagree			
Teacher	1.	Some teachers set simple questions to record high percentage pass	305	243	7.02	Sign	Reject null
	2.	Teachers are reluctant to perform the continuous assessment regularly	327	221	20.51	"	"
	3.	Many teachers can not construct good multiple choice tests	217	331	23.72	"	"
	4.	C. A. makes teachers overworked	416	132	147.18	"	"
	5.	Some teachers forge pupil's marks to make up for undone tests	348	200	39.78	"	"
	6.	Some teachers repeat old test questions when they haven't covered enough ground	277	271	0.07	Not sign	Don't reject
Learner centred	1.	Pupils cheat in order to pass tests	344	204	37.77	Sign	Reject
	2.	Pupils are threatened by the tests	256	292	2.37	Not sign	Don't reject
	3.	Pupils don't understand the purpose of C.A	296	252	3.54	"	"
	4.	Pupils are psychologically depressed by failure	226	322	16.11	Sign	Reject
	5.	Some pupils absent themselves from school if they expect the tests.	291	257	2.11	Not sign	Don't reject

Government centred	1.	Govt. fails to supply equipment needed for conducting the C.A e.g.	455	93	239.14	Sign	Reject
		(a) Typewriters	448	0	548.00	"	"
		(b) Cyclostyling machines	446	102	215.04	"	"
		(c) Duplicating machines	548	0	548.00	"	"
		(d) File jackets or other storage facilities	502	46	379.45	Sign	Reject
Problem of collection and utilization of evidence	2.	Govt. provides no extra money for operating the C.A	548	0	548.00	"	"
	3.	Govt. supplies no proformas for entering grades and other records	210	338	29.8	"	"
	1.	Some teachers can't set good questions especially objective tests	492	56	346.89	"	"
	2.	Most teachers set only multiple-choice or fill-in the gap questions that are easy to mark	503	45	382.798	"	"
	3.	Teachers lack the time to correct or revise pupils scripts before test	417	131	149.26	"	"
	4.	Many teachers can't evaluate some subjects e.g. music, drama etc. properly	402	146	119.59	"	"
	5.	One teacher can't evaluate the class for all effective purposes.	267	281	0.36	Not sign	Don't reject
	6.	Some bad behaved children may not be discovered by a teacher	488	60	334.28	Sign	Reject
Problem of uniform standard	7.	Teachers lack knowledge of other means of evaluating the effective e.g. sociometry (peer evaluation)	393	155	103.37	Sign	"
	8.	Some unusual pupil behaviours are difficult to evaluate/interpret	311	237	9.72	"	"
	1.	Standards of performance vary from school to school	356	192	48.48	"	"
	2.	Teachers' rating of pupils' behavior may be subjective in favour of some people					

Sign* = Significant difference in favour of negative response of "disagree".

With respect to the teacher centred problems of the CA, there were positive significant differences (in favour of "disagree") in the frequencies of responses in items 1, 2, 4, and 5. The frequencies from item 3, was significant but in favour of negative (disagree) responses. And for item 6, it was statistically not significant.

Within the learner-centred category, the frequency of "agree" responses for item 1 was significant while for item 4, the frequency was significant but in favour of "disagree". For the government centred category, all the frequencies for all the items were statistically significant in favour of "agree" responses.

In the category of problems of collection and utilization of evidence, the frequency for item 1 was significant in favour of the negative (disagree) responses; for item 6 it was not significant; while for the problem of uniform standards, the frequencies for the two items were significant in favour of agree responses.

Discussion

The findings include that many teachers deliberately set simple C.A. test in order to record high percentage passes in their classes. This behavior may result from the fact that inspectors often go round schools to check the assessment grades of pupils. A teacher may therefore wish to convince the inspectors that he teaches so well that most of his pupils pass well. This practice is most damaging to the main purpose of the whole teaching – learning exercise. The study also revealed that many teachers are reluctant to conduct the C.A. regularly that is once every two weeks, the C.A. if adhered strictly to, makes the teachers over-worked; and as a result some teachers put down fictitious marks/grades in pupil's records to represent grades of tests which in actual fact were not conducted.

When interviewed, many primary school teachers disclosed how demanding the C.A. policy is on them. There are usually many (at least twelve) subjects that are taught and learned in the primary schools. One teacher (sometimes aided by another teacher) teaches the entire subjects to the class pupils. It is easy to imagine what volume of work a single teacher has to do when he is made to set test questions in all the 12 subjects, mark the tests, record the marks, finding the class average and positions of each member-every two weeks. While we acknowledge how tedious it is for one teacher to do all the work, there is no justification for teachers to forge marks for tests not conducted.

Within the learner centered problem category the findings show that children cheat (copy from other pupils, etc) in order to pass the tests. Yet the children do not seem to be either threatened by the tests or depressed when they perform poorly in the examinations. This situation might result from the fact that they do not seem to understand the philosophy of the C.A. clearly. Thus, because they are neither threatened by the examinations nor depressed by failure, they hardly absent themselves from school because of the tests.

It is painful to observe that in spite of all the emphasis government places on the C.A. there is no financial or other material support offered by the government toward promoting the C.A. The schools need stationeries and other equipment for effective implementation of the programme. There should be at least one typewriter and duplicating machine with substantial quantity of paper for conducting the periodic tests. The C.A. becomes useless if no provision is made for the preservation of records of tests. Thus file jackets and metal drawers are of utmost importance for this purpose – the one for keeping individual pupil's records, and the other for preserving the entire school records, especially against fire outbreak. Where the government cannot provide these, money should be made available for the procurement of the items. It is necessary also for the schools to be provided with the Performa for entering pupils' grade as well as other records of other affective, social and psychomotor behaviors. This would save teachers the inconvenience of and time for tabulating those entries constantly.

Several problems are associated with the collection and utilization of evidence. Probably as a result of the effort and time demanded on teachers for practicing the C.A. most teachers set only multiple-choice test questions or the fill-in-the-gap type that are relatively easier to mark than the essay type items. This findings agrees with the view of Akaju (1977) that most teachers go for test instruments such as multiple choice and fill-in-the-gap which does not give the true picture of pupils behavior. Although the teachers claim to be able to construct good multiple choice test item, it would seem that for a more balanced and useful learning outcomes, a combination of essay and the multiple-choice type is recommended.

Most teachers hardly find time to revise previous tests in class so that learners can learn from the revision exercises. When such revisions are not carried out, then a most essential component of the

C.A. has been neglected; otherwise, how can we guarantee that pupils have mastered all that they should learn?

Lots of subjects are included in the syllabus of our primary schools including those for which the available teachers are not properly trained to teach. Such subjects include music and drama. The result is that teachers merely fill in any marks against pupils' names for such subjects. Special teachers for such special subjects need to be brought in to teach and evaluate pupils' performance.

The respondents expressed the view that a single teacher can hardly evaluate learners' performance in many relevant affective behaviours. This fact calls for concerted effort on the part of several teachers working together in evaluating pupils' affective behaviours. Furthermore, sociometric techniques (which) involve inferring from the entire class response the popularity or otherwise or other elements of the behaviour of pupils' are not employed by teachers for collecting evidence. These and other techniques for collecting data need to be taught to the teachers, preferably during in-service training courses, so that they would be able to demonstrate competence in gathering valuable data of various sorts posted. (Unruh and Alexander, 1974).

Finally, Mkpa (1981) observed that with respect to the problem area of uniform standards, teachers believe that some schools are known for maintaining higher standards than others. They also state that teachers' rating of pupil behaviours could be subjective. In coping with the first problem, it is hereby suggested that periodic workshops should be held for teachers wherein they would be taught how to unify standards of performance in the various schools. Inspectors of education should also go round to ensure that such standards are maintained. This can be done through all the teachers of given primary school classes with a zone coming together to set and harmonize their test questions under the supervision of authorities from the Ministry of Education.

In order to ensure that a teacher's rating is not subjective; several teachers should rate children on every given behavior. Paper evaluation needs also to be effectively exploited.

References

- Federal Ministry of Education (1988). *Handbook on Continuous Assessment*, Lagos Evaluation Unit, Ministry of Education.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (1981). *National Policy on Education (Revised)* Lagos: Federal Government Press.
- Ipaye, Tunde (1982). *Continuous Assessment in Schools (With Some Counselling Applications)*. Ilorin: Ilorin University Press.
- Mkpa, A. H. (1981). *Curriculum Design and Instructional Evaluation*. Ibadan, Evans Brothers Nigeria Ltd.
- Nwana, O. C. (1979). *Educational Measurement for Teachers*. Ibadan: Nelson-Africa.
- Ohuche, R. O. and S. A. Akoju (1977). *Testing and Evaluation in Education*. Lagos: African Education Resources (Nig.) Ltd.
- Unruh G. G. and W. M. Alexander (1974). *Innovation in Secondary Education* 2nd Edition. New York, Holt, Rinehart and Wiston.