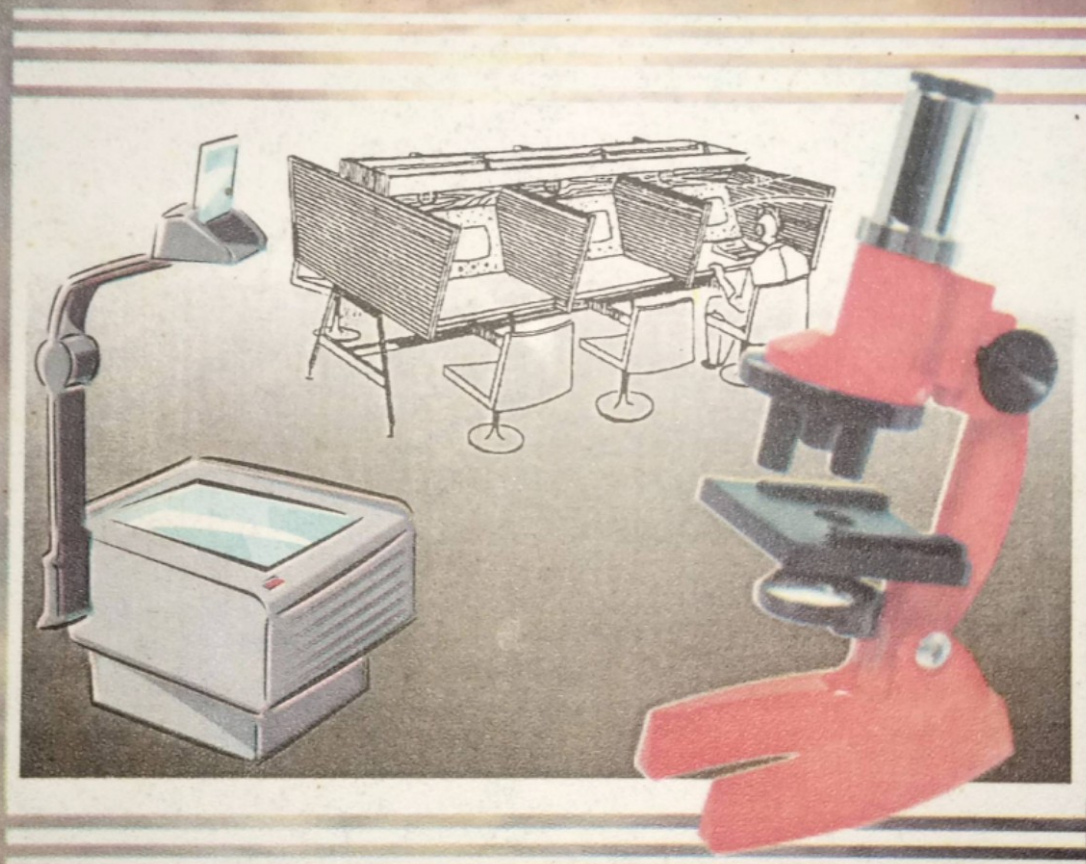


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# CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT: A PANACEA FOR IMPROVED ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

*Mrs Amina Gogo Tafida*

## Abstract

Examinations are sometimes said not to be true test of one's knowledge due largely to reasons such as the strictness of the examination venue, teacher's temperament in marking, students' nervousness at the on set of examinations, examination malpractice emerging from numerous angles etc. These problems in addition to the fact that a single examination administered at the end of a semester, term or session can not adequately cover all that have been done in the course of classroom teaching calls for the use of Continuous Assessment. This paper therefore takes a look at the importance of continuous assessment in the teaching of English as a second language. It compares continuous assessment to the traditional assessment along the dimensions of purpose setting, focus, feedback, Test task, Class management and frame of reference. In addition, it sought responses on the topic with a twenty-item questionnaire administered on one hundred randomly selected students of Federal University of Technology, Minna. One of the findings of these responses was that about 65% were favorably disposed to the use of continuous assessment. The paper also offers worthwhile recommendations for improvement in the use of continuous assessment in Nigerian educational system.

## Introduction

Educational assessment provides the necessary feedback we require in order to maximise the outcomes of educational efforts. The assessment of learner's learning provides objective evidences necessary, in the decision – making process in Education. As opined by Cone and Foster (1991), "a good measurement resulting in accurate data is the foundation of sound decision making". There is no doubt that assessment greatly influences instruction: It is an integral part of the teaching process. The major problems of assessment of learners have however, been in the approaches or methods. Learners' assessment particularly exams at the end of a learning programme or year are perceived by some as contributing to the problems in educational systems particularly in Africa. This finds support in a number of research studies (Little, 1982; Myeni, 1985; Oxenham, 1983) A content analysis of public examinations (primary and Secondary) in some countries also showed that;

- (a) There was high degree of emphasis on the achievement of cognitive skills.
- (b) Most exam items measured achievement at a low taxonomic level of knowledge recall and (recognition of factual knowledge)
- (c) There was very little concrete real life reference to be found in examination, Little (1982).

One wonders then the efficiency of an exam administered in just two to three hours after one to six years of study. In Nigeria, this is true of examination bodies like WAEC, Grade II, Junior graduates at Manchester University, 72% expressed a preference for assessment being carried out by course work and unseen examination.

Only 8.6% would opt for assessment by exam only. Kellaghan (1992), With exams only, students complain of constant anxiety that reached panic levels due to time constraint, inability to think clearly which results in severe organizational problems as well as general feeling of under



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**Puhl (1997), has Provided the Following as Contrast Between the Traditional Assessment and Continuous Classroom Assessment.**

DIMENSION	TRADITIONAL	CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT
Purpose of test	Summative It "Sums up" what has been happening.	Formative: It generates input to inform and guide teaching
Focus	Judgmental: forces learners to study.	Development: diagnostic: directs instructional attention.
	Teacher created activity. Heavy on memorization.	Process of instruction learner – created activity heavy. on thinking, integration.
Feedback	De-conceptualized, a score or mark, final, no changing it	Holistic A range of comments from peers, teachers; happens during the process while still time to change.
Test Task	Typically written work medium: paper and pencil marrow focus	Typically range of tasks multi media multi dimensional Authentic (red life tasks for now)
	Formal	Informal
Class management	Instructive: interns class process one – shot only on chance to show competence results need to be determined. Books closed	Integrated; part of class routine. Over time; Chance to revise, improve, and feed back comes reference quickly available.
	Norm Reference learners compared against norms based on other test takers	Criterion Reference: learner compared against speafied criteria for achievement.
Frame of Reference		

This paper also administered twenty-item questionnaire to one hundred level student of Federal University of Technology, Minna, who do English as one of their courses.

A total number of one hundred randomly selected students were used for this study. The aim of this was to find out their views on the use of continuous assessment in their institution. The feedback from this study is to picture what obtains in other higher institutions in Nigeria in relation to the use of Continuous Assessment. Accordingly, the paper seeks to find answers to the following questions.

1. What role does continuous assessment pay in enhancing students' performance in English?
2. What role does continuous Assessment play in assisting the students to identify their problems in English Language?
3. To what extent does large classes impact on students' performance
4. What forms of Continuous Assessment are students exposed to in learning English as a second language?
5. How frequent are students exposed to Continuous Assessment tests and what percentage of the total English score does Continuous Assessment constitute?
6. How serious does the students take continuous Assessment tests?



*Continuous Assessment: A Panacea for Improved Academic Performance in English Language*

that might go with them. The child learns the rules several times and work with words and sentences so as to be familiar with them. At the end, of this, his knowledge and understanding of this practice could be determined through the use of continuous assessment in forms of assignments, class work, quiz, test etc. All these will make the child to be in control of the language. He becomes fluent in the language and less afraid of end of term or end of the year examination. This will also help to reduce the problem of examination malpractice. This is because, if assessment is based only on exams (e.g. WAEC, G.C.E.) such exams would be so crucial in deciding the future of the candidate and the temptation to ensure success by all means would be very high but with continuous assessment such temptation would be reduced.

Continuous assessment also offers a way to cater for the diversity of learners in the language class. Diversity as a result of sociological factors such as mother tongue difference, culture, and place of origin, as well as individual factors, such as differing abilities, interests and motivations, which arise in most classes, no matter how homogeneous students are grouped. Assessment can be done in various ways, and learners can select the approaches that suit their interests and abilities. For example, in outhning a reading passage on transportation in Nigeria, one leaner may relate ideas in a flow chart another may use annotated drawings, and a third may use key phrases in point form while others may dramatize it Puhl (1997).

Continuous assessment also helps to minimize the problem of teaching English in large classes, because it allows learners to be assessed in groups as well as individually. The group process it self can become part of the content to be assessed and since learning is social in nature; effective participation in class groups is known to bring about learning, and the ability to work as a cooperative team member is an essential skill not only for the class but also for enabling people to contribute to the society.



achievement and dissatisfaction at the style produced. It is also very difficult to grade a learner who took ill and could not write the final examination. In an ESL situation, It is also difficult if not impossible to teach and assess English with only a final examination.

The use of several forms of assessments such as assignments, tests, class work, etc would go a long way to ensure a worthwhile English as a second language classroom. The solution to the problem above is the use of continuous assessment. In Nigeria, of more than 400 different ethnic groups and languages, the use of continuous assessment in English as a second language is inevitable.

### **What is Continuous Assessment?**

Continuous assessment is defined as a method of finding out what the pupils have gained from learning activities in terms of knowledge, thinking and reasoning, character development and industry. Various tools such as test, assignments, projects, observations, interviews, and questionnaires may be used to find out the outcomes of these learning activities. The quota obtained will then be used to aid his development Airasian (1991) also describes continuous assessment as an assessment approach which should depict the full range of sources and methods teachers use to gather, interpret and synthesise information about learners; information that is used to help teachers understand their learners, plan and monitor instruction and establish a viable classroom culture. On their own, Baker and stites (1991), Opined that continuous assessment should involve a formal assessment of learners' affective characteristics and motivation, in which they will need to demonstrate their commitment to tasks over time, their work – force readiness and their competence in team or group performance contexts.

From these definitions, one could infer that continuous assessment is an assessment approach which involves the use of a variety of assessment instruments, assessing various components of learning, not only the thinking processes but including behaviours, personality traits and manual dexterity. Such an approach would be more holistic representing the learner in his/her entirety. It will begin with the decisions that the teachers perform on the first day of school and end with the decisions that the teachers and administrators make on the learners regarding end of – year grading and promotion.

The Nigeria policy on Education (1997), also stressed the importance of continuous assessment at all levels of education. On the universities and other institutions, the policy states in paragraph four that, the universities and other institutions of higher learning will also be required to reconsider the practice where by, Examination performance in a limited number of papers determines the grading of graduates and to explore ways of introducing an element of continuous evaluation.

### **Continuous Assessment and Student's Performance in English Language**

The use of continuous assessment is very vital for it among others reinforces learning in Nigerian situation. Babatude (1998:189) says, "It serves the twin function of being an actual teaching device and a teaching reinforcement. In Nigerian situation where English is our official language and language of instruction at schools, the use of continuous assessment where by the various segments of language taught is assessed is of immense value. This is because language teaching involves inculcating relevant skills in the learners to enable him use the language effectively in a meaningful and communicative situations' Continuous assessment is necessary to ensure that the right skills are inculcated.

This assessment enables the teacher to know his students and do a self assessment of the instructional methods that would necessitate innovations in his teaching, English language teaching just like teaching other languages requires constant practice of the language rules as well as exercises



3. Continuous Assessment is very important as it helps students and teachers to identify their problem areas in the course of teaching and learning. It also minimizes examination malpractice.
4. That continuous assessment also enhances students' academic performance in not only English language but also in other subjects of the school curriculum

#### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are necessary for the use of Continuous Assessment in our schools.

1. The use of Continuous Assessment should be upheld at all levels of education
2. Continuous Assessment should constitute 40% of the total examination score for a semester or term. This should be the same irrespective of the level of education.
3. The national examining bodies such as WAEC, NECO, TC II etc should also make use of continuous Assessment to account for their candidates' final scores.
4. Activities given as continuous Assessment should be varied e.g. tests assignments, classwork, quiz etc. This will take care of the individual differences in the class.
5. Questions given as continuous assessment should not be at student's frustration level but those that actually engage them and encourage effective teaching and learning.
6. Teachers should adequately address the problem areas identified through the tests and assignments given to the students to enhance participation and understanding during teaching and learning process.
7. Teachers of English as a second language should be committed and give numerous forms of assessment irrespective of class size so as to enhance the students' use of the language.

#### **Conclusion**

This study was embarked upon to find out how continuous assessment facilitates student' academic performance in English language. This was successfully done after a thorough review of related literature and administration of questionnaires to randomly selected number of student. The findings of this study answered the question set out in this study. It is therefore, the prayer of the researcher that the use of continuous assessment should not be limited to the tertiary Institutions but all levels of education. This is because, transformation of assessment is essential to the transformation of curriculum. Continuous Assessment in English Language is one response to new global realities as they shape the classroom. We need to keep finding and researching creative and authentic ways to make the development of our learners – students, the primary focus of the assessment process.

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**Table 5**  
**Responses on Levels of Students' Seriousness to Continuous Assessment**

Levels	Frequency	Percentage
Very Serious	75	75%
Serious	20	20%
Not serious	05	05%

The table above shows, that 95% of the respondents said they took continuous assessment serious. From this 95%, 75% saw it as very serious. The remaining 05% said they did not take continuous assessment serious. It is then clear from the result that majority of the students are aware of the importance of continuous assessment because it is supposed to provide for 40% of the total score for the semester.

**Table 6**  
**Students' responses on Whether CA ests Help them to Identify their Problem Areas in English Language.**

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	76	76%
No	24	24%

From the table, 76% agreed that the marked continuous assessment scripts given to them enabled them to identify areas where they had problems while 24% did not agree.

**Table 7**  
**Continuous Assessment Minimizes Examination Malpractice.**

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	67	67%
No	33	33%

67% agreed that CA helped to minimize examination malpractice while 33% did not agree with the assumption.

**Table 8**  
**On whether Continuous Assessment Improve their Academic Performance**

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	91	91%
No	09	09%

From the table, 91% agreed that continuous assessment helped to improve their academic performance while 09% did not see any improvement in that direction.

**Summary of Findings**

From the results presented in this paper, the following findings have been made.

1. Continuous Assessment is taken very seriously by students as it constitutes about 40% of their total score for the semester or session.
2. Students are exposed to different tests, assignment, quiz, classwork etc. which make up the continuous assessment. This enhances their academic exercise.



**Table 2**

**Students Response on the forms of Assessments they are Exposed to**

Forms	Frequency	Percentage
Test	25	25%
Assignment	20	20%
Class work	15	15%
Quiz	05	05%
Two of the above	35	35%

The table reveals that about 25% of the students claimed their continuous assessment was based only on test, 20% on assignment and 15% on class work only 05% of the students claimed they did quiz while 35% said they did two different forms of assessment in a semester. Ideally, Continuous assessment is supposed to be varied in nature so that students' intelligence is well assessed.

**Table 3**

**Students Responses on the Number of times they are Exposed to Continuous Assessment Tests in a Semester.**

Times	Frequency	Percentage
Once	45	45%
Twice	35	35%
Thrice	20	20%

The table above shows the students response on how frequent they were exposed to continuous assessment test. 45% claimed they did it once, 35% maintained twice while 20% said they did it thrice in a semester. The fact that 45% claimed they had it once in a semester might be as a result of the large class size which characterizes the teaching of English in Nigeria, as teachers would find it difficult to assess students' works if given many exercises which needed to be assessed. Teachers should therefore, design a means of knowing what the students performance in these exercises are, the class size notwithstanding.

**Table 4**

**Students' Responses on the Impact of Large Size in Assessing their Tests and Assignments**

Positive	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	35	32%
Negative	68	68%

Form the table, 68% claimed that large class size had negative impact in assessing their continuous assessment Tests and Assignments while 32% claimed it had positive impact.



7. How has the use of continuous Assessment helped to minimize examination malpractice?

After the responses, the questionnaires were collected, organized and analysed using frequency of scores and percentages. The results were later presented in percentages to facilitate easier analysis and interpretation. The formula for the percentage was:

$$\frac{F \times 100}{N} = \%$$

Where:

F = Frequency (The number of responses to an item)

N = The total number of expected responses.

% = The percentages of all the correct and wrong responses for a particular question.

### Data Analysis

A total number of twenty questions were administered on one hundred, 100 level students of Federal University of Technology, Minna. This was aimed at finding out their views on the use continuous assessment in English language teaching. The questions asked embraced the following aspects of Continuous Assessment.

1. Whether continuous Assessment is important to their studies.
2. The forms of continuous Assessment given.
3. The number of times students are given Continuous Assessment in a semester.
4. The percentage of total score allocated to Continuous Assessment in a semester
5. How satisfied the students were with the questions given as Continuous Assessment.
6. Whether the forms of Assessment given are graded and how satisfied they are with the grading system.
7. Whether the assessment assisted in identifying their problem areas.
8. Whether large class has any negative impact on the grading system of their assessments.
9. And, whether students take continuous assessment very serious or other wise and so would want it abolished.

A theoretical review of literature on the importance of continuous assessment in our schools in the previous chapters and an analysis of the data collected from the responses would enable the researcher to answer the questions earlier asked in this paper.

### Results

**Table 1**

**Students' Responses to how Important is Continuous Assessment to their Studies**

Level of Importance	Frequency	Percentage
Very Important	65	65%
Important	25	25%
Not Important	10	10%

From table I above, 90% of the student see continuous assessment as important to their studies because 65% considered it was very important and 25% said important. Only 10% did not see the importance of Continuous assessment to their studies.



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