

ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY EVALUATION

Issues in Contemporary Evaluation

Edited by

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Olajide Olorunnisola
Adams Otuoze U. Onuka
Oyebamiji Babalola
Aderemi I. Alarape
S. A. Babarinde

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Chapter 6

Continuous Assessment: Concept, Practices and Tools

Monica N. Odinko

Introduction

Assessment should be an integral part of any teaching and learning process: This accords the learner and the teacher the opportunity of knowing how far the expected learning outcomes in any course of instruction have been attained. The National policy on Education in Nigeria approved in 1979 has directed that continuous assessment (C.A. as it is popularly called) be used at all educational levels for the evaluation of students. This indicates that every teacher from early childhood level through the university should understand and practice it. At the higher education level, the policy stipulates that:

'the universities and other institutions of higher learning will also be required to reconsider the practice whereby examination performance in a limited number of papers determines the grading of graduates, and to explore ways of introducing an element of continuous evaluation' (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004; paragraph 43.2).

Thus, the use of C.A. as part of students' assessment of level of learning outcome is not out of place. Continuous assessment is not a new concept in educational system around the world. For instance, in the United Kingdom and the United States, it is built into the teaching-learning process. In Nigeria, the philosophy behind this is to liberalise educational assessment and evaluation by basing them on the totality of all that students were exposed to. However, the curriculum's interpreters tend to share different views about the concept and best practices thus, bringing in barrage of misconceptions.

Concept

The notion of continuous assessment will be addressed from two perspectives such as what it is not and secondly what it is.

What Continuous Assessment is not?

In order to understand the concept, it will be necessary to clarify the misconceptions. Firstly, continuous assessment is not continuous testing of the cognitive ability of students. Secondly, the C.A. process should not concentrate on certain curricular aspects of the school activities thus, paying little or no attention to other domains of learning. Lastly, continuous assessment is not summative in nature (given towards or at the end of the course or programme). A critical analysis of all the aforementioned instances of what continuous assessment are not shows that they do not differ from the old system of assessment.

What is Continuous Assessment?

Continuous assessment is a method of finding out what a student has gained from learning activities in terms of knowledge, reasoning, character development and industry. It could also be described as a mechanism whereby the final grading of a student in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning systematically takes account of all his/her performance during a given period of exposure to such teaching-learning activities. Assessment literally is the process of organising measurement data into interpretable forms on a number of variables. The data is obtained using wide variety of instruments such as tests, attitude scales, inventories, questionnaires, observation schedule etc. from multiple sources (pre-test & post-test scores). Assessment provides information or evidence of a change and direction of change in a student's behaviour.

This method is likely to be more valid and a better indicator of a learner's overall ability than a single examination. An important aspect of instruction is the appropriate guidance of the learner; both the learning and preparation process for a career. A continuous assessment procedure facilitates such guidance functions at school. Its practice can reduce examination malpractice drastically when students are aware that marks generated from C.A. will form part of the course examination. C.A. increases competence and better skill acquisition as well as overall ability and performance of both learners and teachers. Furthermore, effective use of C.A. during teaching - learning practices enables the teacher to assess his or her own instructional methods from time to time and aids him or her to improve his or her performance.

Data generated from such practice helps the teacher to self - assess him or herself.

Hoste and Bloomfield (1973) view Continuous Assessment as a systematic collection of marks or grades over a period of time and their aggregation to final grade. To them, continuous assessment creates avenues for the teacher to make use of a wide variety of assessment procedures appropriate to the subject. General course work, practical, oral, project and field-work can all have their place in a continuous assessment scheme (p. 11).

In Nigeria, the National Steering Committee on C.A. in Nigerian Schools led by Professor Yoloye (Ipaye 1982) regards continuous assessment as a systematic (*systematic*) method of ascertaining what a student gains from schooling in terms of knowledge, industry and character development (*comprehensive*), taking into account his/her performances in tests, assignments, projects and other educational activities during a given period-term, semester, year or during the ending period of an educational level (*cumulative*). According to them, it is also a method of using the recorded performance of each learner to help him or her improve on his or her achievements through guidance and helping the teacher to improve his or her teaching by identifying areas of difficulties in the learner's performance (*guidance oriented*). Further, continuous assessment is carried out at predetermined intervals for the purpose of monitoring and improving the overall performance of students during the teaching-learning processes (formative) and not at the end of the course or programme (*summative*).

What is evident from the definitions of continuous assessment above is that one can infer that for one to practice it effectively, the characteristics must be reflected. Some of the characteristics include its systematic, comprehensive, cumulative, and guidance oriented nature. It should be carried out at predetermined intervals and used to perform monitoring and improving functions.

Principles of Continuous Assessment

It is expected therefore, that when conducting C.A.s in schools, care must be taken to reflect the following characteristics.

- *It must be Systematic in nature*

This implies that, C.A. best practice requires an operational plan which indicates what measurements are to be made of the students' performance, at what time intervals or time during the course of the instruction (teaching of the course content) and nature of the test (oral, written – essay/objective, group project, group or individual practical). Measurement here signifies generation of information on the learners by the teacher to find out how much the learners have acquired with respect to the objectives of the course of instruction they were exposed to. The feedback from the scores earned by the student informs the teacher on the level of mastery the students have attained. If the expected level of mastery is attained, the teacher moves on to the next level, where the reverse is the case, the teacher does the following:

- identifies those who are still lagging behind
- finds out how to make-up or re-teach those areas (topics) where learners are having difficulty
- thinks about teaching method(s) to use, and instructional materials that could aid learning
- the teacher can also consider using peer tutoring as well as giving more assignments. After all these measures have been explored and the instructor is able to lead 80% of the learners to attain mastery, the teacher then moves on to the next topic.

This nature of information can only be obtained if the evaluation process is formative in nature.

- *It must be comprehensive in nature*

Continuous assessment is comprehensive in the sense that the learner is seen in his totality because decisions are made based on information obtained in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.

- Cognitive: areas of concern include knowledge, comprehension
- Affective: areas of concern (change of course/faculty, etc. Interest, feelings, attitude towards the course, etc).
- Psychomotor – ability to carry out practical (teaching, mixing up chemicals, cultivation, broadcasting, stage performance, among others).

Further, issues that border on the fact that many types of instruments could be used in determining the performance of learners also makes it

comprehensive. These instruments include tests, projects, assignments, observation, questionnaire, and interviews.

- *It must be cumulative in nature*

This characteristic is one of the elements that gave it the name 'continuous assessment'. This gives it the measurement connotation and not a literal meaning. Thus, this aspect indicates that all previous data collected on the student must be considered when the decision on a student's level of attainment is being considered. This requires the keeping of up-to-date or cumulative records on each student such that at the end of the session, all the student's performance or scores that session should have quantitative bearing on the student in that session and at the end of the programme. Therefore, all the student's scores during the programme contribute to his or her certification thus, reflecting continuity.

- *It must be Guidance-Oriented and perform Monitoring and improvement functions*

Continuous Assessment is guidance-oriented in the sense that, information obtained on any student is used to guide his/her further development. Thus, feedback from the data collected on students (scores, attitude, interest) should not be consumed by the teacher/lecturer alone but should be distributed to various department-counselling unit, student affairs unit for advice or behaviour modification and study habits, etc.). The counsellor or the dean of students acts as a social worker and interacts with students and teachers. These units are required to study students' records carefully and use information from lecturers, course advisers and faculty officers to counsel students with learning difficulties, social and emotional problems as well as those who require assistance in selecting courses and vocations. Mutual relationships should exist between the students and the school authority. Hence, the culture of identifying a student's ability at the end of a course or the year to either withdraw from a course or change to another faculty or even from the university, should not be left at the discretion of the University alone, but students should be carried along and reason for such decision discussed with the students with the intention of proffering a solution. The school authority should act in loco parentis to the students.

- *It should be conducted at Predetermined Intervals*

This means there should be a plan of operation which is uniform for all faculties in the university. For this plan to work effectively, the steps, phases or activities it contains should be implemented in a systematic way to ensure uniformity and comparability. Thus, continuous assessment should not be a hide-and-seek activity or an avenue for a lecturer to witch-hunt students (given during lectures when very few students are in attendance); rather teachers are expected to inform students on the following:

- the number of assessments scheduled for the term;
- date for each assessment;
- types of instruments to be used, and
- nature of the assessment (group or individual).

- *It should be diagnostic in nature*

Assessment is one of the key stages in teaching and learning cycle. The first stage involves the identification of the aims and objectives of instruction. The second involves the administration of instruction and the third, the assessment of the effectiveness of instruction in terms of the specific identified aims and objectives. Continuous assessment should therefore aim at identifying how well students have attained mastery in the given instruction. Feedback from such data should be used for providing corrective prescriptions and remediation for students with learning difficulties as well as adjustment problems (academic, socio-emotional, etc.). It should also be used to ascertain a student's level of strengths and weaknesses in a given subject area/course of instruction, the cause as well as to formulate appropriate remedial measures. The information needed could be obtained by getting learners' entry behaviour, (documentary analysis), identify specific learning problems (through observation and C.A) and then offer a comprehensive diagnosis of the learning disorder. Where the teacher cannot proffer solutions to such problems, referral should be made to an expert in that field.

Best Practice

- Teachers should be provided with a variety of assessment tools for assessing learners' performance and project.

- These tools should not cover only a cognitive aspect of learning (academic achievement) but should cover both the affective and psychomotor areas as well.
- Tests administered must be scored by the lecturer to enable him or her identify students' areas of strengths and weaknesses.
- Records of such performance should be systematically and faithfully kept.
- Feedback from such scores should help both the students (pacing students' learning, monitoring learning progress during instruction, etc.) and the teachers (aids improvement of teaching-learning activities, diagnosis and remediation).
- The course lecturer or curriculum interpreter must take the major responsibility for carrying out such assessments in a continuous manner.
- The school counselling unit should liaise with the classroom teacher in keeping, using, maintaining and up-dating the records.
- All tests, C.A. given must be graded and feedback given to learners and used by teachers for remedial purposes.

Thus, under Continuous Assessment, decisions on a student are no longer to be based on only the end of the course examination. The student is not to be assessed in the knowledge acquired only but also in the aspects of behaviour, task performance (manipulative skills and dexterity of the learner and general activities. Therefore, affective and psychomotor dispositions of students are also expected to play a more elaborate role during assessment of the overall achievement of every student. As a result, emphasis is no longer placed on what a student achieves or fails to achieve in a given test but the totality of what the student does from his or her first encounter with the course lecturer until the last day of the course are cumulatively put together when a decision is to be made on the student.

What is envisaged in C.A. is not really completely new in most faculties but what could be new has to do with the extent to which curriculum interpreters are equipped with the nitty-gritty of what it is and what it is not, the method of coordinating, recording and using the scores obtained for students' improvement. Further, another aspect that may

be new at the university level is integrating the affective and the psychomotor domains of learning (transforming students behaviour and out of class performances, i.e. practices - practical teaching, science practical, farm practical, etc.) into scores with the cognitive measures when passing value judgements on student's performance. These combined scores on academic, behavioural and performance (i.e. cognitive, affective and psychomotor domain) then represent the Continuous assessment for the individual student in a particular course.

Since learning implies changes in behaviour, it is necessary to examine the change in individual performance over time, in order to measure the growth that has taken place. Most times, it is not uncommon in assessment for tests to be administered to individual students, but for little or no importance to be attached to their individual results or group or worse still for the test administered not to be marked by the teacher is very common. Teachers should therefore, know why they want to assess learners, and use the result of the data collected to solve this problem or provide remedial treatment. Continuous assessment should be designed to uncover and display ways in which students represent and solve problems so they provide information to facilitate learning in all the domains of learning. Students should be trained to graduate as students found worthy in character as well as in learning - **Job creators** and not **Job seekers** (not to always depend on government for employment).

The contemporary changes should involve

- The teacher knowing why (aims & objectives) he wants to assess
- Using the right instrument
- Interpreting the data collected correctly
- To take the result, do a better job of facilitating learning for the individual child tested.
- Feedback to the stake-holders. They include the following:
 - the teacher to improve teaching and learning situation
 - the student
 - the parents – to inform them on the performance of their wards
 - the school authority – for quality assurance

Uses

To the student

Some Tips

- Increases motivation for learning, encourages good study habits
- Provides a picture of a student's performance
- Motivates the learner when the performance is outstanding
- Enables the poor to achieve the identified areas of strengths and weakness
- Reduces poor CGPA.
- Encourages lecture attendance.

To the Teacher

- for referral of students lacking in prerequisite learning skills
- to select teaching methods and materials and formulate behavioural objectives
- for providing corrective prescriptions and remediation for students with learning difficulties.
- Helps teachers to ascertain students' strengths and weakness, the causes and formulates appropriate remedial measures.
- helps the teacher to identify students who are lagging behind.

To the School Administration

To examine the identified handicapped students' emotions, interest, motivation to learn, personality, family health histories, home and former school background, (if any) etc.

Consider these situations:

James attended classes for only 30% of the contact hours for every course, was present during the examination period and was able to pass. He photocopied course materials from friend/classmates, read through for a week and took part in the examination and passed.

Ojo is a very diligent student. He attended at least 90% of the contact hours for every course (participated in all the C.As given by the teacher). However, two days to the end-of-the course/term examination, Ojo took ill. Thus, he was unable to take part in the examination. As a result, Ojo was asked to repeat the next year.

- What in your opinion should be the best decision to take in these two scenarios?
- Who do you think benefited more from the course content?

Thus, there is the need to modify the present assessment procedure.

View

- The most obvious modification is to assess a student's work at regular intervals throughout the course.
- A student who can not keep pace with the requirement of the final examination syllabus is catered for by a system of C.A.
- Other domains of learning-(attitude, behaviour, interest, study habit) industry-manipulative skills and dexterity of the learner which one-shot examination does not cater for are included in C.A.

Assessment Questions may include:

1. Did change in attitude towards the English language subject occur in the students after being exposed to some practical work?
2. If so, how much and in what direction?
 - Providing answers to those questions would require, among other things, both pre and post-test in order to determine any change in attitude, and fashioning the data/evidence collected into a profile relative to a base line, in order to determine the direction of any change in attitude.

Problems:

One major problem with the present day assessment method (one-shot examination) is that it is directed mostly to the thought aspect (Cognitive) of learning activities. Thus, only knowledge, understanding and other cognitive skills acquired in various courses of the school curriculum are evaluated and marks awarded relative to the student's performance in the several subjects.

Often neglected in this procedure is the assessment of skills normally associated with both affective (character, attitude, interest) and the psychomotor domains (production manipulation skills) of the students.

Continuous Assessment Tools

Tests

Tests are a collection of items in a subject area(s) prepared by a teacher to ascertain how much the learners have benefited in a given instruction they were exposed to. Two basic types of tests exist – the teacher made test and standardized test. Tests (including examination) serve several functions. These are grouped under Classroom Functions, Guidance Functions and Administrative Functions. In the classroom they help to determine achievement – or lack of it – and help in knowing the effectiveness of teachers' efforts and/or the learning situation and learning materials. The guidance counsellor uses the results as concrete evidence for guiding students and parents in making educational and vocational choices. They also help in solving problem cases. Tests also help the administration in placing students, determining eligibility and evaluating curricula and curricula activities.

Planning tests, their different types and for what purposes, some rules for constructing tests, organising and administering tests and real samples of tests are found in sections on Test Administration and Adaptive Testing of this book.

Project Techniques

This method usually provides deeper insight into students' levels of feelings and the way they normally react to situations. It is useful in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning. If well - handled to provide a successful result, the confidence resulting from a sense of achievement is required. This manual clearly sets out how to handle this technique. It suggests what the role of the teacher should be and provides examples of projects.

Observation Technique

Teachers normally learn a lot from observing pupils. This technique has the advantages of:

- giving a record of actual behaviour not only of what a pupil thinks of himself and it is (should be) free of the observer's bias;
- being applicable in a natural setting; and
- being useful even with children and such others as are not easily capable of verbal communication.

This manual suggests what and how to observe and also how to record observations. It also gives adequate guidelines on how to interpret the records.

Sociometric Technique

This is a way of ascertaining each child's standing within a social group e.g. peers or classmates. It is a simple method of analysing the acceptances or rejection made by every member of a group on other members. It could be used for selecting students for different assignments. Care must be taken to distinguish between the acceptance of a bully and the natural acceptance of a respected colleague.

The Questionnaire

It's a self-eliciting instrument i.e. the respondent fills what he likes, it's an opinion pool. There is no right or wrong answer. A questionnaire can be structured (when respondents have restricted options to choose from); open ended (the respondents are expected to provide their unrestricted opinion); semi-open & semi structured-Not long sentences in some, you may be asked to choose from some words. A typical questionnaire has a structured format.e. g. SD, A and even fill in the gaps. It can be used to generate information for a large number of people.

This is one of the most useful methods of evaluating attitudes. The school should know pupils' interests, work habits and home background. The questionnaire could be open-ended and such questions are very good for measuring attitude. They could also be closed-item questions. The manual has full details on how to construct and administer questionnaires. It is important to emphasize that delicate situations require special caution. This means that the questions should not upset the sensitivities of respondents. These techniques of assessment are dealt with in greater details in chapter on Non-cognitive Instrument of the book.

Checklist:

A table that contains a list of behaviours/variables or items that you want to check for existence, quality, quantity, extent of use, availability etc. The items should be generated by the researcher since respondents can give false information. The best technique to generate authentic data

using this instrument should be through observation. One can generate both qualitative and quantitative data. Checklists differ from one another because items that can make up the list will depend on the variables of interest of the researcher. Usually, frequency counts or percentages are derived from it. If you are interested in the quality of material it can take a quality indicator depending on what the researcher is interested in.

Rating Scale

A rating scale entails the use of a systematic procedure that makes the rater to observe, record, and evaluate at the same time a set of attributes to be appraised with the purpose of indicating the extent to which the attribute is considered present. The scale is used to appraise behaviours especially overt ones. The scale is a continuum of points (usually 3, 5, or 7) on which a person can be rated. These attributes could be rating of individuals, material provision and use, teaching-learning activities. This activity could be carried out by others on an individual or an individual's self-rating.

There are basically three types of rating scales namely:

- Numerical rating scale in which the observer is required to circle the numbers on a continuum which indicates the extent to which an attribute is present in the person or entity observed.

Instruction: Indicate the extent to which the student possesses each of the following characteristics by putting an "X" in the appropriate column

Table 6.1: Example of Affective Domain Instrument

No	Characteristics	Rating				
		5 Excellent	4 Good	3 Fair	2 Poor	1 Very Poor
1	Honesty					
2	Loyalty					
3	Punctuality					
4	Good relations with others					
5	Regular at class					
6	Active participation in class					
7	Politeness					
8	Self-control					
9	Health					
10	Present at practical sessions					

Problems associated with using Rating Scale

- Inability of the lecturer to summarize impression formed about a student over a period of contact with him or her. In this situation, the lecturer may not have been paying attention to the individual's personality characteristics. Further, due to large classes evident in our universities, the lecturer may not have had adequate opportunity to observe each student. As a result these ratings may lack validity and reliability.
- Sometimes the characteristics being rated are not easily visible, for example honesty.
- Often the characteristic being rated may mean different things to different people;

- The standards used in deciding a rating may vary from one person to another. What is "excellent" to one person may be just "fair" to another. This could reduce the reliability of ratings.

Ways to reduce /tackle these problems

- If a rating scale is to be used in a session, the instrument should be made available to the lecturers who will do the rating so that they know what they are looking for and thus, pay attention to these characteristics during contacts with students.

Clear definitions of the characteristics to be rated should be given so that raters using the scale will have uniform meanings for the same characteristics.

Example

Industry

- Works hard on any given task.
- Is ready to work for long periods if necessary
- Is careful and painstaking over his/her work.

Honesty

- Tells the truth
- Faithful when entrusted with valuable things e.g. laboratory materials, marks class attendance without favouring his friends, etc.

Regularity of attendance

Attends all classes and other class activities as expected.

Active participation

- Asks questions in class
- Answers questions in class
- Participates in group work
- Hands in assignment on time, etc.

In order to make standards of judgment uniform, use estimated position in class for deciding the ratings.

Example

- Excellent – would be in the top 20%
- Good – would be in the next 25%
- Fair – would be in the next 30%
- Poor – would be in the next 25%
- Very Poor – would be in the next 10%

To reduce halo effect, several teachers should rate the same student across courses taken at the given level. After this, the average of their ratings will be taken. Thus, if five lecturers took the 200L courses, all the lecturers are expected to rate the students with respect to the course(s) they taught. E.g. GCE 301, GCE 304, 306, 308 3,4,2,3,4 on honesty, the average rating would be $16/5=3\frac{1}{5}$. If the mean of the summation of the numbers is not a whole number, you should then round it off to the nearest whole number.

Whenever a characteristic can be assessed from objective records, make use of these records to aid ratings. For example, punctuality and regularity of attendance in class can be objectively recorded by keeping an attendance register and using three different symbols to represent

- Present punctuality e.g. \checkmark
- Present but late e.g. *
- Absent e.g. X

Assessment of Interest and Attitude

It is useful for teachers to know the interests and attitudes of their students. This knowledge is not usually for the purpose of giving grades; rather it is for guiding and counselling the students. This information if generated may serve as an eye opener to why students performed the way they did or why they are putting up positive or negative attitudes towards their academics, and thus aid guiding and counselling the students.

Example:

Table 6.2: Rating Scale on Attitude toward schooling

No.	Structure	Rating				
		5	4	3	2	1
1	Life in school is very interesting					
2	I find most lectures boring					
3	The lectures make my life miserable					
4	Sometimes I feel like running from lectures					
5	I am reading this course because my J.A.M.B score was too low					
6	I like the company of my classmates					
7	I wish there were fewer school days in a week					

Envisaged problems of CA include:

- The issue of halo effect (by the teacher).
- Sometimes the cores given to learners may not be reliable.
- It takes time.
- The test items may not be reliable.
- Class size
- Learners may not be informed of when, nature and type of the test to expect.

Conclusion

Assessment should be an integral part of any teaching-learning process. Its cumulative nature gives room to having holistic information about a learner's attainment in all the domains of learning (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor). Continuous Assessment guides the teacher in his/her preparation for teaching/instructional delivery, innovation and interpretation of expectation of behavioural changes. This practice encourages skill acquisition and reduces examination malpractice. With C.A, students have to pay attention to all areas of the syllabus when preparing for examinations. Therefore, every aspect of the curriculum the students are exposed to should count.

Both teachers and students need systematic feedback and guidance oriented information on teaching and learning during the period.

- guidance in career preparation and learning (for the learner)
- helps the teacher to assess his/her own instructional methods from time to time.

Continuous assessment appears to be more valid and reliable and thus, more indicative of a student's overall ability than a single examination. The fact that a teacher is able to estimate level of attainment of stated objectives by learners would enable the teacher to introduce innovations or new teaching methods into their teaching activities in the bid to ensure that his/her learners attain mastery of what they are being exposed to. This reduces frustration as a result of the fact that one short final examination does not accord the teacher the opportunity of innovation or re-teaching a topic brought about by feedback from regular evaluation of students' learning outcomes.

Activity

- In your own opinion, how can you define assessment?
- Of what use is assessment data to
 - The learner?
 - The school system?
 - The educational system?

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