

THE INFLUENCE OF CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF IBULANKU SUB-COUNTY, IGANGA DISTRICT (UGANDA)

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Integrating continuous assessment in Ugandan education curriculum is becoming a top priority encouraged at all levels of education but challenging memo in the 21st century of Primary Education system. The curriculum developers of this era focus on providing Continuous Assessment to pupils as one of the ways to improve academic performance. It has become a challenge to 3rd world schools. The parents are unable to meet the costs of Continuous Assessment test, and buying other requirements needed by a pupil to qualify for Continuous Assessment test. This paper explores the meaning of Continuous assessment, the Purpose of Continuous Assessment, Challenges hindering the implementation of Continuous Assessment and what could be done to address the challenges hindering the implementation of Continuous Assessment. This study used descriptive design, specifically literature from the library and key informant interviews were used to complement the information on the Influence of continuous assessment on academic performance in primary schools. It was recommended that; the Government should mount intensive workshop to educate teachers on the appropriate principles of continuous assessment and the workshop should focus objectively on constructing and using assessment as tools.

Keywords: Continuous assessment, academic performance, curriculum developers.

Introduction

This paper addresses the influence of continuous assessment on academic performance in primary schools of Ibulanku Sub County, Iganga district (Uganda). Continuous assessment is conducted in all schools, as formative assessment to inform educators and learners about learner's progress in order to improve learning. Continuous assessment is an ongoing process of gathering, interpreting and using information about the learner's achievement (Kateeba, 2012).

Continuous assessment is an ongoing assessment that is put into the instructional process. It is helpful to take place during the instructional program, then it can be said that continuous assessment constitutes formative evaluation.

Assessment is the process by which schools find out what a child's understanding, knowledge and skills are and the level which the child is achieving (MOES, 2008). Generally assessment is concerned with children's process and achievement.

Classroom assessment is the process of gathering, recording, interpreting, using and communicating information about a child's progress and achievement

during the development of knowledge, concepts, skills and attitudes (NCCA, 2004). Continuous assessment (CA) refers to regular assessment of pupils through observation, homework, exercises, tests and examinations.

Continuous Assessment is an ongoing assessment that is put into the instructional process. It is helpful to take place during the instructional program, then it can be said that continuous Assessment constitutes formative evaluation. NCDC introduced continuous Assessment as one of the basic educational principles of teaching and learning in lower primary school. It is part of the ongoing education reform process in Uganda where teachers are required to use individual child progress card to keep track of children's competence and performance. This is vital in creating a reliable picture of the learners' strengths and weaknesses as specified in the syllabuses.

Assessment in thematic curriculum focuses more on what a learner can do than on what the learner knows or can remember. Assessment covers all competences ranging from oral, written to practical. Assessment indicators are shown at the end of each theme in thematic curriculum. Some the methods used



to assess children in primary one include: direct observation, talking to individual children, oral and written questions. Children drawing and work they display, looking at children's exercise books, observing play and free activities, listening to children debates, group discussions, songs, games and acting.

Continuous assessment at middle and upper primary that is primary four to primary seven, summative assessments is carried out in five subjects forming the following four papers, English Language, Mathematics, Integrated science and social studies with religious education at the end of each term, year and primary cycle (Kateeba, 2012). Summative assessment aims at providing a picture of learner's progress at any given point in time, e.g. Primary Leaving Examination (PLE).

Continuous assessment is the use of different approaches and evaluation tools in the process of assessing the learners such as texts, questionnaire, rating scales, observation and anecdotal records to obtain information on the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning by children (Adebowale & Alao, 2008). Assessment in the cognitive is concerned with the process of knowledge & understanding. The affective domain is associated characteristics such as attitudes, motives, interests and other personality traits.

Assessment in the psychomotor domain involves assessing the learner's ability to use his or her hands e.g. hand writing, construction and projects. Teachers in Ibulanku sub-county, Iganga District focus their greatest attention on measuring head (cognitive) learning rather than the hand (affective) or psychomotor (heart), which is not the real essence of continuous assessment. Thus, continuous assessment becomes examination-centered.

Statement of the Problem

Although there has been marked progress towards realizing Universal Primary Education (UPE), and increasing access to secondary in Uganda. The Government of Uganda faces various challenges in providing quality Education. This led the NCDC to introduce the idea of continuous assessment as one of the ways to improve on academic performance. Continuous assessment is conducted in all schools, as formative assessment to inform educators and learners about learner's progress in order to improve learning (Kateeba, 2012).

The Education system in Uganda has tradi-

tionally emphasized passing examinations. This has promoted examination malpractice whereby learners are reading for the purposes of getting better grades, so they end up finding all the possible ways to cheat exams given as a form of continuous assessment. Some teachers in Ibulanku Sub-county due to pleasure given by their head teachers and District Inspector of schools who often go around schools to check the assessment grades of pupils deliberately set simple continuous assessment test in order to record high percentage passes in their classes in order to convince the inspectors that he teaches so well that most of his pupils pass well, some teachers are also reluctant to conduct the continuous assessment as planned by the school. Continuous assessment, if adhered to strictly, makes the teachers overworked and as a result some teachers put down fabricated marks/grades in pupil's records to represent grades of tests which in actual fact were not conducted. The above practices are most damaging to the main purpose of the whole purpose of continuous assessment. Therefore, this research is intended to find out whether continuous assessment has influence on pupils' academic progress.

Research Questions

1. What is continuous assessment?
2. What is the purpose of continuous assessment in primary schools of Ibulanku Sub-county?
3. What are the challenges hindering the implementation of continuous assessment in primary schools of Ibulanku Sub-county?
4. What could be done to address the challenges hindering the implementation of continuous assessment in primary schools of Ibulanku Sub-county?

Research Methodology

This study used descriptive design, specifically literature from the library, and key informant interviews were used to complement the information on the influence of continuous assessment on academic performance in primary schools of Ibulanku Sub County, Iganga district (Uganda).

Ethical Considerations

The researcher put two ethical issues into considerations and these were informed consent and

confidentiality. The researcher informed the respondents about the purpose of the research so the respondents were stimulated and participated willingly. They were informed about the objectives of the study and so forth. Additionally, the researcher did not disclose the names of the respondents during the research process. All issues concerning the researcher and the respondents were not revealed to anybody outside the circle and also assured the respondents that the data collected will be used for academic purpose only. Before data collection started, the researcher obtained a letter of introduction from the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton Dean of School of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences and permission to conduct research in Iganga District, Uganda. Since the Ibulanku Sub-county primary schools fall under the jurisdiction of the area District Education Officer, the researcher obtained permission from his office to collect data from the Schools. The researcher obtained permission from the headteachers to collect data from the teachers.

Findings of the Study

What is Continuous Assessment?

Continuous assessment (CA) can be defined as a mechanism whereby the final grading of a Pupil/student in cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of all his or her performance during a given period of schooling. The Federal Ministry of Education Science and Technology (1985) defines continuous assessment as a method of finding out what the pupils/students gained.

Abonyi, Okereke and Omebe (2005) also defined continuous assessment as a method of assessment in which the teacher periodically or intermittently ascertains what the learner has gained in terms of knowledge, thinking, reasoning, character Learning activities using various instruments like tests, assignments, projects, observation, interviews and questionnaires. Continuous assessment demands that the teacher takes into consideration information obtained from all source about the child. It is usually well focused by being closely related to what was actually taught. In fact, the feedback mechanism that forms part of it ensures that educational goals are attained.

Continuous assessment is the use of different approaches and evaluation tools in the process of assessing the learners such as texts, questionnaire, rating

scales, observation and anecdotal records to obtain information on the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning by children (Adebowale & Alao, 2008). Assessment in the cognitive is concerned with the process of knowledge & understanding. The affective domain is associated characteristics such as attitudes, motives, interests & other personality traits. Assessment in the psychomotor domain involves assessing the learner's ability to use his or her hands e.g. hand writing, construction and projects.

Arasian (1991) describes continuous assessment as an assessment approach which should depict the full range of sources and methods teachers use to gather, interpret and synthesize information about learners; information that is used to help teachers understand their learners, plan and monitor instruction and establish a viable classroom culture. Therefore, continuous assessment is formative, process-oriented, informal, internal, learner-involved and self-referenced in nature.

Continuous assessment is a holistic approach that represents the learner in his/her entirety. It begins with the decisions that the teachers perform on the first day of school & end with the decisions that the teachers and administrators make on learners regarding end-of-month/term/year grading & promotion (Alausa, 2004). Therefore, CA should be well-organized, based on what a child has learned, simple & ongoing truthful and objective and meaning full (MOES, 2008).

Continuous assessment refers to regular assessment of pupils through observation, homework, exercises, tests and examinations. Diagnostic assessment involves finding out what learners already know about a particular subject, issue or unit of work hence teaching takes place from known to the unknown. Summative assessment aims at providing a picture of learner's progress at any given point in time, e.g. PLE.

The Purpose of continuous Assessment in Primary Schools

The findings revealed that assessment gives evidence to how much knowledge a learner has acquired in a particular subject. Murihead (cited in Ahukanna, Onu, & Ukah, n. d.) noted that students are assessed with a view of finding out the extent of their knowledge, understanding and skills they have learned. Pupils learn that the teacher values their achievements and that their assessment outcomes have an impact on the instruction that they receive. One- to -one commu-



munication between the teacher and the pupil can motivate pupils to continue attending school and to work hard to achieve higher levels of mastery. In continuous assessment, teachers assess the curriculum as implemented in the classroom. It also allows teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching strategies relative to the curriculum, and to change those strategies as dictated by the needs of their pupils. In addition, continuous assessments provide information on achievement of particular levels of skills, understanding, and knowledge rather than achievement of certain marks or scores. Thus, continuous assessment enables pupils to monitor their achievement of grade level goals and to visualize their progress towards those goals before it is too late to achieve them (Riasat, Najma, & Anwar, 2010).

The findings also discovered that assessment reveals the learners' area of weakness and strength in a particular subjects and they encouraged to work towards improvement of the weak area. The results of the study concur with Murihead (cited in Ahukanna et al., n.d.) who noted that the knowledge of the students' weakness and strengths serve as a feedback to the teacher on where extra work needs to be done and where there has been misrepresentation, which needs to be corrected. Pupils receive feedback from teachers based on performance that allows them to focus on topics they have not yet mastered. This also helps teachers and head teacher to benchmark best practices.

Assessment also helps the teacher to provide a continuous record of the student's physical, social and personal qualities and serve as a monitoring device in giving feedback to the students about the effectiveness of his or her learning. The results of the study concur with the findings of Alausa (2014), who said that the successful outcome of assessment depends on careful keeping of accurate records and giving feedback for each student's independently and so instructors should be trained on how to keep records and provide feedback.

Continuous assessment also encourages the teachers to implement the designed instruction objectives as well as to diagnose the strength and weakness of the individual children and to apply corrective actions when lack of progress is observed. The results of the study agree with Obinayu (cited in Ahukanna et al., n.d.) who calls assessment a discovering point, which needs hammering, and repetition. Questions which were poorly done in the previous test should be repeated, but differently. Continuous assessment helps a teacher to obtain a true picture of the child's ability that would be

obtained from a single assessment.

Continuous assessment helps a teacher in making decisions about what to teach, how to teach and what learning materials to be used. This is in line with Kateeba (2012) in the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) Primary curriculum implementation Guidelines and assessment specifications said that the purpose of continuous assessment helps in making decisions about what to teach, how to teach and what learning materials and activities should be included. The actual practice of continuous assessment by teachers of Ibulanku Sub-County were; weekly or monthly tests, Exercise, individual, group assignment & end of term examination were the most commonly used assessment methods at the end of each unit. But according to Linn and Miller (2005) paper and pencil tests are not the only assessment technique to assess the full range of students' information about learning. There is a need also to assess the psychomotor and affective domain of learner's development.

Continuous Assessment places teachers at the center of all performance Assessment activities given to the learners and being the most extensive means of assessment has sustained influence on teaching and learning and improves the quality of student's learning achievements. Provides evidence as regards how assessment information can be used to inform and guide instruction for individual learners. According to Alausa (2004), the various dimension of learning activities of the learners should be assessed by various methods. The understanding is that the variety of assessment strengths the quality of education and fulfill the weaknesses each assessment techniques.

Challenges Hindering the Implementation of Continuous Assessment in Primary Schools

Kakinda (2014), in the Daily Monitor, said that learners at all levels are taught for many years seven for primary, four for O-Level and two in A- levels and yet they are examined for only a few days. This means that their academic competence is measured by what they are able to write in those few examination days. Teachers take a lot of time training students to pass examinations so that their schools can be ranked among the best in the country. But this comes at a cost of failing to develop students' other abilities like practical skills in different areas, life skills, talents and moral values.

According to Kabambwe (2010), the most common challenges to implement continuous assessment were lack of infrastructure, large class size, inadequate clear manuals and guidelines on how to implement continuous assessment and insufficient time allocation for the course. The findings also revealed that teacher's inadequate knowledge & skills in administration of tests, homework, examinations, oral & practical activities are also one of the challenges hindering the administration of continuous assessment.

It was also discovered that teachers have negative attitudes towards the continuous assessment approach and parents' participation in assessment of children's performance. This is evidenced where teachers deliberately set simple continuous assessment test in order to record high Percentage passes in their classes. While other teachers they give free marks to pupils such that they are not found by the District Inspectors as teachers who are not responding to government programmes. Pupils also have negative attitude on the continuous assessment. They see it as requiring extra work and they therefore tend to dislike it. It is fairly labor intensive for both students and the teachers especially where the teacher pupil ration is high.

Teachers focused their greatest attention on measuring written works especially in cognitive attainment rather than affective and psychomotor behavior. Continuous assessment is poorly implemented because of the absence of proper monitoring programme by both the school administration and the District Inspector of schools.

Teachers lack the expertise required in analyzing assessment information, particularly those dealing with analysis and processing of the results. Lack of induction training and refresher courses for teachers on continuous assessment also has affected its implementation in schools. Incompetence in the operation of continuous assessment because of lack of uniformity and standardization of continuous assessment practices.

Parents' ignorance on the usefulness of continuous assessment and because of it they don't give their children the requirements needed to qualify for continuous assessment test. Teachers consider continuous assessment as not part of their job, the availability of instructional materials, large number of students in a class room barrier them to follow the progress of each and every child, it is difficult because it needs continuously to prepare correct and return students assessment result, shortage of time to use different assessment

techniques for block course, lack of knowledge on different assessment techniques and poor communication of instructors with concerned bodies on its implementation. Students also run for mark but not motivated to know their knowledge gap to improve themselves and this affect the judgment about the students (Harlen, 1994).

There are no systems to control its implementation among the teachers. Pupils do not clearly understand the basic concepts of continuous assessment, leading pupils to cheat from others to score good mark on written test and also on group and individual assignment and hence, it is difficult for teachers to know the learners' difficulty. Some teachers have negative attitude towards the implementation of continuous assessment due to lack of training, support and encouragements from school management on its implementation, thus, teachers were not interested to implement as intended. The results of the present study showed that many teachers interpreted continuous assessment as giving a series of paper and pencil tests to learners without intervention on their difficulty. The motives and objectives behind the implementation of continuous assessment were not even clear to most teachers and learners resulting to continuous assessment being carelessly handled and randomly implemented. This was due to lack of adequate training on the part of instructors and students, shortage of resources, and no system to control.

In implementation of continuous assessment, Quansah (2005) found that current continuous assessment system involves class tests and class exercises. According to Kabambwe (2010), factors challenging the implementation of continuous assessment are: large class size, shortage funds to fulfill necessary resources, teachers still felt that the continuous assessment took a lot of time for teachers and lack of adequate training of teachers. As a result, they did not believe that they would finish the syllabus with continuous assessment.

Solutions to Address the Challenges Hindering the Implementation of Continuous Assessment in Primary Schools

Possible solutions provided by most of the respondents were: minimizing the number of learners per class rooms by building enough class rooms and increase numbers of teachers, provide instructional materials and adequate guidelines, create awareness



and capacity building continuously through training among instructors and students, give incentive for instructors as a positive feedback, instructors should consider as continuous assessment is one of the part of teaching-learning, all academic sectors should work together, departments should take responsibility and prepare the way to follow up its implementation and prepare reflective training and discussion session on the implementation of continuous assessment. The programme of continuous assessment must be effectively utilized by teachers in our primary schools. This will help the learners and their parents to understand the usefulness of the continuous assessment.

Each continuous assessment test should include the earlier and related materials taught before and after each preceding test. This will motivate the learners to love continuous assessment.

There is the need to design an operational plan so that uniformity in both standards and record keeping across and within schools will be maintained. Periodic workshops should be held for teachers on how to implement continuous assessment. This will help teachers to acquire knowledge and skills on how to implement continuous assessment tests.

Provision needs to be made for the preservation of records of tests and to be accessed by both pupils and parents whenever a need arises. The continuous assessment 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.

Continuous assessment should focus on the three domains of learning: cognitive (head), affective (heart) and hands (psychomotor), not only one domain as practiced in the education system in Uganda today.

Conclusion

In conclusion, continuous assessment is important in that it improves child's academic performance. However, continuous assessment in Uganda is not done as expected. Teachers do is continuous testing of students in the cognitive and forget the other three domains which are also necessary to be measured.

There is also a need to have completely new assessment procedure that will focus on the three domains of learning: cognitive (head), affective (heart) and hands (psychomotor). This will help to develop

human being intellectually, emotionally, physically, socially and spiritually.

There is a need to adopt an assessment procedure that will facilitate the appropriate guidance of the learner and at the same time enable the teacher assess his own instructional material will be worthwhile.

Recommendations

In view of the influence of continuous assessment on academic performance in primary schools a number of recommendations should be put into consideration. The government should organize continuous workshops on how to administer and implementation of continuous assessment in primary schools. For successful implementation of the continuous assessment, teachers need to assess the three domains of learning that is cognitive, affective and psychomotor. Teachers implementing continuous assessment need to be ethical and to exercise integrity in the way that continuous assessment is implemented as planned. Not to just take it for granted by just awarding free marks to learners.

The MOES should work with the UNEB to introduce CA mode of exams, to work with the teachers in schools to include a percentage of what is examined during the course of study in the student's final results. The MOES should introduce aptitude test to examine different areas in the course or subject that a student wishes to take.

The successful outcome of assessment depends on careful keeping of accurate records and giving feedback for each learner's independently and so teachers should be trained on how to keep records and provide feedback. It is suggested that a committee should be set amongst the staff members to manage the implementations of continuous assessment. Because this will enable to identify problems encountered in the teaching-learning process on time and take appropriate actions before it is late.

The pupils' population in each class should be optimum to manageable size. The successful outcome of assessment depends on careful keeping of accurate records and giving feedback for each learner's independently and so instructors should be trained on how to keep records and provide feedback.

Intensive trainings on the concepts and roles of continuous assessment should be organized in the form of on the job-trainings, workshops, and seminars and in service programs to raise the level of

awareness of teachers towards continuous assessment and its implementation thereby to positively influence the attitude of teachers towards the scheme should be strengthened to address all teachers.

Lack of instructional materials and facilities were among the main hindering factors in the teaching-learning process in general and in the implementation of continuous assessment in particular. Thus, more should be done by concerned bodies to allocate enough budgets for the implementation of continuous assessment. Continuous assessment guides or work books on each field of study area should be prepared and the guide's workbooks should embrace different types of assessment techniques that are relevant to assess practical skills and performance of students in their areas of study.

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