

**INTEGRATING ASSESSMENT INTO THE LESSON PLAN TO
IMPROVE LEARNING: A FOCUS ON NIGERIAN PRIMARY
SCHOOLS**

BY

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**A PAPER PRESENTED AT THE 35TH CONFERENCE OF THE
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR EDUCATIONAL
ASSESSMENT
HELD AT CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY, ENGLAND
7TH – 12TH SEPTEMBER, 2008**

Abstract

Assessment should be a continuous process and the purpose of assessing a child is to help him/her learn. The nature of the primary school curriculum in Nigeria offers wide opportunities for achieving comprehensiveness in the continuous assessment of all that pupils learn, yet the current assessment practice in most Nigerian primary schools is a far cry from what continuous assessment is meant to achieve. Most teachers still practice the traditional method of assessing pupils using only the summative mode. This thereby creates the wrong impression that the purpose of education is to pass tests and examinations. Hence they teach pupils to cover the scheme for external set examinations and do not bother to find out if the pupils understand their lessons. The implication is that a child can finish primary school without learning to read, write or carry out basic mathematical operations. Sometimes some misconceptions and wrong spellings are not corrected by the teachers and the pupils grow with them. However, with the launching of the Universal Basic Education Policy in Nigeria and the educational reforms that have taken place, the purpose and mode of assessment definitely have to change. This work is therefore an advocacy for teachers to build continuous assessment into their lesson plans and assess children at various stages in the teaching – learning process to improve the learning quality. The various ways a teacher can effectively do this by making assessment a part and parcel of the lesson were highlighted.

Introduction

Assessment is not different from the interaction that takes place in a normal classroom situation. To Ughamadu, (1994) it is an integral and vital aspect of the teaching – learning process and the teacher is the key person in the curriculum implementation process. Anikweze (2005) sees assessment as the process of investigating the status or standard of learners' attainment, with respect to expected outcomes that must have been specified as objectives. It is therefore imperative that effective implementation of any school based assessment depends heavily on what the teacher knows about it, his attitude to it and what he/she does in the lesson plan, in actual teaching and after teaching.

School based assessment gives room for a teacher's self assessment of his/her techniques or methods from time to time. This can lead to great improvement in the teaching methods. The teacher can also get feedback about his/her teaching and discover the strategies that will help in achieving the desired goals.

There are two main types of assessment namely summative and formative. Summative assessment is one that is carried out at the end of a course or term. In the school system, it is used to determine how much the set goals are achieved. It is also referred to as "assessment of learning"

Formative assessment on the other hand occurs in the classroom. It is sometimes referred to as "educational assessment" or "assessment for learning." It is used in the course of teaching to collect feed back early and often on how well pupils are learning. The purpose is to provide the teacher and pupils with information and insights needed to improve teaching effectiveness and learning quality. (Angelo, 1991).

There is a wide range of opportunities for teachers to measure the cognitive, affective and psychomotor abilities of pupils while the lesson is on-going in the Nigerian primary school. This can be done at various stages in the teaching and after teaching. This paper examines the various ways a teacher can achieve comprehensive and continuous assessment of learning outcomes as the lesson progresses.

Assessment in Nigerian Primary Schools

The form of school based assessment currently in use in Nigerian primary schools is the continuous assessment.

In continuous assessment, the pupils are assessed in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains a number of times at certain intervals, using a variety of assessment techniques. This implies that the aim of using these tests projects, observations, questionnaires, port folios etc. is to facilitate their learning. This system of assessment is in contrast to the erstwhile traditional summative system that was in use prior to 1982 when pupils were examined once at the end of a term.

Continuous assessment is a formative mode of assessment that uses multiple ways and formats. It combines the scores gotten from the tests, assignments, projects, oral tests, observations etc. and end of term examination scores to give a more comprehensive picture of the abilities and characteristics of learners. This method of assessment, if properly implemented, will promote hard work on the part of the pupils and their teachers. It is disappointing that this policy is yet to make any impact as per improving our educational system. The poor teacher training in classroom assessment, academic misconduct and the spill over of societal corruption to the schools have tended to make assessment results incredible and invalid.

Most teachers lay more emphasis on the use of tests and examinations to assess pupils' progress. Hence only the cognitive aspects of learning are assessed, to

the negligence of those aspects concerned with character and industry. As Hills (1992) has emphasized, standardized achievement tests alone cannot fulfil the major purposes of assessment for young children. There should be instructional planning and communication with parents, identification of pupils' special needs and programme evaluation and accountability.

One can rightly say that what takes place in most Nigerian classrooms is "assessment of learning" because pupils are assessed after teaching has ended. Consequently most teachers do not bother to find out what the pupils already know or whether they are following the lesson. This means that mistakes children make in learning are ignored by the teachers especially in English Language and Mathematics. Since English is a second language in Nigeria, the mother tongue interferes in the way children pronounce English words or use grammatical expressions. Thus if children are not assessed at various stages in the process of teaching, they will form wrong concepts, pronounce words wrongly and commit grammatical errors that are not dictated and corrected on time. This will definitely affect their academic progress. It can lead to a situation where a child can graduate from this basic level without acquiring the skills of reading, writing and numerical operations.

Anikweze (2005), Ojerinde and Falayajo (1984) feel that the abuse of the continuous assessment by teachers in Nigeria is responsible for academic misconduct in the society. These vices come in various forms and shades, with the sole intention of passing examinations, both internal and external through any means – giraffing from mates, use of mercenaries, escapades to "special centres" where textbooks are copied without any disturbance from invigilators etc.

The result of all these is that there is generally poor attitude to learning. Teachers and pupils have the impression that the purpose of education is to pass tests and examinations. The teachers are therefore only interested in teaching pupils to obtain high marks in the continuous assessment and cover the scheme for the end of term examinations. The pupils hence aim to reproduce facts or steps in solving

problems with little attention paid to higher mental tasks, thinking and application skills (NTI, 2006).

The implication is obvious. Teachers do not make genuine efforts to use effective techniques and strategies in ensuring that pupil understand their lessons while the pupils are now too lazy to learn since they can easily copy the answers to test and examination questions from their note books smuggled into the examination arena or through other absurd means.

Added to this is the undue emphasis on certificates rather than on practical evidence of merit and adequacy and on visible manifestation of productive skills. This is why a child cannot apply what he/she has learnt in school after graduation. The system encourages the acquisition of basic skills and passive learning, ignoring thinking and personality skills that will enable the children succeed in the work place of the 21st century. As the Secretary Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills. (SCANS: 1991) has enumerated, these competencies and skills are as follows:

- ❖ To identify, organize, plan and allocate resources
- ❖ Work with others
- ❖ Acquire and evaluate information
- ❖ Understand complex interrelationships
- ❖ Work with a variety of technologies.

Finally, prompt feedbacks needed by both teachers and pupils for effective assessment of the teaching – learning process is lacking. This is because decisions about learning are given at the end of term. The pupils' need for knowledge of the progress they are making in learning is denied. Teachers also fail to ascertain if a particular teaching method is not conducive until the end of term when it will be late to help pupils improve on their learning. This can lead to lack of motivation.

Need for Reform in Assessment Practices in Nigerian Primary Schools

The educational sector reforms in Nigeria, evidenced by the introduction of The Universal Basic Education programme has increased the need for Nigeria to adopt a more practical way of measuring, evaluating and reporting pupils' progress in schools. As stated by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), (2004: 3 (15). National Policy on Education, there will be in existence six years of primary school and three years of junior secondary school education that is free and compulsory. This means that advancement from one class to another shall be based on continuous assessment

and that the primary school leaving certificate shall be based only on continuous assessment

(FRN, 2004:4(h & i))

This development has implication on continuous assessment practices. Since every child is expected to proceed to junior secondary school, there will be no external set examinations like the common entrance and first school leaving certificate examination. Thus teachers need to assess the pupils comprehensively in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains, keep accurate records of their progress, and be conversant with assessment techniques.

Another aspect of the reform implication is the need for a change in the purpose of assessment. Since the focus in teaching has shifted from teaching the pupils to cover the schemes for external set examinations towards teaching for understanding, the purpose of assessment should be to inform and improve learning. Thus teachers should assess the pupils during the course of instruction, using various techniques and methods.

Our assessment methods need to change also because our children live in an information age that demands new knowledge and abilities. It is therefore imperative that pupils need to understand the basics, think critically to analyze and to make inferences (NCRL, 1991).

Recently, there is a global call for a close match between the skills pupil learn in school and those that they will need upon graduation. Teachers are expected to help pupils develop these skills and competences. Helping children develop these abilities will definitely require alternative assessment methods.

Integrating assessment and instruction in ways that will support learning

Teachers are now conscious and aware that the primary aim of assessment is to improve the learning of worthwhile academic content for all the pupils. Hence much effort is therefore expected from their teaching than in the previous assessment mode. Similarly the products of the school need not just be possessors of certificates but graduates with admirable, decent and predictable character (Anikweze, 2005). To that effect, feelings, attitudes, interests and aspirations of pupils that are part of the expected curricula experiences as well as their motor and manipulative skills like gross bodily movements, finely coordinated movements, non verbal communicative behaviours in form of dances, speech, and gesture, sound production etc. should also be assessed by the teacher during lessons.

Assessment, as a part and parcel of teaching can help a teacher to determine how well he/she is meeting instructional goals and how to adjust curriculum and instruction so that the goals will be better achieved. The purpose of this classroom assessment is to provide teachers and pupil's information and insights needed to improve teaching effectiveness and learning quality. Assessment therefore can take three forms:

- a) Prior to teaching:- Assessment can be carried out informally before teaching to check pupils' previous knowledge before introducing a new topic. In the process, the teacher can observe those characteristics and behaviours of pupils that could hinder and promote learning. It can generate information about the pupils' socio cultural background and their emotional dispositions. Armed with such information, the teacher will now determine whether the pupils are ready to learn a new topic or require some pre-operational skills training or activities or whether to adopt a more in-depth approach to the lesson. It can help the teacher to determine the categories of learners and plan learning needs to suit their level.
- b) In the process of teaching. Pupils can be assessed while lesson is going on to check whether the pupils are following the lesson. By observing, and listening to their answers to questions asked by the teacher, comments etc. the teacher can check on their understanding of the lesson, detect and correct wrong concepts, spellings, pronunciations, wrong grammar, wrong formulae etc on time.
- c) At the end of Lesson: This is summative in nature and is carried out to review what has been taught, to get information on the extent the children has understood the lesson. This will determine whether the teacher will repeat the lesson, change teaching method or go ahead to teach a new topic.

Techniques for Effective Integration of Continuous Assessment into the Lesson Plan

Teachers can integrate continuous assessment into their lessons through the following strategies:

Effective Planning

This is an asset for a good integration of class assessment into the lesson plan. Thus teachers should acquire the skills to effectively plan teaching strategies that will suit particular subject areas:

- ❖ Acquire skills to plan construct and use achievement tests and other assessment tools in evaluating pupils' learning attainments.
- ❖ Plan, design and use instruments for the assessment of personality characteristics and psychomotor behaviours.
- ❖ Score and interpret scores and also diagnose pupils learning difficulties (Ughamadu, 1994).

Learning Experience Approach/Participatory learning:

This approach is applicable where the teacher adopts participatory method of teaching and involves the pupils in “organized activities or movements” from which emerges the product of assessment. (Anikweze,1988) For instance, a teacher can measure pupils' cognitive and affective attributes during lesson in mathematics, English, using games and simulations. As the children are actively engaged in the game, obey the rules and follow procedures, the teacher takes note of their intellectual inputs and assess their interests, feelings, attitudes, values, beliefs, discipline, commitment, co-operative, self confidence, team spirit, honesty, perseverance, endurance, obedience, relationship with others etc. Similarly, a teacher can involve children in measurement and scale drawing of table, lockers, blackboard, classroom etc. As the children do this, the teacher assesses their performance using pre-determined attributes in the observation checklist. These intangible traits that are observed manifest during the active engagement of the children in the learning activity. These assessment tools will be prepared by the teacher in addition to the lesson plan and teaching aids/apparatus. As the lesson is going on, the teacher is assessing the children using various techniques and methods.

Balance between Process and Product evaluation

In the evaluation of motor and manipulative skills, the efforts of the pupils as well as their final products should be rewarded even when there is absence of an impressive final product. This can be used in assessing children in subjects like creative art, music, primary science, health and physical education, home economics, English language, e.t.c. For instance during cultural activities, those children that beat the drum should be assessed as well as the dancers.

Systematic Periodic Testing

Periodic testing comprising of multiple choice, essay questions. Before giving the children test, the teacher should determine the area of the content he/she wants to test, prepare the test blue print, ensure that the content and process objectives are weighted and determine the total number of items, the time available for the test, type of test item to be used, the age, ability level of the pupils and the type of objective set etc. Normally for the primary level, the teacher should focus on knowledge, comprehension and application as objectives.

Follow through

After scoring a test, the teacher should study the results to evaluate how well the class has performed. The difference between the expected and actual performance of pupils as well as the items that prosecuted the greatest or easiest problems should be noted. This will help the teacher to decide which areas need re-teaching. If the problem arises from the quality of the test, the test should not be recorded rather the lapses should be located and corrected.

Conclusion

Assessment is an inevitable part of teaching. It is the process of determining the worth of a child's academic career. The achievement of a comprehensive achievement is determined by what the teacher knows about it, his/her attitude to it and how effectively he has planned the lesson, his actual teaching and after teaching.

Thus the teacher must ensure that all aspects of learning are assessed at various stages in the process of teaching to improve the quality of both teaching and learning.

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