



## ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT REVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

Continuous assessment is one of the tools used in measuring students' academic performance or achievement during a course of study and it serves as a modal for evaluating effective teaching and learning. The focus of this paper is to examine the impact of continuous assessment on academic achievement of students. The paper examines and reviews the meaning of continuous assessment, and, the characteristics of continuous assessment, it discusses the fundamental basis for using continuous assessment for effective teaching and learning, and Various ways of implementing continuous assessment within schools to determine students' academic success. It goes further to provide additional information on features of good continuous assessment records, problems that hinder the implementation of continuous assessment in evaluating students' academic performance and also the impact or influence of continuous assessment on the academic achievement of students. The paper also enumerate some of the problems of using continuous assessment in assessing students' academic success among which are; the lack of adequate instruments for assessment, some teachers' lack the skill of instrument construction, absence of a proper monitoring programme among others. In conclusion, continuous assessment if well implemented will provide a method of assessment that will bring about proper guidance of the learner and in the same vain allow the teacher to assess his instructional material.

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## 1. Introduction

Academic achievement, the results of any educational training, reflects the quality of formal training given to the students. It is the extent to which students accomplish an educational goal and an indicator of educational success (Steinmayr *et al.*,2014). Shoukat *et al.* (2013) aver that students' academic achievement after undergoing any educational training can be measured in diverse ways when they undergo any formal training. Continuous assessment (CA) is a form of educational assessment that measures learner achievement throughout educational training (Joy *et al.*,2019).CA is a tool used to evaluate the outcome of students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains at the end of educational activity. The Federal Government Handbook on Continuous Assessment (1985) describes continuous assessment as "a means of finding out what the learners gained from educational activities regarding knowledge, thinking and reasoning, character development and industry. Abonyi *et al.* (2005) also defined continuous assessment as a method of evaluation in which the teacher determines the change in behaviour of the learner in terms of knowledge, thinking, reasoning, character, and learning activities using various techniques like tests, assignments, projects, observation, interviews and questionnaires.

Universal Basic Education Commission (2010) describes continuous assessments (CA) as the periodic assessment of student's performance in teaching the curriculum content of a given course of study. The main focus of continuous assessment is to give feedback on the learners' academic progress regularly before the final assessment at the end of their educational programme.

UBEC (2010) describes continuous assessment as a process of periodic collection of academic information of the students through tests, assignments, teacher observation, and other assessment tools throughout an educational course of study to evaluate the progress or success of the students towards goal attainment.

All the information about learners' academic success and records from all sources needed to be put into consideration by the teacher in assessing the learners' academic achievement, and this is one of the unique features of continuous. Continuous assessment involves using various tools or instruments such as tests, projects, assignments and the like to determine the outcome of educational instruction given to the learners. Continuous assessment is an important component of the educational process that must be given proper attention (Lawrence & Oba, 2019). Continuous assessment gives feedback on who the learner is after undergoing educational training and provides the basis for how to help him in areas of difficulty.

Continuous assessments as a means of evaluating the learning outcome possess the following features;

1. **Systematic:** Continuous assessment requires proper planning to decide on every action that will be taken in the assessment process. Continuous assessment is systematic in the sense that it requires an operational plan, indicating the appropriate time within the school's academic calendar when evaluation or assessment of a student's academic performance will be made. The type of instrument of assessment, such as tests, assignments, and projects, are specified within the school academic year and incorporated into the scheme of work.

2. **Cumulative:** Continuous assessment is cumulative in the sense that previous evaluations and decisions on the learner were expected to be put into consideration and are being put into consideration in subsequent decisions. This now makes it binding for every school counsellor to keep an up-to-date record of every student.

3. **Guidance-oriented:** Academic achievement of the individual after undergoing educational training and decisions on the progress of the learner is determined through records kept in various assessment instruments. The information gathered about the learner will be useful in assisting the learners in educational pursuit and further development based on their academic performance and interest in the course. The school will also benefit from the information because it will be used in improving teaching and learning. This makes the CA be regarded as guidance-oriented.

## 2. Importance/ advantages of continuous assessment

The National Policy on Education (2013) highlights the importance of continuous assessment in Nigerian Education when it states that: “Educational assessment and evaluation will be liberalised by basing them in whole or in part on continuous assessment of the progress of the individual”. This implies the teacher's behaviours in assessing the performance of the students about their achievement in the subject being taught. Continuous assessment plays a vital role in monitoring students’ progress in terms of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. The advantages of continuous assessment include the following;

1. Continuous assessment helps in evaluating all aspects of learners’ behaviour; it therefore encourages the total development of the learner.
2. Continuous assessment helps to enhance learners’ habits.
3. Continuous assessment encourages teachers as they feel relevant in the scheme of work because it forms a part of a final assessment of student’s academic performance.
4. Continuous assessment, if properly used, will help to reduce examination malpractice and also minimise the fear of examination among students.
5. Continuous assessment helps to reveal the outcome of student academic progress throughout schooling.
6. Continuous assessments can be used to evaluate the performance of the teacher and, subsequently, the school, particularly as trends in performance may emerge.

Continuous assessment also helps in Monitoring students’ progress during educational programs. It is a continuous process since it is carried out continuously during a course of study. The student is evaluated and assessed anytime when new knowledge is introduced to him to find out his level of performance relative to exposure. Student’s academic progress or achievement is evaluated from one stage to the other during a course of study through tests, projects, teachers’ observations or assignments at the end of the term or year.

Omebe (2019) Despite the importance of continuous assessment in monitoring students’ progress, most of the teachers in Nigeria use only one test that is given at the end of the term to assess their student academic performance, and this is found to be inadequate because it does not put into consideration students class academic performance records such as assignment, class work, projects etc. which are also important instruments of monitoring students’ progress.

Adeshina (2011) notes that the continuous assessment method of monitoring students' academic achievement has many advantages over the short method of assessment because it is capable of making assessment more meaningful and more representative of the learner's overall abilities.

Continuous assessment encourages more teacher participation in monitoring students' academic performance because it places the teacher at the centre of all assessments of students' academic performance.

### **3. Limitations of continuous assessment**

The lack of valid and reliable tests that could be used in all schools is one of the major limitations of continuous assessments (Bassey *et al.*, 2017). Standard and reliable test needs to be constructed by following established procedures and practices. Bassey *et al.* further note for a successful implementation of the continuous assessment approach in monitoring students' progress, teachers need to give more tests, which means more marking. This indicates that teachers' responsibilities will increase, demand for their display of professionalism and attitudinal behaviour is needed for operating the system, and demand for their time will also increase.

Also, the lack of proper documentation of student information and academic records by the teacher is another limitation of continuous assessment (Baker.,2010). Learners' assessment records from the time they enter a new course of study must be adequately and meticulously kept over a long period. Records of class assessments of students such as assignments, tests, group works, projects and teachers' observations needed to be properly documented and stored for future decisions that will be taken on the learner's academic progress. These records should be properly stored and easily retrievable. Other challenges of using continuous assessment in monitoring students' academic achievement include the following;

1. Teachers negative attitude toward continuous assessment
2. Construction of poor assessment instruments by the teachers due to lack of skill in instrument construction
3. Lack of continuous assessment guidelines in schools
4. Irregular attendance and truancy on the part of students
5. Unethical attitude of teachers in the award of continuous assessment marks to the students
6. Lack of uniformity and standardisation of continuous assessment practices.

#### 4. Continuous Assessment and Academic Achievement

Continuous assessment and final examination are the two means of evaluating the level of students' academic achievement in Nigeria's educational system. The continuous assessment approach replaced the short system method, which was noted to have many limitations which include, including diagnostic and guidance-oriented properties, the creation of emotional problems, low context coverage and a high rate of examination irregularities, as noted by (Kapambwe 2010). Students' progress and growth are expected to be monitored by continuous assessment (i.e. through tests, assignments and projects) and terminal examination at the end of a term, semester, year or during the entire educational level as contained in the Continuous assessment policy. Ysseldyke and Salvia (2011) note that continuous assessment gives hints about the child's current academic achievement and provides information that will be used to assist the learner in the areas of academic need.

Farooq *et al.* (2011) highlighted the following roles of continuous assessment in the educational system:

- i. It provides a more standard and reliable means of assessment of the student's overall academic achievement.
- ii. Continuous assessment enables teachers to be more flexible and innovative in their teaching.
- iii. It provides basic guidance and encouragement for students.
- iv. It minimises the fear of examination and also reduces examination malpractice.

Omebe (2019) highlighted the following as some of the implementation problems of Continuous assessment in monitoring student academic achievement,

- i. Lack of Comparability of Standard,
- ii. Lack of proper Record Keeping and Continuity of Records,
- iii. Most schools lack continuous assessment storage facilities,
- iv. Unqualified Personnel, because most teachers lack skills for the construction of assessment tools and most teachers restrict themselves to only assignments and tests.
- v. A large Number of Students in a class makes it difficult for the teacher to teach effectively, assess and provide feedback to the children individually.
- vi. Misinterpretation of Continuous assessment guidelines by teachers,

#### 5. Influence of Continuous Assessment (CA) on Students Performance

Academic performance or achievement is described as the extent to which a student gains skills and knowledge or the level of success of students in specific areas concerning academic work, and it is measured by test scores or marks assigned by the teacher. Ekpeyong (2011) in his study revealed that the use of continuous assessment in monitoring students' academic performance is the most valid and appropriate means of improving class efforts towards summative evaluation (outcome). However,

Aremu (2011) noted that a certain number of factors exist which make the use of continuous assessment as a means of monitoring students' academic achievement or performance non-reliable, these factors include school traditions, teachers' assessment and rating styles, students' abilities and entry behaviours, manipulation of tests scores by the teachers among others. He also noted that these factors can also make the grade obtained from continuous assessment to be non-reliable. Similarly, Idowu and Esere (2010), in their studies of continuous assessment practices in schools, noted that most teachers lack skills and knowledge of different ways of students' assessment as most teachers observed during their study restrict themselves to tests and assignments as the only means of assessing students' academic achievement.

The nature of continuous assessment, therefore, has a significant influence on students' academic achievement. Characteristics of CA, such as being systematic, comprehensive, cumulative diagnostic and guidance-oriented, have a significant influence on students' outcomes (Ukuije,2011). It could, therefore, be inferred that for continuous assessment to continue to have a more positive influence on students' summative performance, teachers should move away from the traditional practice of tests and assignments to other different instruments such as observation, interview, and project reports.

## **6. Conclusion**

Continuous assessments are pivots on which the wheel of the teaching and learning process rotates; it is the process through which the quality of an individual work is judged. This means it can be used to predict the student's future performance in the final examinations and the possible success. It is a formative evaluation procedure that is concerned with finding out systematically all gains that a student has made in terms of knowledge, attitudes and skills after a given set of learning experiences.

## **7. Recommendation**

It is therefore recommended that:

- The classroom teachers should introduce the meaning and importance of classroom assessment to the students.
- The school principals should also make it compulsory for the classroom teachers to conduct and make use of continuous assessments in every subject.
- The school principal should provide all the necessary materials required for the successful conduct of continuous assessment and its usage.

- The proper implementation and the use of continuous assessment of the school curriculum will help the teachers and learners achieve their learning goals.
- The Ministry of Education and other stakeholders should provide enough funding and necessary materials required for the successful implementation of continuous assessment in schools.

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