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Most Appropriate Assessment Methods in Early Childhood Education and Sustainable Development: Counselling Implications

Adadu, Paulinus M. A., Ph.D.

ECCE Development
School of ECCE/PES
CRS College of Education, Akamkpa
E-mail: paulinusadadu@gmail.com

.....
Ani, Hannah Sunday

ECCE Development
School of ECCE/PES
CRS College of Education, Akamkpa

.....
Okon, Emilia Etim

ECCE Development
School of ECCE/PES
CRS College of Education, Akamkpa

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Abstract

The thrust of this paper is most appropriate assessment methods in Early Childhood Education and sustainable Development: Counselling Implications. It discussed the concepts: assessment, continuous assessment, objectives of continuous assessment, most appropriate continuous assessment methods, sustainability of continuous assessment, counselling implications and conclusion.

Introduction

The term assessment was derived from the Latin word 'assidere' meaning 'to sit beside'. This simple phrase tells us about the essence of assessment in the context of the pre-primary school classroom. Its

tone is non-threatening and affirming and it suggests a partnership based on mutual trust and understanding.

It reminds us that there should be a positive rather than a negative association between assessment and the process of teaching and learning in Schools. In the broadest sense assessment is concerned with children's progress and achievement. Much more specially, classroom assessment may be defined as 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. Assessment, therefore, involves much more than testing. It is an ongoing process that encompasses many formal and informal activities designed to monitor and improve teaching and learning in all areas of the curriculum. Continuous assessment was formally introduced into the Nigerian Educational system in 1982. It is often regarded as 'Assessment for learning' because the purpose of assessing the child is to help him learn and not just to find out if he has satisfied the objectives of learning. The pupils are assessed in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains using a variety of assessment techniques such as tests, projects, assignments, observations, questionnaire, interviewed portfolios, checklist, socio-metric and so on.

The results of these assessments are recorded and kept on a continuous basis for future use in decision making, programme evaluation and accountability, identifying children with special needs, formulation of policy, for guidance purposes pertaining to the school programme and pupils. It is therefore a formative mode of assessment. It is a method of ascertaining what pupils gain from schooling in terms of knowledge, skills, industry and character development, taking account of all his performance in tests, assignments, projects and other school activities during a given school period and using his recorded performance to help improve his learning by identifying and remedying areas of difficulties in learning (Federal Ministry of Education 1980). Thus Continuous Assessment is sensitive to the needs of the developing child and within an educational environment (Olatunje and Odenu 1984).

Characteristics of Assessment

Assessment has the following characteristics, according to (Anikwere 2005):

- It is comprehensive as it assesses all aspects of learning in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains using all possible techniques in data collection. It is systematic as every action is planned and well thought of before it is taken (Ojerinde and Falajo 1984). What to assess, how to assess, time of assessment, time to be spent by the
- Pupils, instrument to be used etc are determined and planned in advance.
- It is guidance oriented; the information, obtained can be used as a basis for guidance to enable pupils to continue to improve in their efforts. It is cumulative as it involves keeping of accurate records of all measurement taken on the child in a given school year. These records are used to give a true picture of the child any moment (Afe, 1991).

Objectives of Assessment

The aims of Federal Government of Nigeria on introducing continuous assessment in schools are deduced from the national policy on education and the hand book on continuous assessment (1980) as follows:

- a. To liberalize educational assessment and evaluation.
- b. To replace the basing of certification on one shot final examination with a system that takes into account the learners performance throughout the entire period of schooling so that the result will be more valid and more indicative of the learner's ability.

- c. To improve the method of selection into secondary schools by incorporating Headmaster continuous assessment into the Common Entrance Examination result.
- d. To give the teacher the opportunity to participate in the final assessment of his pupils.
- e. To encourage teachers to introduce innovations in their teaching since their assessment of pupils' performance on such innovations will become a part of the pupils' final assessment.
- f. To enable the use of assessment result for the guidance of pupils' learning and preparation for a career.
- g. To reduce the incidence of examination malpractice and leakage in final examinations.
- h. To enable the teacher regularly improve upon his own performance from the feedback he gets from assessment.
- i. To ensure consistency, clarity and uniformity in educational practices throughout the federation and ensure an even orderly development of the country.

There is no doubt that these are desirable and laudable aims. The problem however has been appropriate methods of assessment of pupils in pre-primary schools.

Appropriate Methods/Tools for Assessment in Early Childhood Education

Assessment in Pre-Primary

Schools should involve the three domains of cognitive, affective and psychomotor. For cognitive assessment, short answer test items such as drawings, true/false and voice response exercises are very suitable and are done orally constitute appropriate method not necessarily involving pen and paper.

For affective and psychomotor domains, observation, interview, checklist and practical activities are most suitable.

According to Uyiuta (1995) the most appropriate method of assessment in Early Childhood Education should be mainly informal. The teacher should more often than not make use of observation using achievement checklists or rating inventory in assessing children of pre-school age. Informal observation is very important in assessing early childhood activities considering the fact that most of the children cannot talk well nor are able to write. This is most appropriate.

Observation fits an interactive style of curriculum in which give and take between the teacher and the pupils is the norm. Since observation is informal, children can be observed at any time and any place during their daily activities without limiting assessment to end of the term or year (schiveinhart 1993). This is also most appropriate.

The teacher can also make use of an achievement checklist. The items on the checklist could be derived from the listed behaviours/skills mastered by each child. The rating is done on a 3 rate point where:

- 1 = sometimes
- 2 = Always and
- 3 = Never

The extent of each child's achievement could be computed by adding the frequency of observed behaviour skill and as a percentage of the total behaviour/skill.

Assessment in pre-primary schools is not one-time event, rather it is conducted severally over time to document progress and growth during the child's participation in high quality care and education programmes. In both early childhood and primary school, it is not primarily comparative but rather

individualistic in nature. The individual is viewed as the reference point to make comparison about progress and gains due to the programme and or curriculum being implemented.

This is done to avoid a situation where weak children in the class begin to have negative self-concept and see themselves as failures while the brilliant ones look down on others.

Sustainability of Continuous Assessment

To ensure sustainability, honesty and integrity in grading and reporting of assessment results thereby maintaining high standards, government proposed the programme should be coordinated on four levels:

- i. The school level.
- ii. The local government/district level.
- iii. The state level.
- iv. The national levels.

Secondly, appropriate committees have to carry out the coordination exercise of these levels.

In the pre-primary and primary schools, the committee is supposed to comprise (a) the Headmaster/Headmistress (b) the assistant Head and (c) three most Senior members of staff provided at least of them is from the Junior section. The following constitute the objectives of the school assessment programme.

1. To have something to report to parents and some interested bodies.
2. To identify levels of ability, achievement and affective development for various individual and groups of pupils.
3. To diagnose learning difficulties and strengths and weaknesses in group performance for the purpose of improving intuition.
4. To assess group gains in achievement on co-operatively developed standardized instruments in the evaluation of some locally introduced innovative programs.
5. To assess special attitude and interests of pupils for counselling purposes.

The functions of this committee are given as follows:

- a. To assign various duties relating to continuous assessment to the teacher.
- b. To oversee to keeping of various records.
- c. To give guidance to other teachers who may need some skills in continuous assessment.
- d. To develop a time table for the continuous assessment of pupils in the school.
- e. To ensure availability of appropriate materials.
- f. To facilitate cooperative development of assessment instrument among schools in the locality (Federal Ministry of Education, 1980).

Counselling Implications

Assessment should be age appropriate and multiple methods should be used such as assigning the child familiar task, in a setting that is comfortable for the child and the child's family. This will increase the likelihood that the results will be valid.

For assessment to be alright, teachers must have adequate knowledge of this level of education and trained for this same level.

- Teachers must have adequate knowledge of constructing assessment instrument for this level of learners.

- Teachers must have adequate knowledge and skills of recording accurately children's social, emotional and cognitive skills during their usual daily activities.
- Teachers must have knowledge of how to integrate the results of assessment into planning educational opportunities and developmentally appropriate learning experience for the individual children.
- Teachers must ensure uniformity in teaching in terms of content, method of teaching, period to teach based on the modules for pre-primary schools.
- Teachers must ensure uniformity and quality of assessment in terms of method and time throughout the school year. Such as making it informal as in the use of suitable and oral response, observation and use of checklist.

Conclusion

Teachers must have a positive rather than a negative association between assessment and the process of teaching in pre-primary schools. It is a process of gathering recording, interpreting, using and communicating information about a child's progress and achievement of knowledge, concepts, skills and attitudes. It involves much more than testing.

Assessment is very successful in pre-primary schools when the right approaches are adopted in terms of methods, age of the children, teachers' knowledge and skills and ability to record the assessment. The most appropriate method is therefore informal involving observation, suitable and oral voice response and use of checklist.

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