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Continuous Assessment as a Predictor of Academic Performance in Imo State Secondary Schools in Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria

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Abstract:
The study examined continuous assessment as a predictor of academic performance in Okigwe Zone secondary schools in Owerri, Imo state. The study adopted the survey research design. The population of the study included all the 66 public secondary schools in Imo state, Nigeria. The respondents' populations of the school were 8700 (132 Principals and 8,568 teachers) and randomly sampled 1740 respondents(26 principals and 1713 teachers) was selected and this represented 20% of the respondents population. Data was collected through the use of questionnaire designed by the researchers. Rating scale tagged ''Continuous Assessment as Predictor of Students Academic Performance Questionnaire (CAAPAPQ)''. The questionnaire had 13 items and test—retest statistical method was used to determine the reliability coefficient of the instrument (0.89). Two research questions and one hypothesis guided the study. Weighted mean was used to answer the questions while z-test was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The finding of the study revealed that continuous assessment is essential for academic success of the students. Based on the findings, the study recommended that schools should set aside a particular body that will carry out the duty of continuous assessment from time to time in the school. This will enable the school to know the areas the students are lacking and find means to correct it. Feedbacks from continuous assessment unit should be given urgent attention. This will help the school to correct mistakes in their early stages; and, finally, teachers should be educated on how to conduct assessment on the students so as make the students understand that the essence is for him/her to emerge with good academic performance in the end.

Keywords: Continuous assessment, academic performance, school, teachers

1. Introduction

Over the years, researches on factors that influence academic performance of students have attracted the interest of not only researchers but concern of teachers, counselors, psychologists, and school administrators as well. Thus, identifying the factors in determining academic success is a major concern of researchers for the purpose of developing an education curriculum aimed at improving levels of academic performance. This calls for examining the reasons for individual differences in students' academic performance. Hew (2019) explained Academic performance as the extent to which a student, teacher or institution has achieved their short or long-term educational goals. However, in regards to the present study, academic performance of a student can be seen as the extent to which a student has achieved in the academic works given to them within a period of time. The importance of academic performance of students, especially at the basic level cannot be overemphasized. This is because the social and economic development of the country is directly linked with student academic performance. According to Soribe (2014), the students' performance (academic achievement) plays an important role in producing the best quality graduates who will become great leader and manpower for the country thus responsible for the country's economic and social development. Academic performance is a very essential issue in Nigerian secondary schools, especially the students in secondary level who would enter universities for further studies. For Nigerian students to perform very well academically, it is crucial to review from time to time the method of learning in the schools and establish the major ways of regularly checking on the performance of the students. Ekwe (2015) carried out a survey in some selected secondary schools in Izza North LGA of Ebonyi state to identify some major causes of low academic performances in students. Major among the issues raised was lack of continues assessment by the teachers. According to Ekwe (2015) many teachers today have disregarded the importance of continues assessment in determining the progress and performance of the students. It is noteworthy to state that

continues assessment is basically used to find out how much student has acquired in terms of knowledge and learning skills. The assessment can be continuous, final examination or a combination of both. The method of assessment per se is not the target but its impact on student learning is important. Hall (2015) noted that it is designed with the aim of sustaining quality of learning throughout a period of semester or term. Gawood (2017) explained that the term 'continuous assessment' is used to describe assessments that are completed during the course module. The method is also referred to as curriculum integrated assessment or embedded assessment. Continuous assessment can replace the final assessment or can be combined with the final assessment to calculate a final grade Aina (2014) Continuous assessment involves the administration of several tests instead of a single final examination; continuous assessment assists students to identify their strong and weak areas and also makes teachers to be more involved in his or her works. According to Ekeada, (2015) continuous assessment is important for assisting teachers to understand the problems affecting the art of teaching, learning and evaluation. Continuous assessment is a formative type of assessment as it aimed at helping both students and the teachers at a time when they can still make any adjustment in teaching and learning Mahul (2012). Continuous assessment covers all area of student learning that is why Natt (2019) stressed that evaluation should not only be based on recalling of facts but also on the affective and psychomotor. Sometimes assessment of student could be in form of project; personal observation by the teacher; take home assignment and class test. Whichever form it might take assessment activities takes much time of the teachers and has an important place both in teachers and students' lives Njoku (2018). It is a powerful process that can either optimize or inhibit learning depending on how it is applied. Nwoko, I. (2016) opined that continuous assessment is a method of appraisal in which students' achievements in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains are determined using scores obtained from various instruments like mid-term tests, homework, assignments, quizzes, practice sessions, laboratory, worksheets, and classroom participation. Similarly, Santrock, (2016) All these assessment tools should complement each other having in mind that the objectives of continuous assessment is to make students learn consistently and effectively. Bello (2012) Continuous assessment was introduced to influence the quality and style of teaching and learning to ensure that all learners learn by utilizing a range of teaching learning and assessment strategies. Ogonna, P. (2010).Continuous assessment is school-based process that uses a variety of assessment tools to measure behaviour or learners performance. Roberts, B. (2011). Continuous assessment can be done in both formative and summative assessment. Formative assessment is the frequent interactive assessment of students' progress and understanding of what goes on in the instructional process to identify whether instructional objectives are being achieved from both the learners and teacher's perspectives. Summative assessment occurs at the end of a class, course, semester or academic year and it measures learning outcomes and reports these outcomes to students, parents and administrators. One of the functions of the school is the assessment of the learners on what they have been taught with the intent of determining how well such learners have attained the objectives of a particular subject taught. In this case some teachers may exhibit positive or negative attitude towards continuous assessment practices.

Marizu, L. (2013) defined continuous assessment as an assessment procedure whereby each child's performance and progress in the cognitive, affective, psychomotor and psycho-productive areas of learning in the school up to the last day in it. Continuous assessment was introduced to influence the quality and style of teaching and learning to ensure that all learners learn by utilizing a range of teaching learning and assessment strategies. Okoro (2013) Continuous assessment is school-based process that uses a variety of assessment tools to measure behaviour or learners performance. Continuous assessment can be done in both formative and summative assessment. Formative assessment is the frequent interactive assessment of students' progress and understanding of what goes on in the instructional process to identify whether instructional objectives are being achieved from both the learners and teacher's perspectives. Summative assessment occurs at the end of a class, course, semester or academic year and it measures learning outcomes and reports these outcomes to students, parents and administrators. One of the functions of the school is the assessment of the learners on what they have been taught with the intent of determining how well such learners have attained the objectives of a particular subject taught. In this case some teachers may exhibit positive or negative attitude towards continuous assessment practices.

Mkimbili (2018) opined that testing students on the basis of knowledge that they acquire from classes, books, and videos are not sufficient. Many times, students are excellent when it comes to studying the course out of a well-written book. However, the challenge lies in testing the student on something more. This is often in relation to the curriculum and the course. In order to be able to test the student on various skills, continuous assessment is crucial. This study therefore, attempts to examine continuous assessment as a predictor of academic achievement, using secondary school students in Imo State, Nigeria as a case study.

1.1. Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study was to examine continuous assessment as a predictor of academic achievement, using secondary school students in Imo State, Nigeria as a case study. Specifically, the study intends to:

- Determine the role of continuous assessment in secondary schools in Imo state, Nigeria.
- Identify the impact of continuous assessment on the academic performance of secondary school students in Imo State, Nigeria.

1.2. Significance of the Study

The study will be useful to the government, schools, students and future researchers.

To the government, the study will provide them with information on the importance of continuous assessment on the academic growth of the students especially, those who would be entering higher institutions.

Schools will find the study immensely useful in that it will enlighten them on the relevance of continuous assessment in the growth of the students' academic performance. It will also help them to see reasons to prepare their school curriculum in a way that it will accommodate continuous assessment of the student's performance.

Students will benefit from the study as it will educate them on the importance of studying hard in other to come out with good grades, especially during continuous assessment.

Future researchers will find the study very useful in that it will provide them with material on continuous assessment as a predictor of academic achievement in upper basic education. It will also serve as a reference material to those who are carrying out research on the same topic or any related one.

1.3. Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study

- What are the roles of continuous assessment on the academic performance ofsecondary school students in Imo State, Nigeria?
- In what ways does continuous assessment impact on the academic performance of secondary school students in Imo State, Nigeria?

1.4. Hypothesis

- Ho1: there is no significant difference between the mean rating scale of Principals and teachers on the role of continuous assessment on academic performance of secondary school students in Imo state.

2. Method

The research design adopted for the study was the descriptive survey. Population of the study comprised all the 8,700respondents made up of all the 60 Principals and 8640 teachers in the 30 public secondary schools inImo state, Nigeria. A sample of 1,740 respondents was selected and this represented 20% of respondents' population. Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to select the sample.

The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire designed by the researchers. It was titled 'Continuous Assessment as Predictor of Students Academic Performance Questionnaire' (CAPSAPQ). Draft copies of the instruments were given to three specialists, one from Educational Measurement and Evaluation and two specialists from Educational Management and policy Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka for validated. Fifty (50) copies of the instrument were distributed to fifty(50) respondents that were chosen from secondary schools in Imo state that were outside the study area on two occasions within the space of two weeks for the reliability. The reliability indexes of 0.88 for the rating scale and 0.85 for the checklist using cronbach Alpha were realized respectively. One thousand seven hundred and forty (1,740) copies of the instruments were personally administered by the researchers to the respective secondary schools. The respondents completed the instrument on the spot and this ensured a 100% return rate. Mean rating and standard deviation scores were used to answer the research questions while the z-test statistics was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

The method of data analysis adopted was that questionnaire items that have weighted mean scores that are equal to or above 2.50 are considered 'Agreed'. While those that weighted mean score was below 2.50 are considered 'Disagreed'. While when testing the hypothesis, if the z- cal score was higher than the z- criterion (z-crit.) score the null hypothesis was considered rejected. Thus if the z-cal score was lower than the t-crit. score the null hypothesis was considered accepted.

3. Data Analysis

- Research Question One: What are the roles of continuous assessment in schools?

S/N	Items Description	Principals	Teachers	Weighted Mean	Remarks
1	provides the necessary feedback	3.33	3.29	3.31	Agree
2	provides objective evidences necessary in the decision-making process	3.45	3.15	3.30	Agree
3	identify strengths and weakness	3.15	3.10	3.13	Agree
4	Discover the subject and activities not useful to the students	3.26	2.96	3.11	Agree
5	Suggests when there is need to improve on a particular subject	3.29	2.99	3.14	Agree
6	Provide information useful for the school curriculum	2.35	2.13	2.24	Disagree
7	Give insight on the progress of the students academic performance	3.21	3.00	3.11	Agree
	Criterion Mean		2.50		

Table 1: The Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of the Response of Teachers and Principals in Junior Secondary Schools on the Role of Continuous Assessment in Secondary Schools in Imo State, Nigeria

Table 1 showed that items 1, 2,3,4,5, and 6 have mean scores (3.31, 3.30, 3.13, 3.11, 3.14, 2.24 and 2.86 respectively), that are greater than 2.50. Sequel to this, it therefore follows that the respondents agreed that items, 1,2,3,4,5,6, and 7 are the roles of continuous assessment as a predictor of academic performance in Junior secondary schools in Imo state, Nigeria.

- Research Question Two: In what ways does continuous assessment impact on the academic performance of upper basic students in Secondary School in Imo State? The mean and standard deviation scores of the response of teachers and Principals in senior secondary schools on the Impact of continuous assessment in senior secondary schools in Imo state.

S/N	Items Description	Principals	Teachers	Weighted mean	Remarks
8	Helps the student to sit-up academically	335	3.04	3.30	Agree
9	Enables the student to know areas he/she is lacking behind	375	3.40	3.58	Agree
10	The students sees his/her area of specialization	330	3.0	3.15	Agree
11	Helps the student to aim for high academic success	340	3.15	3.30	Agree
12	Gives the teacher insight on the academic strength of the student	355	3.22	3.39	Agree
13	Helps the student to see where he/she is having difficulty in school	348	3.16	3.32	Agree
	Criterion Mean		2.50		

Table 2

Table 2 showed that items 8, 9,10,11,12, and 13 have mean scores (3.30, 3.58, 3.15, 3.30, 3.39, and 3.32 respectively), that are greater than 2.50. It therefore follows that the respondents agreed that items, 8, 9,10,11,12, and 13 are the impact of continuous assessment in senior secondary schools in Imo state, Nigeria.

- Hypothesis: Ho: there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of the response of Principals and Teachers on the impact of continuous assessment as a predictor of academic performance in both junior and senior secondary schools in Imo state, Nigeria.

Table 3: z-test on the there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of the response of Principals and teachers on the impact of continuous assessment as a predictor of academic performance in secondary schools in Imo State, Nigeria.

Respondents	N	X	SD	zcrit	Zcal	Df	level of Significance	Decision
Principals	60	3.11	1.64	1.96	2.75	1738	0.5	Ho not accepted
Teachers	1690	2.97	1.25					

Table 3

4. Discussion of Findings

The findings of research question one, revealed that the respondents agreed that continuous assessment play essential role in the school which includes provision of feedback to the school management, provision of objective evidence necessary for decision making, identification of strength and weakness of teachers and students, etc. This data suggests that continuous assessment provides day-to-day feedback about the learning and teaching process. It reinforces the efficacy of teaching and learning. It also encourages the understanding of teaching as a formative process that evolves over time with feedback and input from students. This finding in line with Mkimbili (2018) that in order to attain the competencies in teaching and learning, the method of assessment ought also to change to make it more authentic. The focus should not be on passing the final examinations, but, rather, to attain competencies and ability in solving problems in real life situations. He further stressed that to facilitate learners' acquisition of problem solving skills, in the continuous assessment, teachers should specify the learning tasks in a given lesson, administering the assessment for every aspect of competence learned and use feedback from evaluation to improve mastery of competencies.

The findings of research question two showed that the respondents agreed that continuous assessment impacted on the academic performance of secondary school students in Imo state. Which includes helping the students to sit up academically, enables the student to his/her area of weakness, helps the student to know his/her area of specialization, makes students to aim for higher academic success, etc. in the opinion of Ekwe (2015) It is noteworthy to state that continues assessment is basically used to find out how much student has acquired in terms of knowledge and learning skills. The assessment can be continuous, final examination or a combination of both. The method of assessment per se is not the target but its impact on student learning is important. Hall (2015) noted that it is designed with the aim of sustaining quality of learning throughout a period of semester or term.

5. Conclusion

The use of continuous assessment in secondary schools, aimed at competence development is very crucial for prosperous education of any country. Competent students are in the position to be future experts in various fields and contribute to the country's economic development. In order to achieve this, substantial changes need to take place in the assessment procedures in Nigeria. Continuous assessment procedures should be restructured in such a way that they go beyond paper-and-pencil tests. Continuous assessment should be integrated into the teaching and learning process. It should be learner-centered and should employ various assessment techniques including among others, project work, assay writing, oral examinations and portfolio assessment. It should not focus on academic skills alone. It embraces the cognitive, the psychomotor and the affective domains. Cumulative characteristics of continuous assessment means that all information gathered on the individual has to be pooled together before a decision can be taken. To say that continuous assessment is guidance oriented means that the information so collected is to be used for educational, vocational and personal-social decision-making for the student. It can be deduced from this study that continuous assessment provides feedback to students and teachers. Such feedback provides information which is used for purposes of improving on the students' performance or modifying the content, context and methods of teaching, as well as in making a variety of other decisions that will help the academic performance of the student. It suffices to state that schools that do not have continuous assessment medium will likely graduate students whose academic performances are very poor.

6. Recommendations

- Schools should set aside a particular body that will carry out the duty of continuous assessment from time to time in the school. This will enable the school to know the areas the students are lacking and find means to correct it.
- Feedbacks from continuous assessment unit should be given urgent attention. This will help the school to correct mistakes in their early stages.
- Teachers should be educated on how to conduct assessment on the students so as make the students understand that the essence is for him/her to emerge with good academic performance in the end.

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