

Trends In Educational Evaluations In Nigeria: Issues And Challenges

¹Ndubueze, M. Okoloeze; ²Iyoke, J.O., ¹Okoh, S.C. and ³Beatrice, N. Akubilo

¹Department of educational foundations, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria

²Department of Science and Computer Education, Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu, Nigeria.

³Department of Science Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Abstract

The paper highlights the trends in educational evaluations in Nigeria starting from the pre-colonial Nigeria to the contemporary. Nigeria first practiced traditional educational evaluation but the system was criticized for lack of documented data. Then the colonial one – shot end of programme evaluation which was later found to be judgmental, breeds examination malpractice among other ills. The present continuous assessment system was introduced to take care of the anomalies and reposition our educational system. The new system is however not free from issues and challenges. These have been highlighted and recommendations made.

Introduction

Education is the transmission of what is worthwhile from the custodians (teachers) to the learners. Evaluation is the process of seeking, obtaining and quantifying data with a view to making value judgment about objects, events or their characteristics (Nworgu, 2003). Evaluation is therefore an integral part of education. Education cannot really be said to be transmitted without proper evaluation. Evaluation is a broad concept which involves measurement, test and value judgement (Masha, 2002). One may therefore say that the process of describing individual achievements in education without assigning numerical value to it is called evaluation

Before the coming of colonialism, Nigeria practiced traditional education and evaluation. The parents and adult members of the community are the teachers while the children are the learners (Owolabi, 2003). Children were brought up along the lines of family profession or occupation (Mkpa, 2014; Owolabi 2003). Pupils seeking special training in such areas as traditional medicine, carpentry, sorcery etc were sent for apprenticeship where they learn under masters of such trades (Esu & Junaid, 2014; Owolabi, 2003). Teaching and learning in traditional education was by observation imitation and practice while evaluation was a form of continuous assessment aimed at diagnosis and remediation. According to Esu and Junaid (2014), a practical test relevant to the learners experience and level of development was the final examination. The evaluation covers physical, character and intellectual areas thus a comprehensive evaluation. The major limitation of the system lies in the absence of writing and record keeping (Okonkwo, 1998 in Ojerinde, 2002; Mkpa 2014) except in the brain and memories of the custodians. Mkpa lamented that memory could fail and that in the event of death of the custodian of some useful information or skill; all is lost.

Colonial Educational Evaluation

Western education was brought into Nigeria by the early Christian missionaries around 1843 (Oni, 2009). The basic curriculum as at that time was the '3Rs' (Reading, Writing, Arithmetic).

By 1886, the British had colonized Nigeria and took over the running of education (Oni, 2009). The emphasis was on writing, communication and the ability to read and memorize the holy Bible. It could be said that the colonial masters at that time do not want the colony to get education in the real sense of education but rather wanted them to learn how to read and write the English language (the language of the colonialists) for better exploitation of the colony. Educational evaluation at this time was not systematic but was left on the hands of teachers who adopted different methods as they deem fit (Owolabi, 2003).

The promulgation of educational ordinance of 1887 brought an end to the parochial missionary education (Owolabi, 2003). According to him, the ordinance introduced infant, primary, industrial schools and later Colleges and Universities.

The major problem of educational evaluation at this time was that it consisted of one – shot end of programme evaluation. Students may be assessed as teaching and learning was going on, but such an assessment never counts in his certification (Nworgu, 2003).

The fate of the child therefore hangs on a single examination which is externally administered and marked and has the power to uplift or pull down. A pass guarantees a meal ticket while a fail turns one into a hewer of wood and drawer of water for his certificated mate. The temptation to pass by all means was therefore irresistible. In the words of Ojerinde (2002) “the use into which the results of candidates were put soon made the examination attain a high status that passing them became a do-or-die affair”.

The colonial system also failed in the provision of corrective feedback to learners rather it was completely judgmental. Students are supposed to know why they fail, take corrections and then progress in the learning activity. Failure discourages but it discourages the more when you do not know why you failed. The colonial system did not however take notice of this anomaly

The contemporary educational evaluation in Nigeria

The method of educational evaluations Nigeria inherited from the colonial masters was a defective one (Okoye, 1996a). A system in which one running a three or five years programme is only assessed at the final year of the programme and the result is expected to be a true reflection of the child’s academic acquisition over the years. The results are also expected to put food on the tables of the successful candidates. Students therefore had no other choice than examination malpractice as already highlighted’

The worst case of this defective system was perhaps in 1977 when there was a massive leakage of the WAEC SSCE examination question papers. Yolo (1980) in Nwaogazie (2009) blamed the incidence on the practice of a single examination “the reason for such a high incidence on examination malpractice is the fact that a single examination is too crucial and the temptation to ensure success by all means is high”.

It became quite urgently necessary to rescue the nation’s education from decay, total collapse and oblivion. The government rose to the challenge by setting up various commissions of enquiries on the remote causes and innovations to solve the problem.

Innovations in Educational Evaluation in Nigeria

Innovations in educational evaluation in Nigeria before and after independence can be discussed under four major headings: Instrumentation; frame of interpretation, evaluation agencies and mode of evaluation

Instrumentation

Prior to independence and after independence, the evaluation instrument used in Nigerian schools was essay type achievement tests which were solely used by classroom teachers in evaluating students’ achievements. These tests are teacher made. Essay tests have many advantages such as being easy to develop, promoting whole learning, giving rooms for proper interpretation of information among others, it however have the following limitations: it’s not easy to score, seems to have low reliability in scoring, limitations in sampling and so can have low content coverage. It also promotes subjective scoring. Due to these limitations amongst others, the multiple choice objective tests were introduced in 1964 by the West African Examination Council (WAEC) to supplement the traditional Essay type test (Obodo, 2004). Up till now, the multiple choice objective tests are used in conjunction with the essay type test in evaluating students’ achievements in schools, school certificates/general certificate examinations, basic education certificate examinations, common entrance examinations etc in Nigeria.

Frame of interpretation

Two frames of interpretation in Nigeria educational system are norm referenced interpretation and criterion referenced interpretation. Norm referenced frame of interpretation consists of interpreting evaluation data with respect to a student’s relative position in a defined group. Here, the average score of the student represents the norm which is used in comparing each student’s level of achievements. The criterion reference frame of interpretation evaluates achievements in absolute terms. Data are interpreted based on pre-specified criteria. For instance, at the inception of a lesson, a teacher may decide in advance that any student who answers at least 70% of the number of items has mastered the concept. Those who reach this criterion proceeds to the next lesson while those who could not repeat the lesson. This gives rise to individualized instruction systems today.

Evaluation agencies in Nigeria

Another factor that contributed to the development and innovations in educational evaluations in Nigeria are the evaluation agencies. These include the West African Examination Council (WAEC), The Ministries of Education, The Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), National Teachers Institute (NTI) and Schools.

Mode of evaluation

Mode of evaluation refers to the general design/ approach to evaluation. There had not been any clearly defined mode of evaluation in Nigeria until 1977 when Nigerian government first introduced continuous assessment as contained in the National policy on education (Federal Government of Nigeria, FGN, 1977). It should be noted that the national outcry of 1977 against the massive leakage of the WAEC SSCE question papers gave rise to this mode of evaluation in Nigeria. The government having taken notice of the grave consequences of a malpractice ridden exam and certification made haste to form various commissions of enquiries into the problem. One of the obvious consequences is that the Nigerian educational certificate and indeed all West African's will be treated with contempt if the ugly trend is not nailed or checkmated.

The emergence of continuous assessment system

One of the outcomes of the commission's work was the introduction of 6-3-3-4 system of education which incorporates a system of evaluation called continuous assessment.

The initiative was celebrated by stakeholders in education (Odum, 2012; Ojerinde, 2002; Okoye, 2007).

Meaning of continuous assessment

The Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (1985) in Ojerinde (2002) defined continuous assessment as:

A mechanism whereby the final grading of a student in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of behavior systematically takes account of all his performances during a given period of schooling. Such an assessment involves the use of a great variety of modes of evaluation for the purpose of guiding and improving learning

According to the national policy of education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004) cited in Okoye (2007), educational assessment will be liberalized by basing them in whole or in part on continuous assessment of the progress of the individual. Continuous assessment is therefore the periodic determination of the value and worth of a learner all through his school career and ensuring that the decision based on the assessment contributes to his final assessment at end of the programme.

Features of continuous assessment

The main characteristics of continuous assessment as can be deduced from the definition are: systematic, comprehensive, cumulative and guidance oriented.

Systematic nature

This feature means that the continuous assessment involves an operational plan as regards to how it should be implemented. The students are also aware of what is scheduled and at what time it is scheduled in the school calendar. It is therefore a wrong practice for any teacher to take students by surprise in the name of continuous assessment (Ojerinde, 2002). This unfortunately is what is obtainable in most public and private schools where teachers arbitrary administer continuous assessment. Some teachers may not do any assessment till the term is about to end and it then downs on them that they have no assessment scores to add to the end of term score, they then rush to the classroom to announce an urgent test that must take place 'tomorrow'. Such practice will only encourage memorization and regurgitation of facts, stifles reflective thinking and defeats the aim of the introduction the CA

Cumulative nature

The information about the child includes his performance from the first day at school to the last day. The decision as to whether to promote him or not is based on his performance during the entire school session and not on the last term alone (Ojerinde, 2002).

Comprehensive nature

The continuous assessment just like the traditional evaluation is based on the totality of the individual's performance and not only on the cognitive domain. The three educational domains are systematically and comprehensively assessed. The colonial system was criticized for basing assessment only on the cognitive domain at the expense of the affective and psychomotor.

Guidance oriented

The purpose of the continuous assessment is not only to accumulate data (Okoye, 2007) rather to guide the learner in the areas of strength and weakness. It involves systematic and objective assessment of the student in order to obtain information about the student and identify, select and help the child based on his weak areas (Ubom, 2006). Unfortunately, many teachers today use their assessment results for computing terminal report cards only as against identifying students' weakness and for remediation (Odum, 2012).

Rational for adopting continuous assessment

The Federal ministry of education, science and technology (1985) in Okoye (2007) explicitly captured the reason for the introduction in the following statements:

For several years now, Nigeria and indeed other West African Countries have been plagued with the occurrence of examination malpractices especially in the West African School Certificate Examination. It has been suggested that one of the reason for such incidence of examination malpractice is the fact that the temptation to ensure success by all means (fair or foul) is very high. It is believed that if continuous assessment is employed, this temptation will be considerably reduced.

Other rational for the introduction was the need to have a comprehensive as well as a guidance oriented evaluation of teaching and learning (Nworgu, 2003; Ojerinde, 2002; Okoye, 2007; Ubom, 2006). These were all lacking in the colonial system.

Issues in the CA

The CA is not a finished and neatly packaged product; there are indeed a few unresolved issues in the practice (Ojerinde, 2002).

One of such issues is the problem of comparability of standard (Nworgu, 2003; Ojerinde, 2002; Okoye, 2007).

This problem arises because of the difference in the quality of tests and other assessment instruments used in different schools (Nworgu, 2003) and the difference in the procedures for scoring and grading the instruments in these schools (Ojerinde, 2002). Central to the problem therefore is the lack the requisite skills of test construction among the teachers.

Okoye (1996) lamented that it is difficult to compare a score of 80% given to a child in school A with another score of 80% given to another child in school B since both tests may not be equal in difficulty.

In a study that covered six states in southern Nigeria carried out by Okonkwor (1998) and reported in Ojerinde (2002), most schools in the study areas still carry assessment in the cognitive domain alone. The study further revealed that it was only two schools that were found to carry assessment in the affective and the psychomotor domain and even in those schools, the weights accorded to the domains in the computation of students results differs as well as the weights allocated to the different assessment data, the collecting instruments and scores for the different terms of the session across the schools and states.

Okoye (1996) had suggested that one of the ways of reducing this problem but not eliminating it is by transforming the scores to T-scores (standard scores). But Okonkwor (1999) in Ojerinde (2002) criticized the suggestion on the grounds that it victimizes students of higher ability and at the same time favoring students of

low or average ability. He however advocated the use of mean of means and standard deviation scores of schools for a period of time ending with the year of a given examination. None of the examination bodies have started using the Okonkwor suggestion and this implies that the problem remains unresolved.

To overcome the problem in the use of different assessment tools, Nworgu (2003) and Ojerinde (2002) suggested the development of item pool or bank where schools from each education zone of a state can draw and construct reliable and valid assessment instrument for their use. This will ensure uniformity in assessment tools across the zone at least.

Another issue is that of proper record keeping. The uniqueness of continuous assessment method hinges on appropriate, progressive and comprehensive record keeping else; it's not different from the old system. Record is to be kept in all domains and not only on the cognitive.

In a bid to solve the problem of record keeping, the continuous assessment implementation committee introduced a uniform report card system (Nworgu, 2003). The reporting system provides for recording of students assessment in subjects, physical developments, affective and psychomotor domains.

Regrettably, Okoye (2007) observed that many teachers still do more of cognitive assessment at the expense of the affective and psychomotor. He noted that this could be because many teachers are not at home with the techniques of non cognitive assessments.

Challenges of continuous assessment practice

Central to the success or otherwise of the CA practice is the teacher. He is 'the man behind the machine of the continuous assessment practice'. Positioning him therefore for the appropriate CA practice is a major challenge in the execution of the practice (Ojerinde, 2002).

One of the challenges to the practice of the CA is the problem of large class size. One can find a class size of about 70 students in Nigerian public and private schools. A teacher may be handling about two or three classes of such class size. It therefore becomes hard for the teacher to provide the necessary guidance as required by the CA practice. He therefore struggles to do assessment not for remediation but result computation. If the objective of the CA must be met, the issue of class size must be urgently looked into.

Close to the challenge of class size is the abuse of the CA by some unscrupulous teachers. So many teachers may be because of the aforementioned challenge awards scores arbitrary to students while some may make some demands on the students in order to score them (Okoye, 2001). What this means according to Esomonu (2006) is that some scores submitted by the teachers are unreliable. The implication of this, she continued is that decisions about the students are made on false data and that this could be dangerous to both the educational system and the society at large.

The validity and the reliability of the CA scores have been seriously questioned by researchers (Esomonu, 2006; Odum, 2012; Ojerinde, 2002; Okoye, 2001). This can never be gotten right except the teacher is in complete agreement.

Recommendations

There is no gainsaying that the CA system of evaluation is better than both the traditional system and the colonial system. What is necessary now therefore is addressing the issues and challenges and to this the researcher makes the following recommendations:

1. The ministry of education should implement the provision of central assessment banks for schools. This should be implemented in all states of the federation and not in some states or few educational zones.
2. The government should establish and equip more schools so as to address the issue of class size. A class size of 40 – 50 can be manageable to a resourceful teacher.
3. Enhancing teachers' salary and other allowances will be of a great motivation to the teacher who incidentally is 'the man behind the machine' of the continuous assessment practice.
4. Teachers should be trained on the techniques and practice of non cognitive assessment. This will enhance comprehensive assessment

5. The teacher himself should be committed to this great innovation, shun all forms of unscrupulous acts. This simply suggests that the teachers should also develop their affective domains.

Conclusion

Educational evaluation in Nigeria is a product of evolutionary trend which started with the traditional educational evaluation to the present continuous assessment system. There were issues and challenges with the three systems of educational evaluations addressed by the paper. The CA system however is the best among all if its rudiments are to be religiously followed. The ball is completely in the courts of teachers. The society is a product of the school and the school is a product of the

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