

# LEARNING AND CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT: VITAL TOOLS FOR MEASURING STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

**Oratokhai, D.I. (Mrs.) and  
Osagie-Obazee, G.E. (Mrs.)**

*Lecturers, Department of Educational Psychology,  
College of Education, Ekiadolor, Benin City, Nigeria*

*Phone: +234-805-737-5557, +234-802-882-8367*

*E-mail: fridayojiebun@yahoo.com*

## ***Abstract***

*This paper attempts to x-ray learning and continuous assessment as a vital tool for measuring student's academic performance. Several definitions of the words were viewed. Types and importance of learning were also considered. The role of assessment in learning was not left out. It was discovered that learning cannot thrive without assessment, as students will develop a lascivious attitude towards learning. Learning requires assessment to survive. Conclusion was drawn and finally several recommendations were made.*

## **Introduction**

Learning has always been of primary interest to teachers responsible for having children master the academic curriculum of the school. To the layman, the nature of learning refers to the acquisition of knowledge and skills. The word learning is

etymologically derived from the old English/German word “laeran/lehren”, which means to teach (Awanbor, 1997: 2).

According to Awanbor (1997), learning is a highly general term for the relatively lasting change in behaviour (i.e. thinking, feeling and acting) that is induced directly by practice or relevant experience. From the above definition, the following caveats need immediately to be considered for learning to be effective.

1. Learning itself (like hunger or intelligence) is a construct, which cannot be directly observed. It has to be inferred from the changes in the behaviour as well as in the affective state of the entire organism. We can see performance but we cannot see learning, which is only one of the many variables influencing behaviour.
2. The differences between learning and performance should always be borne in mind. Lack of performance does not mean lack of learning. The need for motivation and incentives is of vital importance for manifestation of learning.
3. Learning excludes changes in behaviour due to maturation.

### **Types of Learning**

There are different types of learning which include the formal, non formal, informal, etc. It is worthy of note that the three domains of learning are relevant to the teacher and the learners. These are (1) Cognitive (2) Affective (3) Psychomotor.

The cognitive domain has to do with learning, such as recalling facts, to analysis and to solve problems. The psychomotor domain deals with the learning to perform, such as steps in dancing, learning to swim, learning to ride a bicycle, etc., while the affective domain implies learning, such as learning to love/like someone, to hate sin, to love one’s country, etc. These domains need to be interwoven for proper learning to take place.

### **Importance of Learning**

Learning is an everyday affair. Therefore, its importance cannot be overemphasized. The following are some of the reasons why we learn.

1. survival;
2. advancement in knowledge;
3. improvement of our environment and society;
4. overall upliftment.

### **Assessment**

Assessment is the act of judging or forming an opinion about somebody or something, e.g. written or oral examination and other forms of assessment (Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary). From the above definition, it is clear that assessment could either be written or oral.

### **The Meaning and Importance of Continuous Assessment**

Continuous assessment, according to Ogunaniyi (1984), may be viewed as a formative evaluation procedure concerned with finding out, in a systematic manner, the overall gains that a student has made in terms of knowledge, attitudes and skills after a given set of learning experience. The term continuous implies a process going on without a break. In practice however, this is not possible. The emphasis here is that students' evaluation takes place as often as possible and without the need to wait until the end of the term or year.

It is worthy of mention that the main objective of continuous assessment is not to judge, but to provide the students with maximum opportunities to learn and to demonstrate from time to time the knowledge, skills and the attitudes that they have acquired during the teaching and learning process. For continuous

assessment to cater for all aspect of learning, several evaluation tools are required, namely teacher-made test, standardized test, oral questions, discussions, project, direct classroom observations, assignment, questionnaires or interviews, etc.

Assessment of students is a participatory, interactive process that provides data/information you need on your students' learning. Assessment engages you and others in analyzing and using data/information to confirm and improve teaching and learning. In other words, with assessment, the teacher improves in his/her teaching, and the students, on the other hand, improves in his/her learning skills too.

This is so because assessment provides evidences that students are learning the outcomes the teacher intended to achieve. However, for there to be assessment, learning must have to take place. In this regard, one can say that assessment cannot thrive without learning.

### **What then is Learning?**

Learning is acquiring new knowledge, behaviours and skills, values, preferences or understanding, and may involve synthesizing different types of information. The ability to learn is possessed by humans, animals and some machine. The human learning may occur as part of education or personal development. Learning may, however, occur consciously or without conscious awareness. For instance, there is evidence for human behavioural learning prenatally in which habituation has been observed as early as 32 weeks into gestation, indicating that the central nervous systems is sufficiently developed and primed for learning and memory to occur very early in development. Several theorists affirm that play is the first form of learning. Children play, experiment with the world, learn the rules, and learn to interact. Play is pivotal for children's development, since they make meaning of their environment through play.

Having seen what learning is all about, its types and domains, to accurately evaluate both the learners and the teacher's objective of learning, assessment comes into play.

### **Role of Assessment in Learning**

According to Elliott N. and Littlefield *et al* (2000), assessment plays a central role in planning, instruction and documenting the effects of teaching. Also, it monitors the learning process of students. How this is achieved depends on the skills and behaviour of the teacher and the learner. In most cases, daily work, assignment, project and teacher-constructed test are the main tools that could be used to assess and communicate results. Regardless of the assessment method used, effective teachers must have a command of test and basic measurement concept. Thus, the knowledge of assessment enables one to communicate about learning with one's students, parents and other educational stakeholder.

In the same vein, Dickson (2003) says that assessment enables teachers to match what they do in classroom environment with how learners develop their understanding.

HMSO (1989) opined that with assessment, pupils (learners) learn most effectively when they are actively involved in tasks, which provide firsthand experience of practical skills and require recording, reporting or an imaginative response.

Assessment provides room for feedback and opportunities for reflection from the beginning of, and throughout any sequence of instruction/learning. Assessment helps in the identification of the learner's need. Assessment incorporates target setting, action planning and the recording of achievement. Assessment helps to evaluate their works and discover areas, where there is need for improvement.

## **Recommendations**

1. Clearly state the purpose for an assessment.
2. Be explicit about the assessment target and the key element of a sound performance
3. Understand student's motivation and create connections between what is taught and tested and the student's world outside of the school.
4. At the start of the process and throughout, share the scoring criteria with students in terms that they understand.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion therefore, one can say that assessment and learning are vital tools for measuring students' level of intelligence as well as academic performance. Hence, the American Federation of Teachers (1990) opines that "assessment competences are an essential part of teaching and that good teaching cannot exist without good student assessment.

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