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Keywords: *assessment practices, cognitive, continuous assessment, school facilities.*

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The State of Continuous Assessment Practices in Junior Secondary Schools in Kenema City

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Abstract- The study investigated Continuous Assessment Practices in Junior Secondary Schools in Kenema City. Three research objectives guided the study: Responsibilities of teachers in continuous assessment practices; Aspects of Child's Development (Educational Objectives) assessed/rated; and School Resources/Facilities available and used. The population comprised of all Junior Secondary Schools in Kenema city and a sample size of ten Junior Secondary schools was randomly selected. Questionnaire, Observation and interview were the main instruments used to collect data. Data were analyzed using simple percentages, tables, bar charts and pie charts. Results indicated that teachers had responsibilities such as subject teacher, class teacher, Continuous Assessment Record (CAR) teacher and guidance counsellor. The Cognitive aspect is assessed/rated by all the teachers while the Affective and Psychomotor aspects are assessed by class teachers only. School resources/facilities were available were not adequate and also not used by teachers and pupils during teaching and learning activities. Recommendations include: The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should provide appropriate and adequate school facilities, and finance schools to undertake workshops, seminars and in-service courses on Continuous Assessment Practices. The principals should ensure that all teachers are involved in assessing/rating of the Cognitive, Affective and Psychomotor aspects of child's development.

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I. Introduction

The assessment of students' learning achievement has become the object of a great deal of attention on activities all over the world, industrialized countries and developing countries alike (Kellaghan, 2001). The Dakar Frame work for Action 2000 stresses the importance of having a clear definition and accurate assessment of learning outcomes. Additionally, the World Conference on Education for all in Jothiem, Thailand (1999) states that the focus of basic education should be 'actual learning acquisition and outcome'. According to Rayment (2006) for assessment to work effectively it must be a continuous process and there is little point awarding grades, scores and praise if they don't mean anything to the learner. He further cites that assessment is an effective monitoring tool which helps learners to feel valued and that learning and achievement has a purpose. In addition, it may be used as a process of improving the teaching, the curriculum, as well as the learning condition of learners. It is evident that Continuous Assessment is not only of benefit to the learners, but it provides both the teacher and learner with ongoing feedback about teaching – learning process.

One of the most important hall marks of the New Policy on Education (1995) in Sierra Leone is the provision of the Continuous Assessment as an effective tool for wholly a partly assessment and evaluating the students learning outcomes in the various levels of the educational system.

The New Policy on Education provides a six year primary education, three years junior education, three years senior secondary, and four years university education, each of which level would be allowed to implement the Continuous Assessment as laid down by the Ministry of Education. Continuous Assessment has been introduced in Sierra Leonean schools as part and parcel of the new education system in 1995. This means that Continuous Assessment is in use for twenty years in Sierra Leonean Schools. It is presently been run in Junior Secondary Schools as it is so introduced. It is made by intention to make students specialized early enough in the future careers. Most importantly, it has provisions for making drop outs employees.

The repeated emphasis being placed on Continuous Assessment is a clear evidence of its importance. Continuous Assessment is a method of ascertaining what a child gains from schooling in terms of knowledge, industry and character development taking into account all his/her performances in tests, assignments, projects and other educational activities during a given period of term, year, or during the entire period of an educational level (Ipaye, 1995). It is also a method of using the recorded performances of each pupil to help him or her improve on his or her achievement through guidance.

Uiseb, (2009) states that Continuous Assessment of learning is a systematic, on-going, interactive process of monitoring learning in order to determine that teachers are doing well and what they must improve. Another way how the progress of learners can be gauged is by listening to a discussion group or observing the participation of individuals or groups. He further proffers that the advantage of Continuous Assessment is that it makes it possible to address qualities that are not assessed in examinations. Another

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positive aspect of Continuous Assessment is that it could improve teacher-learner relationships because of individual monitoring and therefore teachers and learners could work closely. A variety of assessment methods are possible and thus wide range of abilities, skills and attitudes could be accessed through Continuous Assessment. Continuous Assessment is used not only to monitor learners' achievement, but also to evaluate the competence of educators and the quality of educational systems.

Freiberg and Driscoll (1996) refer to Continuous Assessment as a strategy for measuring knowledge, behaviour, performance or attitude while Jones (1996) regards Continuous Assessment as a means that describes and classifies learners performance in tests, examination etc. In other words, when applied to classroom situations Continuous Assessment may be regarded as all procedures of collecting and interpreting information, which the teacher may use to determine, what is happening in the classroom such as learners' progress or achievement.

In Nigeria, the 1977 National Policy on Education laid strong emphasis on Continuous Assessment. This advocacy of Continuous Assessment arose for the belief that it would:

- Give the teacher greater involvement in the overall assessment of his or her pupils;
- Provide a more valid assessment of the child's overall ability and performance;
- Enable teachers to be more flexible and innovative in their instruction.
- Provide a basis for more effective guidance of the child;
- Provide a basis for the teacher to improve his or her instructional methods;
- Reduce examination malpractices.

According to Mwebaza (2010), Continuous Assessment is not simply continuous testing. Continuous Assessment does not solely depend on formal tests. Continuous Assessment is more than giving a test; it involves every decision made by the teacher in class to improve students' achievement. Continuous Assessment is an ongoing diagnostic and school –based process that uses a variety of assessment tools to measure learners' performance (Zambia Ministry of Education, 2007). Continuous Assessment could also be defined as a learners' progress in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning systematically takes account of all their performances during a given period of schooling (Falayajo, 1986). The main objective of Continuous Assessment is to obtain a reliable picture of the progress of the learner in terms of achieving the basic competencies as set out in the objectives of the syllabus as early as possible and to embarks upon corrective measures if needed.

According to the Department of Education of South Africa (2000), teachers are expected to be assessors and learning area specialists. This justified a paradigm shift among teachers regarding their roles as teachers in assessment and teaching methods, classroom management and learning content. Lemmer (1999) contends that teaching should among others provide ongoing assessment of learners' skills in critical thinking, reasoning and action. This creates the impression that there are some challenges with implementation of Continuous Assessment.

The primary purpose of teaching and learning process is to bring a significant change in behavior through active participation and critical thinking of the learner. This cannot take place without the availability and proper use of school facilities and other needed resources. Ogunsaju (1980) emphasized that quality of education that students receive depends on the availability of school facilities in which teaching and learning takes place. Quality, relevance and access to education can be attained if and only if educational materials are properly available and utilized in an educational institution. According to Durbin, et al. (1989), resources are the only means through which organizational activities, service and satisfactory ends are attainable. For the achievement of organizational objectives, resources play the crucial roles. School facilities, which consist of all types of buildings that are used for academic and non-academic purpose, equipment, classroom facilities, furniture, instructional materials, audiovisual aids, toilet, ICT, library and laboratory materials and others play a pivotal role to smoothly run teaching and learning process.

As Buckley, Schneider and Shang (2004), school facilities enable the teacher to accomplish his/her task as well and help the learner to learn and achieve effectively. Additionally, they emphasized that the availability and proper use of school facilities can affect the interest of the teacher to teach effectively in turn that positively affects student's academic achievement. Therefore, the school facilities in the school need a proper attention as they have a great value in the support of teachers and students morale, motivation and play a significant role to improve the quality of education.

Hedges and Theoreson (2000) also argue that, the adequacies of school facilities do not give a guarantee for student's academic performance but the proper utilization of the facilities has a great value. As Khan and Iqbal (2012) state that adequate and quality school facilities are basic ingredients for quality education and to achieve the intended goal of the school program. They also strengthen the idea by emphasizing that learning is a complex activity that requires students and teachers' motivation, adequate school facilities such as standardized buildings and

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classrooms with their facilities, instructional materials and equipment for child's development.

According to Nitko (1995) any plan for Continuous Assessment is only as strong as the teacher's ability to use it appropriately. This illustrates that teachers are the key players as implementers of Continuous Assessment in the classrooms. The nature of Continuous Assessment put greater demands on the role of the teachers. They are entrusted with delicate and indeed challenging task to ensure effective and efficient Continuous Assessment. Almost in all training and learning institutions, some kind of assessment is done. This brings out the importance and inevitability of assessment in the training and learning process. As teachers, trainers and educators, we are all involved in assessment at one or the other stage during the learning, teaching and training process. But are we all clear on how we assess, why we assess, when we assess, and familiar with the various techniques we use? In response to some of these questions, Baula et al (1996) cite that successful assessment should be undertaken with the knowledge that this process will be constantly updated and adapted to meet the changing needs of the institution, learners, teachers and the public at large. A key question for assessment is not how to measure a learner's achievement, but what mechanism are used to evaluate their learning. It is against this background that warrants an investigation into the State of Continuous Assessment Practices in Junior Secondary Schools in Kenema City.

Research Objectives

The following research objectives guided the study:

1. Identify the responsibilities of teachers in Continuous Assessment Practices;
2. Find out the aspects of child's development/ educational objectives assessed/rated by teachers;
3. Identify school facilities/equipments that are available and used by teachers in Continuous Assessment Practices.

II. Methodology

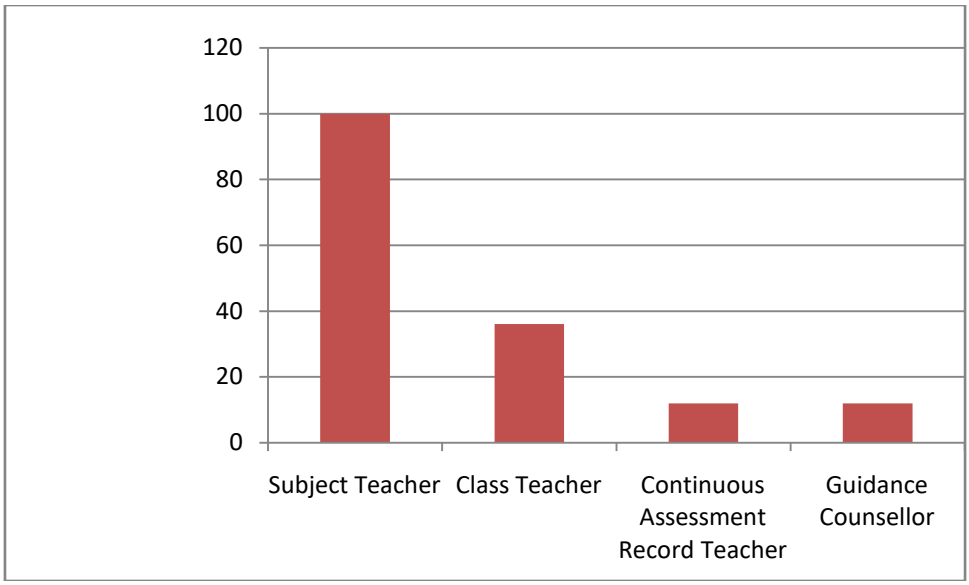
The study was carried out in Kenema City. A descriptive research design of a survey type was used in the study.

The population of the study comprised all the thirty-nine (39) Junior Secondary Schools and all junior secondary school teachers in Kenema City. Out of the total number of 39 junior secondary Schools in Kenema City, ten (10) JSS were selected using a random sampling technique as a sample with a total of one hundred (100) Junior Secondary School teachers. Out of the ten (10) selected JSS, the researcher selected two (2) boys Junior Secondary Schools, a girl's Junior Secondary School and seven co-educational Junior Secondary Schools. Questionnaire, and observation were the main instruments used in the study. Data were collected and carefully examined. Observation data gathering technique was employed to study the physical feature of schools including: school buildings, classrooms, office and classroom facilities, libraries, laboratories, workshops, play grounds, toilet, and other educational inputs. Data were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. The results of the analysis were presented in tables, pie-charts and bar charts for easier interpretation.

III. Results and Discussion

Figure 1 shows multiple major responsibilities of teachers in Continuous Assessment Practices. Eighty-three (83) teachers 100% had the responsibility of being subject teachers. Among the eighty-three (83) subject teachers 100% thirty (30) teachers 36.1% had the responsibility of being class teachers. Ten (10) teachers 12.0% had the responsibilities of been Continuous Assessment Record (CAR) teachers and guidance counsellors. This implies that teachers have responsibilities that will enhance good relationship with pupils and ensure effective and efficient Continuous Assessment practices. This agrees with Nitko (1995) who states that any plan for Continuous Assessment is only as strong as the teacher's ability to use it appropriately. This illustrates that teachers are the key players as implementers of Continuous Assessment in the classrooms. They are entrusted with delicate and indeed challenging task to ensure effective and efficient Continuous Assessment.

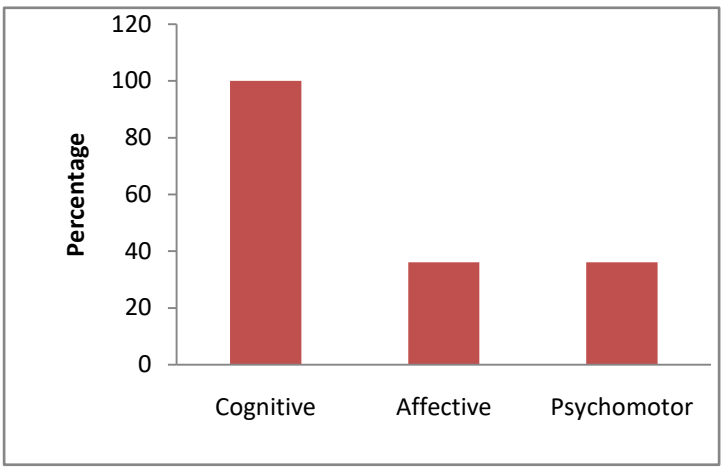
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Source: Field Data (2016)

Figure 1: Responsibilities of respondents

Figure 2 below shows the aspect of child's development (educational objectives) assessed/ rated by teachers in the selected Junior Secondary Schools in Kenema City. From the Figure, eighty – three (83) teachers 100% assess the Cognitive aspect, thirty (30) teachers (class teachers) 36.1% rate both the Affective and Psychomotor aspects. The findings on the aspect of Child's Development (Educational Objectives) pointed out that all the teachers were highly involved in the assessment of the Cognitive aspect. Few teachers (class teachers) rate the Affective and Psychomotor aspects. Also few teachers (CAR teachers) had the responsibility of recording pupils' grade. This implies that adequate attention is not paid to the Affective and Psychomotor aspects, and those teachers are not taking full account of learners' performances. This may be due to either teachers have low knowledge, not given the responsibility or are not committed in Continuous Assessment Practices as Falayajo (1986) states that teachers must take account of all performance of learners in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects.



Source: Field Data (2016)

Figure 2: Aspect of Child's Development / (Educational Objective) Assessed/Rated by Respondents.

Table 1 provides information on the availability and usage of resources/ facilities in the selected schools. The table shows that seven (7) schools 70% had science laboratory/ equipments and soccer/sport fields but are not used during teaching and learning activities in the selected schools. Three (3) schools 30% had library and agricultural sites/tools but not used. Two (2) school 20% had Home Science laboratories and computer laboratory but are not used. One (1) school 10% had wood workshop and Creative Practical/

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Performing Arts room but only the creative practical room is used during teaching and learning activities. One (1) school had a Guidance Counsellor's Office which is seldomly used through the motivation of the counselor. The findings on resources/ facilities in the selected schools showed that some schools had facilities such as Science laboratory, Wood workshop, Computer laboratory, Library, Agricultural Site/tools, Soccer/sport field, Home Science laboratory and Creative Practical/Performing Arts room/materials and a Guidance Counsellor's Office but are seldomly or not used during teaching and learning processes. From observation generally, the availability of facilities was in adverse condition which makes it difficult to address the learning outcomes of education in general and their schools in particular. To facilitate the teaching and learning process school facilities need to be available and utilized as to bring significant effect on students learning. This implies that active participation of pupils in their learning activities; experiments, and practical works that are supposed to be covered in lessons are neglected which cannot allow pupils attitudes, behaviours, motives (Affective) and dexterity (Psychomotor) to be assessed/rated. As Buckley, Schneider and Shang (2004) state that school facilities enable the teacher to accomplish his/her task as well and help the learner to learn and achieve effectively. Additionally, they emphasized that the availability and proper use of school facilities can affect the interest of the teacher to teach effectively in turn that positively affects student's academic achievement. Therefore, the school facilities in the schools need a proper attention as they have a great value in the support of teachers and students morale, motivation and play a significant role to improve the quality of education. Ogunsaju (1980) emphasized that quality of education that students receive depends on the availability of school facilities in which teaching and learning take place. Quality, relevance and access to education can be attained if and only if educational materials are properly available and utilized in an educational institution. To Durbin, et al. (1989), resources are the only means through which organizational activities, service and satisfactory ends are attainable. For the achievement of organizational objectives, resources play the crucial roles.

Table 1: Resources/Facilities in the Selected Schools.

Resource/Facility	Available		Used	
	No. of School	Percentage %	No. of School	Percentage %
Science Laboratory/Equipment	7	70	0	0
Wood Workshop/Tools	1	10	0	0
Computer Laboratory	2	20	0	0
Library	3	30	0	0
Agricultural Site/Tools	3	30	0	0
Soccer/Sport field	7	70	0	0
Home Science Laboratory	2	20	0	0
Creative Practical/Performing Arts Room/Materials	1	10	1	100
Computer	10	100	0	0
Guidance Counsellor's Office	1	10	1	10

Source: Field Data (2016)

IV. Recommendations

The findings came out with the following recommendations that could be used to enhance outstanding performance in Continuous Assessment Practices. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should provide appropriate and adequate school facilities, and finance schools to undertake workshops, seminars and in-service courses on Continuous Assessment Practices. The principals should ensure that all teachers are involved in assessing/rating of the Cognitive, Affective and Psychomotor aspects of child's development.

V. Conclusion

The following are deduced from the findings: that teachers had responsibilities such as subject teacher, class teacher, continuous assessment record teacher and guidance counsellor that mandate them to be seriously involved in Continuous Assessment practices; all teachers are involved in assessing/rating the cognitive abilities while the affective and psychomotor abilities are assessed/rated by class teachers only; and that some school resources/facilities are available in some schools but not utilized by both the teachers and the pupils during teaching and learning processes.

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