Evaluation and Assessment Practices in Early Childhood Care: A Theoretical Approach to Training

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Abstract: The roles of caregivers in early childhood education and care unit in Nigerian education sector is enormous, as this level forms the foundation of the education a pupil will be exposed to in his or her life time. It is important therefore for the caregivers to know how to accurately assess their pupils because the information generated at this level represents the placement of individual pupils in future educational level. Based on the above premise, no responsibilities is more important or more central to the work of the caregivers than that of assessing pupils’ performance accurately and not only just on the paper and pencil system of assessment that is common in our educational system. Thus, this paper explores the following items: (1) meaning of measurement, (2) assessment, (3) evaluation, (4) comparison between formative and summative evaluation, (5) method of assessment and evaluation in early childhood education and care, (6) purpose of assessment and evaluation in early childhood education and care, and (7) the need for periodic evaluation in early childhood education and care. After the analysis of these items the article recommends: (a) there should be periodic workshop for caregivers on how to efficiently assess and evaluate their pupils’ performance progress, (b) the objective of each unit of instruction must be clearly stated for accurate evaluation of the predetermined change in behaviour of the pupils, (c) adequate logistic should be provided for effective assessment and evaluation to enhance desirable pupils’ performance.

Key Words: Assessment, Evaluation, Educational Practices, Early Childhood Education, Teacher Training.

1. Introduction

The misconception of the meaning and relationship that exist among the concepts involve in making value decision on the pupil’s performance or academic progress has been one of the sources of confusion, when literate members of the society who are non-assessment experts are involved in discussions, they use the following terms measurement, assessment and evaluation loosely as being synonymous. Measurement is a process that assigns by rule a numerical description to observation of some attributes of an object, person or event. Assessment is a process of arranging or fashioning data into an interpretable form. Assessment focuses on a number of variables judged to be important and utilize a number of techniques to gather data from multiple sources. Evaluation is the continuous inspection of all available information concerning a pupil, caregiver, educational programme, teaching and learning process to ascertain the degree of change in pupils and form valid judgment about the pupil and the effectiveness of the programme.

Measurement is the assignment of a number to a characteristic of an object or event, which can be compared with objects or event. The scope and application of a measurement is dependent on the content and discipline. It is a cornerstone of trade, science, technology, and quantitative research in many disciplines. Assessment is the process of gathering, recording and using information about a learner response (performance/achievement) to a task because it is intended to cover a wide range of different circumstances. It does identify what are usually regarded as the key elements of assessment in education. Evaluation is a systematic determination of a subject’s merit, worth and significance, using criteria governed by a set of standards. It helps in decision making or to ascertain the degree of achievement or value in regard to the aim and objectives and results of any such action that has been completed.

The relationships between these terms that is one leads to another. If a test is conducted, the steps is to mark and assign numbers to each items, then mark right or wrong, then later judge whether passed or failed which is evaluation (Adeleke, 2009, Santrock, 2014).

Early childhood education is not about teaching, it’s about exploration and learning. According to national policy on education (2014), it is segmented into ages 0-4 years, situated in daycare or crèches, fully in the hands of the private sector and social development whilst ages 5-6 (pre-primary) are within the formal sector. In early childhood education, sector, the caregiver is very important and they cannot work in isolation without the child and the school.

NPE (2004), states that it is the education given to children prior their entry into primary school. The government of Nigeria states that it a
compulsory sector in order to reduce the rate of neglect and human trafficking.

The roles of caregivers in early childhood care and education and care unit in Nigerian education sector is enormous, as this level forms the foundation of the education a pupil will be exposed to in his or her life time. It is important therefore for the caregivers to know how to accurately assess their pupils because the information generated at this level represent the placement of individual pupils in future educational level. Based on the above premise, no responsibilities is more important or more central to the work of the caregivers than that of assessing pupils’ performance accurately. It is possible for an individual caregiver to be more energetic, knowledgeable and full of pedagogical skills in handling these younger ones but if such a caregiver is unable to accurately, consistently assess and evaluate the performance of his or her pupils, he or she is not doing justice to the pupils (Mertler, 2003).

In other words, the major responsibility placed on caregivers in early childhood education and care is the periodic communication of academic, social performance and progress of pupils to a variety of audience. These audiences include parents, administrators and the general public as well as individual pupils; and when the results of assessment and evaluation judgment made about a pupils performance are not accurate, such a caregiver will be providing mis-information to the various recipients of the information. For years in Nigerian education, there existed a singular approach for assessing what students could and could not do. This primary means of assessment which involves the use of pencil-and-paper testing is known as traditional assessment of pupils’ performance is informal. In practice, the majority of assessments upon which grades and other evaluation decisions are based come from these formal written tests. The two main categories of traditional formal written test items are objective and subjective items (Trice, 2000).

The term assessment refers to the procedures and processes employed in collecting information or evidence of human behaviour. It is a systematic process of collecting and interpreting information to aid making informed decisions. Educational assessment in early childhood care and education ,may be seen as a systematic and deliberate attempt to determine pupils’ status in relation to predetermined educational variables of concern. It is concerned not only with tests but with other tools such as: observational schedule, anecdotal records, interviews, rating scales and socio-metric methods e.t.c which can be used to obtain a realistic observation of the individual. Assessment involves all methods in which tests may be used, thus leading to some measurement or quantification of results. Assessment is much more embracing and comprehensive than test and measurement. It is used to obtain a comprehensive record of a person’s behaviour in a teaching and learning situation. (Adeleke,2009).
Moreover, Airasian, (2000) defined an assessment system as the process of collecting, synthesizing and interpreting information to aid in educational decision making. It is important to note that this system of assessment is a process; it is not a single entity. An assessment system is not a much broader concept. It refers to a related series of measures used to determine attributes of individuals or group of individuals. It is important to note that all pupils have the right to be assessed in fair and impartial ways, regardless of individual situations. Classroom caregivers have various responsibilities in support of fair assessment. These responsibilities include ensuring that pupils are properly motivated to do their best on any type of assessment (Oosterhof, 1999). Every child that is assessed must be evaluated to pass a valued judgment on them.

Evaluation is often described as the process of making a value judgment about pupils’ skills or capabilities. Evaluation transcends measurement, not only to quantify performance, but also to judge the merits of that performance. Evaluation typically follows measurement and other assessment related activities conducted by the caregivers in early childhood education and care. Likewise evaluation often requires a substantial degree of professional decision making by classroom instructors. Since, this decision making process has the potential for very important repercussions, it should occur only after adequate samples of assessment information have been collected, analyzed and synthesized (Chase, 1999).

Likewise, Imas and Rist, (2009) asserted that evaluation can be used to address such questions as what is taking place (descriptive question) and normative questions such as comparing what is taking place with what should be taking place. Evaluation assesses activities to establish whether or not target objectives of the programme are achieved or not. Hassan, (1983) explained evaluation as the determinant of the congruence between performance and objectives. Stufflebeam and Shinkfield (2007) described evaluation as arguably the society’s most fundamental discipline as it is oriented at assessing and helping to improve all aspects of the society.

Evaluation enables us to compare the actual outcome with the expected outcome and to arrive at conclusions about these comparisms with a view for taking future action. This is obviously a vital phase, because without some quantitative and qualitative comparism of actual and expected outcomes, it is impossible to know whether objectives have been realized and if they have been, to what extent? Without some systematic development of benchmarks, it is impossible to tell whether behaviours, in the form of attitudes, value, skills and knowledge, e.t.c. have been instilled, inhibited or altered. In this regard, Alkin (1970) cited in Bamidele, (2004) defined evaluation as the process of ascertaining the decision to be made, selecting related information and collecting and analysing information in order to report summary data useful to decision makers in selecting among alternatives.
There are two main forms of evaluation –formative and summative. Ayodele, Adegbile and Adewale (2003) distinguished between these two forms of evaluation. Formative evaluation, according to them, is a type of evaluation that guides the implementation of a programme. The primary aim of formative evaluation is to obtain evidence about the worth or adequacy of a programme while it is in progress. The continuous assessment plays a very prominent role in this regard. All the mistakes are corrected as the programme is going on. Summative evaluation is carried out when the programme has been completed. It aims at collecting evidence in order to judge the worth or adequacy of the whole programme or learning process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formative Evaluation</th>
<th>Summative Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How are you doing?</td>
<td>How did you do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occurs during the process of learning</td>
<td>Occurs at the completion of instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assesses progress in a unit of lesson</td>
<td>Summarizes achievement in a unit of lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directs learning to achieve objectives</td>
<td>Assesses objectives achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade may not be assigned</td>
<td>Assigns grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides feedback</td>
<td>Provide feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Comparism between Formative and Summative Evaluation. Source: McDonald, (2011)

In the school system, summative evaluation is usually done at the end of a lesson, a term, a semester or a year. Examples of summative evaluation include the final primary school leaving certificate examination popularly known as “common entrance”, senior secondary school certificate examination (SSCE) conducted by WAEC and NECO, semester and final degree examinations in higher institutions of learning. Likewise in nursery sections, the evaluation is done at every interval for holistic development of children. Evaluation of pupils’ progress is necessary for the new and ever changing educational policy to provide useful information to programme designers, implementers, beneficiaries and researchers to monitor the extent of the success of programme so that decision can be made either to continue or discontinue the programme, improve its practices and procedure, add to or drop specific strategies, institute a similar programme elsewhere, allocate resources among competing programmes, accept or reject programme approach or theory (Igwe, 2001).

2. Method of Assessment in Early Childhood Care and Education

2.1. Observation Method

Instructional objectives direct the choice of strategies for a school programme and provide a sounding broad for evaluation of that programme.
Information use in evaluation of pupils’ progress and the effectiveness of the school programme can come from observation of the pupils. The input information (data) is collected by observing pupils individually and collectively. Observing is often seen as one of the most simple, yet effective methods of assessing young children as they develop (Ronspreewenberg, 2015).

Caregivers can collect assessment data about pupils through observation. Since, “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” perception of individuals and situation may vary among observer. Caregivers can use observation of pupils to aid in drawing conclusions and making decisions. Observation is valuable because proper use of it permits the educational process to serve the needs of pupils better. The caregiver observes pupils in a wide variety of situations and if observations are well planned and structured the quality and value of the information increases.

Direct observations allow the actions to speak for themselves in a natural way. The best way to determine how well a pupil uses English Language is to observe his or her language in a number of natural settings to determine how well the kindergarten pupil has conceptualized the principle of one to one correspondence, asks the child to decide how many cartons of milk will be needed for the class at lunch time. Observation can be carried out at almost any time and is quite versatile. Observation has the following strengths: it allows action to speak for itself; it can be carried out at almost any time; it is versatile; it allows a record for future interpretation; it provides for direct comparison overtime; it is useful with non-readers, young children and the mentally handicapped; it identifies the level of skill development; it may be less threatening than some other type of data collection procedure. However, the following are the weakness of observation; it is time consuming; it may be too expensive; it may use supplementary devices that alter natural and on-going events; it may reflect observer biases. Systematic observation can be used for observing children in class or at play. It can also be used for assessing the characteristic, contribution of individuals to group discussion (Yoloye, 2008).

For a child provider or educator, observing a child begins with noting how each child behaves, learns, reacts to new situations and interacts with others. Later, then reflects on this information and determine how it can help one to improve on ones classroom to meet the need of the young learners (Spreeuwenberg, 2015). Importance of Observation:

- **Getting to know the children.** Observing the children in one’s care can help to better understanding of the strengths and weakness of each individual child.
- **Tracking progress.** Once observed, one will be able to monitor the progress of each child’s development over time.
- **Identifying Issues.** By understanding individual progress of each child through systematic observation, one may discover that a certain child is struggling or falling believing in one more areas of development.

- **Better assessment.** It allows one to get a more accurate reading on a child’s true developmental progress. Recorded observation can show a much more accurate picture of a child’s performance in the most important developmental areas. (Spreeuwenberg, 2015)

2.2. Rating Scaling method

Rating scale is a device that permits an observer the opportunity to record the intensity or degree of impression made while observing a subject or setting. The caregivers can find many opportunities to collect information from pupils by the use of scales. A second use of scaling allows self-rating by a subject on perceptions or impression of self-reports and it is widely used in psychological measurement where personal attributes are of concern. Important reasons for using rating scale are: to eliminate reflection on what happened through memory; to give a way of structuring a recording process that is efficient for the observer and that does not interfere with what is being observer; to get a detailed record of behaviour. A rating scale is an instrument used for assessing attributes which cannot be easily broken down into separate observable behaviours or task for instance, human attribute like “initiative” “originality” “enthusiasm”. A rater in assessing such attribute is expected to estimate how much of the attribute the person possesses on a provided scale (Yoloye 2008)

Testing method: Over the years educators have found that a well prepared test, if administered and scored properly, is an efficient means of collecting information about the progress of the pupils. The major function of classroom testing is to measure pupils’ achievement. As long as a test score is not used as a single criterion for decision making, scores on standardized that can supplement other data collection and support sound decisions. Test is an instrument, devices or procedure that purpose a sequence of tasks to which a pupil is to respond the results of which are used as measures of a specified trait. The on-going every day activities in classroom requires caregivers to use variety of techniques to assess the progress of pupils. The most often used technique is the administration of paper and pencil test that presents selected tasks to pupils in writing and require the pupil to respond symbolically.

It is important to note that appraisal for pre-school classes, primary grades and severely handicapped pupils relies extensively on evaluation of performance because these pupils have not developed the verbal and writing skills necessary for taking paper and pencil tests. Appraisal is likely to have a large component of performance evaluation. Likewise, caregivers may
employ assignments and projects to help pupils apply information they are acquiring and to develop good study attitude and social skills as well as enhance physical, cognitive development at all educational levels (Popham, 2002).

1. **Achievement test.** These tests are designed to assess current performance in an academic area. Because achievement is viewed as an indicator of previous learning, it is often used to predict future academic success. Individual achievement is determined by comparison of results with average scores derived from large representative national or local samples. Scores may be expressed in terms of “grade-level equivalents”; for example, an advanced third-grade pupil may be reading on a level equivalent to that of the average fourth-grade student.

2. **Aptitude Test.** These tests predict future performance in an area in which the individual is not currently trained. Schools often use aptitude test when assigning individual to specific groups. Vocational guidance counseling may involve aptitude testing to help clarify individual career goals.

3. **Objective Personality Test.** These tests measure social and emotional adjustment and are used to identify the need for psychological counselling. Items that briefly describe feelings, attitudes, and behaviours are grouped into subscales, each representing a separate personality or style, such as social extroversion or depression.

4. **Intelligence Test.** In contrast to tests of specific proficiencies or aptitudes, intelligence tests measure the global capacity of an individual to cope with the environment. The early intelligence scales yielded a mental-age score, expressing the child's ability to do as well as average children who were older, younger, or equivalent in chronological age (Adeleke 2009).

2.3 Anecdotal record method

An objectively written description of a pupil’s behaviour, what was said or done in a specific situation recorded as being typical or unusual behaviour. Evaluation of pupils’ performance progress is integrated into classroom activities keeping in mind four basic aspects of performance.

- **Decision situation.** Reason for the assessment: specifies the information you need.
- **Exercise.** Task given to pupils that require performance, specifies what the pupil is to do
- **Response.** Actual pupils performance, specifies the behaviour or product evaluated
Rating. Evaluation of performance, specifies method used to judge performance

Anecdotal records are useful in a variety of situations such as observing social adjustment of pupils, personal and social development, identifying unintended learning outcomes, and identifying difficulties which pupils’ experiences in executing projects and learning activities, as well as identifying interest and work habit (Okpala, Onocha and Oyedeji 2012)

Summarily, in this era of triangulation in classroom assessment it was discovered from many literatures (Popham, 2002, Yoloye 2008, Okpala, Onocha and Oyedeji 2012) that a method cannot be apply solely in classroom assessment but rather the care-givers must be well abreast of all the aforementioned.

Checklist. Rating scales and rubrics are tools that state specific criteria and allows teachers and student to gather information and to make judgment about what students know and can do in relation to the outcomes. They offer systematic ways of collecting data about specific behaviours knowledge and skills. The quantity of information acquired through the use of checklists, is highly dependent on the quality of descriptors chosen for assessment. The benefit also depends on students direct involvement in the assessment and understanding of the feedback provided. The purpose of checklist is to provide tools for systematic recording of observations, provide tools for self assessment, provide samples of criteria for students prior to collecting and evaluation data on their work record, record the development of specific skills, strategies, attitudes and behaviours necessary for demonstrating learning clarify students instructional needs by presenting a record of current accomplishment. It is usually offer as yes/ no format in relation to student demonstration of specific criteria (Kostelnic, Soderman and Whiren, 2011)

Portfolio. Is a record of the child’s process of learning, what the child has learned and how she has gone about learning, how she thinks, questions, analyzes, Synthesize, produces, creates, and how she interacts- intellectually, emotionally, socially with others. It can be defined as purposeful collection of students work that exhibit to the student, or others, her efforts or achievement in one or more area. Portfolio enable children to participate in assessing their own work; keep track of individual children’s progress; and provide a basis for evaluating the quality of individual children overall performance.

Inventory. Is a behavior rating scale that screens for emotional and behavioral disorders in children between 3 and 5 years old (Kostelnik, Soderman and Whiren, 2011, Santrock, 2014).
3. Purpose of Assessment and Evaluation in Early Childhood Education and Care

Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Instruction Delivered. Caregivers need to periodically carry out assessment in order to help themselves in making decisions at a variety of levels. The most basic and important purposes of assessment is to assist in making decision about the worthwhile of instruction. Assessing for instruction is not complete at the end of the day when a lesson is done. Instead, effective caregivers consistently assess and evaluate their instruction after its completion for the purpose of making alterations to enhance productive classroom interaction.

Diagnosing Pupils’ Difficulties. Assessment methods are often used prior to instruction in order to determine what the pupils already know and can do. This is important in helping the caregivers to plan for instruction. This type of assessment will help the caregivers to pin point the distinct type of difficulties pupils may be experiencing and remediate it.

Placement of Pupils. Data collected in the process of assessment are used in placing pupils into various groups in the classroom. In fact caregivers may use the results of groups based on similar level of ability to organize pupils for other classroom activities.

Providing Feedback to Pupils (formative evaluation). Assessment result is used to provide feedback to pupils regarding their socio-metrics and academic progress.

Grading and Evaluating Academic Learning. Data generated from assessment exercise will help the caregivers to evaluate pupils’ learning at the end of a unit, a grading period or a school year.

The Need for Periodic Evaluation in Early Childhood Care and Education:

1. Frequent changes in the system of education call for periodic evaluation in all level of education, for instance, Nigeria education system changes from 6-5-4 system of education to 6-3-3-4 and presently the nation is operating 9-3-4 system of education.

2. The need to occasionally revise instructional resources and methods, such that, it will reflect the changing characteristics of the pupils and likewise, to acquire new knowledge and orientation of the contemporary world and make instruction pupils-friendly.

3. Sometimes, existing content of educational programmes are criticize as obsolete to the need of the societies by the stakeholders. Therefore, there is need for periodic evaluation to ascertain the relevance of the present educational package to the learners and general societies.
4. Expansion of developmental activities, sometime may give rise to request for evaluation of existing educational programme.

5. Stakeholders a times may want to know whether the new programme is producing result to the need of the societies. In other words, evaluation may emerge through worried from stakeholders coming from the performance of the pupils.

6. Sometimes, textbooks of the past and present do not reflect contemporary emphasis.

7. Mode of instruction sometime comes under criticism, for instance the method of learning under the traditional education system i.e. learning by memorization and conventional methods was highly criticized by the stakeholder, which justify the need for periodic evaluation in early childhood education and care (Bamidele, 2004).

4. Conclusions

Attempt has been made to explore, meaning of measurement, assessment, evaluation, comparism between formative and summative evaluation, method of assessment and evaluation in early childhood education and care, purpose of assessment and evaluation in early childhood education and care, the need for periodic evaluation in early childhood education and care. Summarily, it is important to note that all pupils have the right to be assessed in fair and impartial ways, regardless of individual situations. Classroom caregivers have various responsibilities that they must carry out efficiently in support of fair assessment. Recommendations:

i. There should be periodic workshop for Care-givers on how to efficiently assess and evaluate their pupils’ performance progress.

ii. The objective of each unit of instruction must be clearly stated for accurate evaluation of the predetermined change in pupils’ behaviour.

iii. Adequate logistic should be provided for effective assessment and evaluation to enhance desirable pupils’ performance.

iv. Caregivers should be exposed to rudiment of evaluation so as to know the appropriate tools for data collection.

v. The caregivers should be objective in their assessment. In other words, they should avoid prejudice.

References


