

Assessment Practice and Factors Affecting Implementation of Continuous Assessment in Secondary Schools of Guruve District of Mashonaland Central Province in Zimbabwe

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Abstract: The updated curriculum introduced in 2017 in Zimbabwean secondary schools came along with new approaches to assessment procedures vital to ensure each product reaches certification through numerous if not rigorous examination in the form of continuous assessment. This assessment model is a blend of continuous and summative assessment intending to measure learners' potential throughout the duration of the study. Considering that this form of assessment requires the teachers to become both facilitators of learning and assessment which factors could affect its implementation? The study therefore sought to establish assessment practice and the factors that are affecting implementation of this innovation from 20 purposively selected qualified secondary school teachers in Guruve district. Qualitative data was generated using an interview. From the data generated the following themes emerged: There is a deviation from principle and practice of continuous assessment; There is a variance between the continuous assessment policy and the actual implementation due to a backlog of both tasks and projects; Teachers have a limited idea on what continuous assessment should actually be; Information dispatched from the Ministry and ZIMSEC is conflicting; Teachers do have a negative attitude towards instructional activity; Learners are being over assessed and scorn leading to enmity and malpractice; Resources are inadequate for learners to develop their projects; There is inadequate time for teacher to fully assess learners. The study therefore recommends that more groundwork need to be done before implementation. The Ministry need to embark on more staff development programmes for teachers on how continuous assessment should be implemented. The government needs to reconsider unfreezing of posts and reduce tasks for children.

Keywords: Facilitator, continuous assessment, implementation, ZIMSEC.

INTRODUCTION

In Zimbabwe many graduates today cry lungs out that there is nowhere to find jobs because the curriculum had indoctrinated them to be useful employees with limited traces of innovation such that they would become employers. Hence the decision to develop a new curriculum framework was made in the context of the government growing focus to initiate education system in which graduates would acquire practical skills, life skills and work related knowledge to meet the transitional nature of the global educational standards. The new curriculum has also come along with new approaches to assessment procedures vital to ensure each product reaches certification through numerous and rigorous examination in the form of continuous assessment. The transformative assessment model is a blend of continuous and summative assessment to create a total being through measuring learners throughout the duration of the study. The teachers' role in this new dispensation has been revisited to become both facilitator of learning and assessment. The assessment model is believed to

engage learners and teachers in a productive and beneficial way. Learners become active in the teaching and learning due to continued engagement between themselves and their facilitators/teachers. It is assumed that this engagement motivates learners throughout and contributes to the final certification. Both learners and teachers are equipped with knowledge to provide remedies to any challenges along instruction programme [1]. Educational planners agree that learners do not achieve much by learning in the four walls of the classroom, listening to traditional repositories of knowledge whereby teachers, memorize pre-packaged items and spitting out answers [2]. The success of this new assessment paradigm is hinged on assessment competencies that teachers have. Considering that continuous assessment has been introduced in secondary schools, it is therefore necessary to investigate its applicability in the existing secondary schools in Guruve district of Mashonaland Central Province in Zimbabwe.

Conceptual framework of continuous assessment

Assessments originated from the word assess which means to sit beside [3]. According to Marcus [4] assessment is sitting beside a growing learner, observing, documenting and describing qualitatively and quantitatively the learners' cognitive, affective and psycho motivational behaviour and using the results as feedback to ensure valid identification of as well as maximizing desirable growth and development to be made. Assessment is anything done to find out what knowledge, skills, habits attitudes practices or behaviour a learner has or have acquired or developed before, during and at the end of instruction [5]. Assessment is a teaching and learning approach which should depict the full range of sources and methods teachers use together, interpret and synthesise information about learners, plan and monitor instruction and establish a viable learning culture. Continuous assessment is based on the constructivist epistemology which assures knowledge as something produced through a meaningful interaction between the learner and the surrounding environment [6]. It requires learners to be actively involved in the entire system of teaching and learning process.

Continuous assessment is a method of evaluating the progress and achievement of learners in educational situations aiming to get the true possible picture of each learners' ability at the same time helping each learner to develop his or her abilities to the fullest [7]. Assessment and implementation of continuous assessment is premised on generic principles guiding the curriculum. It upholds and promotes holistic assessment through inclusivity, balance, continuity, coherence, integration, transparency, equity and fairness. It is premised on cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains [8]. Continuous assessment is an appraisal technique which systematically covers all the performance of the learner in class tests, home assignments, projects and other school activities during school period [9]. Continuous assessment begins with decision on societal developmental needs, effective planning at the managerial level cascading down through a defined hierarchy to the teacher for implementation.

Continuous assessment is destined to ascertain the learning, change and progress taking place in the learner over a period of time in different learning areas and other aspects of the personality to find out the needs and learning styles [9]. It helps to improve the teaching and learning materials by increasing value and assisting each learner to find out the best in terms of aptitudes, interests, strength and weaknesses [10]. The practice helps the learners to evolve effective learning strategies. Gronuland [11] notes that, the purpose of continuous assessment is to deconstruct the supremacy of the traditional summative assessment.

Continuous assessment is an assessment system in which the quality is judged by various pieces of work during a course and not by one final examination. It is a cumulative appraisal of performance of individual learners throughout the period of schooling in order to render the overall ability of the learner more valid. It is anchored on Assessment as and for learning which seeks to establish where learners are with reference to set goals and how to get there by developing and supporting their meta-cognition. It assumes that learners are actively engaged in the assessment process, that is, they monitor their own learning.

Principles of continuous assessment

It complements the teaching process, establishing a relationship between what is learnt and taught and what is to be assessed. Methods of learning should influence methods of assessment. Continuous assessment should use multiple different methods to minimise the weaknesses of individual methods. It involves monitoring activities and evaluation throughout the entire duration. It is expected to be flexible, fair, transparent, valid, and reliable and to differentiate.

How to conduct quality continuous assessment

- Teachers/learners need to be clear about the purpose of assessment.
- They must start with clear sense of who they are trying to help with the assessment results and how the results can help the individuals.
- Teachers/facilitators are expected to start with clear and appropriate vision of learning targets.
- Quality continuous assessment recognises the principle of universal design that is to consider the disabilities that students might have and, if necessary, determine a strategy for extending accommodations to such students.

Statement of the problem

In spite of the positive dimension of continuous assessment of engaging learners and teachers in a productive and beneficial way, are teachers fully implementing this innovation in Zimbabwean secondary schools?

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to assess factors affecting teachers in the implementation of continuous assessment in Guruve district secondary schools.

Research objectives

- To determine teachers expertise in implementing continuous assessment.
- To assess the availability of resources in schools to implement continuous assessment.
- To establish whether schools have adequate time to implement continuous assessment

- To determine whether school managers are able to supervise continuous assessment
- To establish teachers' attitudes towards the innovation

METHODOLOGY

This study used the qualitative methodology and the descriptive survey design. The population were 300 teachers. Purposive sampling was used to come up with 20 teacher participants. The interview was used to generate data.

FINDINGS

Data generated from participants reveal that there seem to be a deviation from principle and practice of continuous assessment as eluded by one participant that: *What are being emphasized are projects and tasks in addition learners are being compelled to buy a lot of resources like files and laptops.* It appears there is a variance between the continuous assessment policy and the actual implementation as there is backlog of both tasks and projects.

On what continuous assessment is, teachers responses revealed that they have limited idea on what continuous assessment should actually be since a lot of conflicting information has been dispatched to schools from the ministry and the ZIMSEC leaving educators in quagmire. Teachers feel it is imperative to have in-service training on what should be covered in continuous assessment. However due to inadequate resources to embark on insert, teachers feel deficient when faced with the new phenomenon. They all agreed that they have not been capacitated to handle the programme. Apart from incapacitation, teachers are overloaded with work to assess the projects at the same time to cover some aspects of curriculum areas. Participants felt that the programme is being affected by mistiming tasks and projects considering the economic meltdown being experienced in the country.

Data generated reveal that teachers seem to have negative attitudes towards continuous assessment. Ten participants questioned: *Why introducing this innovation yet we are struggling to teach learners without adequate resources but performing considerably well?* This is an indication that teachers/facilitators have negative attitudes towards continuous assessment. Teachers' attitude positively or negatively contributes to their commitment to work. This is a critical factor in the success of every instructional activity. Lack of commitment is a contradiction to Abbas [12]'s idea that if the teacher develops positive attitude to his or her job, it will have a corresponding positive effect on attaining success on the job. The positive attitude will serve as a motivating factor for the individual to achieve the best of his or her efforts while negative attitude will result in affecting continuous assessment activities. This is due to the fact that most of the secondary teachers are involved in marking and

moderation from the school to national level with ZIMSEC promising sporadic checks to ensure quality of continuous assessment process. In addition to the mentioned factors, secondary school teachers appear to be lagging in comprehending the concept of continuous assessment. Data collected from respondents reveal that some teachers are interpreting continuous assessment as continuous testing while the process employs a variety of techniques to assess learners' progress. It would appear that teachers/facilitators have misconception of the concept of continuous assessment[13].

Apart from the misconception on part of the teachers highlighted that learners are overloaded with tasks to accomplish whilst they need to conceptualise some of the subjects' content since they would be expected to sit for examination in those particular learning areas. Teachers also highlighted the need for improving the feasibility of some tasks by learners since this is time consuming hence compromises the quality of other curriculum subjects.

Another participant had this to say: *The teacher pupil ratio is alarming imagine at this school we have classes ranging from 50 to 60 yet in secondary schools the teacher pupil ratio is supposed to be 1 to 35 learners how are we going to assess all the learners tasks?* Continuous assessment is being affected by large classes that have high teacher pupil ratio due to the government freeze of teachers' posts because schools are no longer requesting for additional teachers if their enrolments increase. Teachers expressed that it is logically demanding to provide detailed descriptive feedback for each learner in a large class. Apart from large classes resources was highlighted as an inhibiting factor due to financial constraints to acquire resources in schools because schools are not being subsidised and are relying on levies being paid by parents who are struggling to pay.

They all concurred that continuous assessment is time consuming as it requires significant, on-going dedication and effort from the teacher to sustain.

From the findings the following themes emerged

- There is a deviation from principle and practice of continuous assessment;
- There is a variance between the continuous assessment policy and the actual implementation due to a backlog of both tasks and projects;
- Teachers have a limited idea on what continuous assessment should actually be;
- Information dispatched from the Ministry and ZIMSEC is conflicting;
- Teachers do have a negative attitude towards instructional activity;
- Learners are being over assessed and scorn leading to enmity and malpractice;

- Resources are inadequate for learners to develop their projects;
- There is inadequate time for teachers to fully assess learners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Basing on the findings from the study this study therefore recommends that:

- More groundwork need to be done before implementation
- The Ministry need staff develop teachers on how continuous assessment should be implemented.
- The government to reconsider unfreezing of posts
- Tasks for children need to be reduced.

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