

CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT ISSUES AND PRACTICES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF OROMIA REGIONAL STATE, ETHIOPIA: THE “BIG PICTURE” OF ASSESSMENT MECHANISM

Dr. Birhanu Moges Alemu

Adama Science and Technology University
School of Educational Science and Technology of Teacher Education

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The main purpose of this study is to examine the issues and practices of continuous assessment in secondary schools in selected Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia. This study used both qualitative and quantitative descriptive survey research design to collect and analyze the data. Data was collected through questionnaires, interviews and focused group discussions. All these were applied to elicit opinion of all teachers, students and principals and their deputies of studies. Documents regarding grading practice, students' performance, activities concerning feedback and related educational and instructional decisions were also consulted. Generally, percentages, means and chi-square were used as the main methods of analysis. The findings of the study revealed that: (1) Proper student assessment in the sampled secondary schools are inadequate because (a) most of the sample secondary school teachers lack skills of assessing students' performance in using continuous assessment, (b) school principals established to help the implementation of continuous assessment have not to their expectations of teachers, and (c) manuals and directives of continuous assessment are inadequate. (2) Continuous Assessment Strategies were Lesley used and (3) there is a positive relationship between some of the continuous assessment strategies used and students' performance. The researcher concluded that continuous assessment strategies positively contribute to the performance of students. It was recommended that regulations and policies should be put in place so that all schools can benefit from the practice and a uniform policy should be emphasized. Also training for teachers should be encouraged especially in the use of continuous assessment strategies.

Keywords: Continuous assessment, Ethiopia, Oromia Regional State, practices, secondary schools.

INTRODUCTION

Educational assessment provides the necessary feedback that requires in order maximising the outcomes of educational efforts. The assessment of learners' learning provides objective evidences necessary in the decision-making process in education. There is little doubt among educational practitioners about the special value of assessment as a basic condition for effective teaching and learning. The major problems of assessment of learners have been in the approaches or methods. Continuous assessment of learners' progress could be defined as a mechanism whereby the final grading of learners in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning systematically takes account

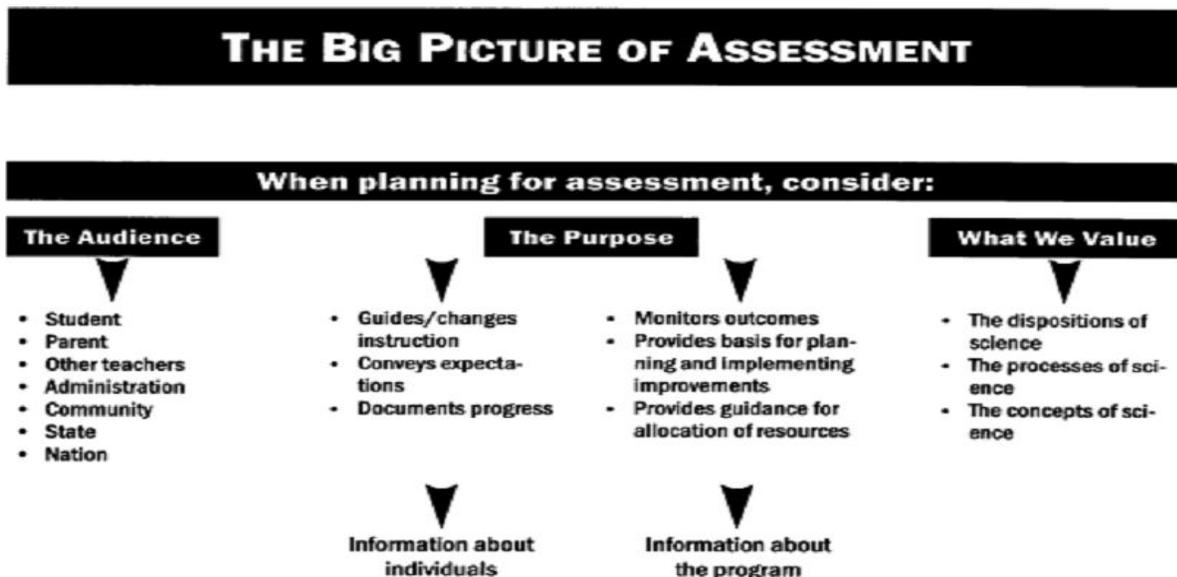
of all their performances during a given period of schooling (Anikweze, 2005). Assessment in the cognitive domain is associated with the process of knowledge and understanding. The affective domain applies to characteristics such as attitudes, motives, interests, and other personality traits. Assessment in the psychomotor domain involves assessing the learners' ability to use his or her hands (e.g. in handwriting, construction and projects).

Another definition by Airasian (1991) describes continuous assessment as an assessment approach which should depict the full range of sources and methods teachers use to gather, interpret and synthesise information about learners; information that is used to help teachers understand their learners, plan and monitor instruction and establish a viable classroom culture. A *Continuous Assessment* is listening closely to students, observing students as they are engaged in learning, as they are engaged with materials, and trying to understand what they understand (Onuka, 2006; Stiggins, 1994).

From these definitions, one could infer that continuous assessment is an assessment approach which involves the use of a variety of assessment instruments, assessing various components of learning, not only the thinking processes but including behaviours, personality traits and manual dexterity. Continuous assessment will also take place over a period of time. Such an approach would be more holistic, representing the learner in his/her entirety. It will begin with the decisions that the teachers perform on the first day of school and end with the decisions that the teachers and administrators make on the learners regarding end-of-year grading and promotion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review of relevant literature of this study. It highlights the basic concept of continuous assessment, continuous assessment strategies and students' performance.



The Big Picture of Continuous Assessment Mechanism

CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT

The repeated emphasis being placed on continuous assessment is a clear evidence of its importance. Continuous assessment can be regarded as a method of ascertaining what a student 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 (Onuka, 2005, 2006). 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. In other words, continuous assessment should be systematic, comprehensive, and cumulative and guidance oriented.

Continuous assessment is systematic in the sense that it is planned, graded to suit the age and experience of the students and is given at suitable intervals during the school year. Appropriate timing saves students from being tested to death or becoming bored with too frequent assessments. Comprehensiveness of continuous assessment means that it is not focused on academic skills alone. It embraces the cognitive, the psychomotor and the affective domains. A child is assessed as a total entity using all the psychometric devices such as test and non test techniques. Cumulative characteristics of continuous assessment means that all information gathered on the individual has to be pooled together before a decision can be taken. To say that continuous assessment is guidance oriented means that the information so collected is to be used for educational, vocational and personal- social decision-making for the student. Conceptually as well as in practice, continuous assessment provides feedback to children and teachers. Such feedback provides information which is used for purposes of improving on the child's performance or modifying the content, context and methods of teaching, as well as in making a variety of other decisions. However, the notion of whether continuous assessment in Secondary Schools of Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia take into cognisance these four attributes, places a question mark on the classroom teacher. Webb and Briars (1990) argued that assessment must be an interaction between the teacher and students, with the teacher continually seeking to understand, what a student can do and how a student is able to do it. Yoloye (1991) also pointed out that continuous assessment is only a part of the field of educational evaluation. He further argues that continuous assessment is "*a method of evaluating the progress and achievement of students in educational institutions*" (Yoloye 1999). This means that continuous assessment could be used to predict future students' performance in the final examinations and the possible success at the work place or on a particular job. Indeed, in secondary schools, assessment of students' learning in the classroom has been an integral component of the teaching-learning process especially at secondary school level because there is much effort by the teacher to teach a lot of content to students. However, to Kellaghan and Greany (2003), that kind of assessment is subjective, informal, immediate, on going, and intuitive as it interacts with learning as it occurs. Although the main argument behind the adoption of continuous assessment is to avoid focusing all efforts, time and energy on just one exam, this is not true in secondary schools. Griffith(2005) have also indicated that, "*in a global economy, assessment of students achievement is changing mainly because in an ever-changing knowledge based society, students would not only be required to learn and understand the basics but also to think critically, to analyze, and to make inference for making decisions.*" It is therefore critical that CAs could utilize strategies that are able to measure the changing students' abilities and attitudes, and this is why this study was undertaken to find out the different continuous assessment strategies teachers used in Secondary Schools of Selected Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia.

ADVANTAGES OF CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT

One of the expected advantages of continuous assessment lies in its being guidance oriented. Since it will involve data gathering over a long period of time, it will yield more accurate data reaching the teachers early enough to modify instruction. This could play a vital role in diagnosing and remediating areas of learners' weakness if properly anchored in what occurs in classroom.

Another advantage of continuous assessment is that it place teachers at the centre of all performance – assessment activities. It encourages more teacher participation in the overall assessment or grading of his/her learners. Though this approach, teachers would be able to integrate assessment and assessment results into instructional practice. Teachers will be expected to incorporate assessment into the larger learning framework and possibly to provide evidence regarding how assessment information is used to inform and guide instruction for individual learners.

THE CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS LEVEL

According to Onuka (2006:1), there is a need to use a variety of instruments to effectively measure the students' traits and their results are used to assist the students to improve themselves. In addition, Lewin

(2001) recorded that, over the years, various attempts have been made in many countries to improve the quality of examinations through the continuous assessment provisions. For example, in Tanzania, the National Examination Council for Tanzania (NECTA) in the late 1970's established continuous assessment programs to monitor students' academic progress in the whole education cycle from lower classes to higher classes.

In many schools, regular testing takes place on weekly, fortnightly, monthly, mid-term, termly and yearly basis. This is further evidenced with what Etienne (2007:2) noted in Mauritius that, only for purely organizational reasons, some teachers might be brought to do continuous assessment during the beginning of first term. This is similar to Uganda's Beginning of Term (BOT) tests in secondary schools. Besides testing, assignments and recap exercises, projects are other forms of continuous assessment strategies sometimes used in secondary schools level.

According to Farrant (1997), continuous assessment is being used increasingly as a strategy to prepare students for terminal examinations. For instance, the results obtained from continuous assessment can be used to identify the students' weak areas so that teachers can give them special support in those areas. Continuous assessment results can also inform decision-making in terms of determining as to whether students should be promoted from one class to another. "...Continuous [assessment]... or schools-based assessment should test the total growth of the pupils in the non-scholastic areas and therefore [should] be built into the teaching-learning process" (Graume & Naidoo, 2004:103). This implies that helping students acquire the needed knowledge and skills would require changes in the public examination system and assessment techniques at the schools and classroom levels.

Continuous assessment is also used to provide teachers with feedback about students' performance and achievement. In Uganda, excellence in the national external examination has also become the top priority of teachers and school administrators. Therefore, teachers have had to rely on continuous assessment in order to monitor their students' academic progress and performance. However, despite the central role of continuous assessment in enhancing the teaching-learning process, we do not know a great deal about how teachers continuously assess their students in secondary school level classes. Kellaghan and Greany(2003) further suggested that, there is evidence that the quality of those practices may be deficient in many ways. This study attempted to find out what continuous assessment strategies were being used in secondary schools of Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia. In addition, the study was intended also to examine whether there was any relationship between the continuous assessment strategies being used with students' academic performance in those schools.

CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES AND STUDENTS PERFORMANCE

According to Onuka(2006), what is termed "assessment in many schools today is summative, final, administrative, rigorous and content-driven rather than formative, diagnostic, private, suggestive and goal oriented, as such can be regarded as grading." Summative assessment entails the focus on final examinations by teachers, parents and students. Surprisingly, formative assessment is geared towards the consolidation of students' performance in the final examinations rather than inculcating students with problem solving, critical thinking, and life skills.

Performance is defined in terms of results (Madaus, 2000:98). In addition, Kellaghan and Greany (2003:16) noted that, "when continuous assessment has important consequences attached to performance, they are likely to impact directly on teaching and learning and so merit consideration as a mechanism for improving student achievements". Onuka (2006:11) also found out that in Nigeria there was a comprehensive implementation of continuous assessment and feedback for the improvement of the education system for the accomplishment of learning objectives effectively according to students. This concurred with the finding of Onuka and Oludipe (2005) that there was a significant remediation for poor performance as a result of the application of the feedback mechanism resulting from formative evaluation of learners. Furthermore, Etienne (2007:2) contended that, the protest against final examinations by students in France in May 1968 was the perfect opportunity for students to point at the unfair and risky final assessment in their schools. They made it clear that such examinations merely represented the performance of the moment and not the efforts made throughout the year. Students insisted on the risk that even the best-prepared student could have a problem on the day of the examination and came out in favor of continuous assessment in order to reduce the risks though some difficulties are likely to occur

during implementation of the recap exercises as well. Graume and Naidoo (2004:) also noted that up to high school level, the assessment of students is done through terminal, half yearly and annual examinations at the schools. Madaus and Kellaghan (2000) contends that, when continuous assessment tools are applied over a period of time, they give an indication whether improvement is taking place or not.

However, in secondary schools of Masaka district, it cannot be over-emphasized that the measurement of these domains, using continuous assessment, makes it a good tool for improving learning objectives and outcomes. This is so because in his research, Kalleghan and Greany (2003) noted a deficiency in the practice of continuous assessment. This therefore may account for the variance in performance among schools and students in particular in secondary schools level of selected Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia. Since there is a need to improve students' performance in our education system as a whole, the need exists to establish what continuous assessment strategies are being used by teachers in secondary schools.

The need also exists to investigate whether there is any relationship between continuous assessment strategies being used in secondary schools and students' performance in the final examination. Finally, the need exists to find out the teachers' perceptions on whether students exposed to numerous CA strategies perform better than their counterparts.

CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT

Evaluation of which assessment is part plays important roles in the educational development of a nation. It is a means by which quality control is carried out and determines the educational system is accountability exemplified by the various stakeholders in the industry. It is equally the tool used in determining the effectiveness of teaching and learning. It is a vital sector. Assessment is said to be continuous when it is regular, cumulative and comprehensive. Continuous assessment uses a variety of instruments in the process of assessing the student because it considers all the three domains of learning namely: Cognitive, affective and psychomotor. The result of continuous assessment is usually used to advise the students and thus such results improve the student learning outcomes. The reintroduction of the universal basic education and the expansion of its scope from six to nine year basic education in 1999 brought a new dimension to continuous assessment in the form of School Based Assessment (SBA) at the lower, middle and upper basic levels. The main objective of the Nigeria government by introducing continuous assessment is: making it to form a substantial percentage of the final certificate examinations. Yet, as at present only the examining bodies are able to tell what they do with the continuous assessment scores collected from secondary school as the school themselves and the rest of the educational subsystem and society are not sure of what happens to those scores.

Psychometric properties of the tests that produced these scores are subject to doubts as the reliability and validity of the measurement instruments used are not ascertained. The competence and capability of some of the teachers who generated them is in suspect, since many of these teachers were not professionally trained.

It has been however, observed that implementation of continuous assessment in schools has been fraught with some problems which include the fact that teachers are not adequately educated in continuous assessment implementation, stakeholders are unaware of the importance of continuous assessment as a quality control and assurance tool and the fact that it assists both teachers and students to improve and as such little or no importance is attached to its implementation, thus sufficient funds are not made for its implementation and continuous assessment storage equipment such as computers are not made available for teachers to use. Report that some scholars had discovered that though continuous assessment can make tremendous improvement in student learning and in reducing examination malpractices in schools where it is often practiced yet the operators need to be honest in discharged of duties and use the instrument to promote learning among student and enhance teaching by its use in the school system.

PROBLEMS WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENTS

The problems of continuous assessment that could be associated with the teachers include: their skills in

test construction and administration, and their attitudes toward the continuous assessment approach and record keeping.

One of the important aspects of continuous assessment is the availability of valid and reliable tests which could be used in all schools. There is a need to construct these tests following established procedures and practices. To make the results comparable across all the schools, teachers need to be equipped with skills of test construction and administration. This could be done through teacher training institutions so that teachers are equipped with such skills as part of their training and certification. The Ministry of Basic Education and Culture could also organise workshops on test construction and administration as in-service training for serving teachers. Apart from the skills of test construction measuring cognitive aspects of learning, teachers should also be able to measure the learners' affective attributes such as attitudes, motives, interests, values and other personality characteristics. Such characteristics could be as important as others associated with intelligence. They could assist the teachers and administrators in understanding the learners better, both in the process of education and in the practical affairs of everyday life. They could help us answer questions such as why learners perceived to have high academic abilities do not do well at school. They also provide clues about the interest patterns of learners which could be used in their placement into schools of higher learning and for employment purposes. For successful implementation of the continuous assessment approach, teachers need to give most tests, which mean more marking. They need to observe the learners more keenly to assess their affective outcomes, and there will be more records to be kept on the learners. All these could mean more work to the teacher, more demand on his or her time and more responsibility on him or her. This means they must be professionally and attitudinally prepared for operating the system. If the teacher is not adequately prepared for operating the system, it may lead to a tendency to merely 'cook up' scores in the name of continuous assessment. Thus, teachers should be encouraged to form favourable attitudes toward the practice. They should be made aware of the requirements of the system, its importance and how to implement it.

Another problem with continuous assessment is the issue of record keeping. Learners' records have to be adequately and meticulously kept over a long period of time. They should be properly stored and easily retrievable. A related issue is that of collation. Scores may have to be combined from different sources using various weights. Teachers will need basic arithmetical operations of addition and multiplication; calculators may be handy here. So that scores are not misplaced, marks books or registers for learners could be used.

This presentation is of the view that there are inherent problems with the derivation of continuous assessment scores and the situation deserves the focus of academics. The entire practice of continuous assessment is surrounded by laxity. Thus, there is laxity in timing. For example, in the institution where I work, usually an academic calendar is drawn up which states the times when the first and second continuous assessment exercise for each of the two semesters of the session will hold among other details. However, no one enforces the timing so that individual lecturers decide along with their students when to administer continuous assessment.

There is also laxity in terms of the mode that the continuous assessment exercise takes. For instance, a school calendar may specify two continuous assessment tests, but because there is no enforcement, some lecturers and their students agree on one test and one assignment, one test and two assignments, one test only. Griffiths (2005) captures another area of disparity which relates to teacher involvement. He opines that the input of teachers/lecturers in continuous assessment may not be fair because different lecturers may understand their involvement differently. Other areas of disparities noticed across the board is that there are lecturers, who grant students the opportunity of a make up test when they miss one, while others do not, some lecturers remark continuous assessment scripts and make corrections on them while others do not, some disclose continuous assessment marks to students while others do not. Some of the objectives for the adoption of continuous assessment⁶ have not been achieved because of some factors.

Continuous assessment places much power in the hands of teachers. This power is often abused by the teachers who award scores even when tests are not administered (Ezeudu, 2005). There is also the problem of over emphasis on the cognitive domain with total neglect of the affective and psychomotor domains of behaviour. This problem is more serious in the higher or tertiary institutions where no effort is made to assess the students' affective domain of behaviour. To worsen the situation, the students are

awarded certificates with the comment that they have been found worthy in character and in learning. Comparability of standards results from the variation in the quality of test and other assessment techniques in scoring and grading patterns as the inability of teachers to make reports of records to concerned persons. Large classes resulting from prerequisite skills by teachers, lack of materials and facilities necessary for acquisition of skills in the psychomotor domain and poor supervision or administration of continuous assessment practice in various schools (Ezeudu, 2005; Greaney, 2001).

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

This study which used a range of data collecting methods to explore the implementation of continuous assessment and focusing, in particular, on the experiences of pupils who record lower attainments at basic schools, is significant for the following reasons:

- As stated in the introductory paragraph, in Selected Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia, teachers' continuous assessment practices are under-developed but have great potential for improving learning. The study will provide explicit information about aspects of continuous assessment that needed

improvement and suggest strategies to improve teachers' assessment practices. The assumption is that improvement for attaining students will inevitably affect other pupils.

- Second, improvement in teachers' continuous assessment practices links to another benefit relating to raising standards of all students. Since there are pupils with diverse needs in basic schools, improvement in teachers' continuous assessment practices has the potential to help all pupils, including attainers to improve. This will help to achieve one of the objectives of the educational reforms, to provide quality education for all.

- Further, the study is significant because it gives opportunity for student's 'voice' to be heard. Previous studies in Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia have excluded students, including attaining pupils from participating in discussion concerning their assessment and other aspects of their education. The tacit assumption has been that students will be neither sufficiently well informed nor sufficiently articulate or rational to contribute to such discussion. However, in this study, student's views will be explored about their experiences of classroom assessments. The assumption is that, it is only by drawing on such sources of knowledge that basic school environments can be improved in ways that are meaningful and important to all students, particularly those who record lower attainments in classrooms.

- In addition, the study is significant because it will provide explicit information about the constraints imposed on teachers' continuous assessment practices by prevailing educational policies. This will offer policy-makers relevant feedback which if addressed can bring about relevant changes to improve basic schoolteachers' classroom and assessment practices in Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia.

- As the first of its kind in Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia, the findings will contribute new knowledge to the existing knowledge about basic schoolteachers' continuous assessment practices and the experiences of lower attaining pupils in the classroom.

Specifically, the findings of this study might contribute in the following ways:

The research results would inform the teachers of the numerous CASs being utilized in Secondary Schools of Selected Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia that these strategies should be emphasized during the course of teacher training. The research would provide relevant knowledge and information to the school heads and supervisors about the performance of students in secondary schools those results from the classroom practice. Teachers would be informed of the alternative CASs that could be used to enhance students' performance. This research will act as a foundation for further research that will benefit researchers.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The urgent need to promote learning and improve assessment strategies and performance in secondary schools of Selected Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia resulted into a range of related but different developments in continuous assessment at classroom levels. The resultant feature has been inconsistent assessment strategies and performance of students' in secondary schools of Selected Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia level examinations national wide and performance still varies from school to school. This undermines the future of many students that are in secondary schools that persistently perform poorly.

What therefore remains disturbing is whether a relationship between continuous assessment strategies adopted by teachers in secondary schools of Selected Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia with students' performance in final examinations.

In this study the researcher wants to identify some of the problems in assessing and evaluating students in secondary schools.

The researcher also feels that the present systems of evaluation in secondary schools of Oromia Regional State is inadequate in measuring students' behavioral changes in cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains in continues manner.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The major objectives of this study are to:

identify the strengths and weakness of secondary school teachers in selected Oromia Regional State related to students assessment in general and continuous assessment in particular.

find out whether there was a relationship between continuous assessments strategies used and students' performance in the final examinations.

find out the teachers' perception of whether students exposed to various continuous assessment strategies perform better in the final examination than their counterparts.

explorer the extent of teachers give feedback to their students in Selected Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia examine the conditions/issues that affects the use of continuous assessment in Selected Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to assess the different issues systematically, the following research questions were formulated:

What continuous assessment strategies were being used in Secondary Schools of Selected Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia?

What is the relationship between the continuous assessment strategies used and students' performance in Selected Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia?

What are the teacher's perceptions about whether students exposed to various continuous assessment strategies performed better in Selected Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia?

To what extent do teachers give feedback to their students in Selected Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia?

What are the conditions/issues that affect the use of continuous assessment in Selected Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The chapter has presented the relevant literature particularly on continuous assessment strategies and students' performance. The next chapter discusses the methodology utilized in this study. Further, this chapter presents the research design, sample selection procedures, how validity and reliability was maintained. This chapter also highlights the procedures used for carrying out the field study and data analysis.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study used a descriptive survey research design utilizing both qualitative research methods and

quantitative approaches. This research design was seen to be the most desirable because the study sought to describe the current situation in secondary school level classrooms in terms of continuous assessment strategies being used and their relationship to students' academic performance. Surveys are well-known instruments that can be used to gather a lot of information in a short period of time. Given the time constraints and the financial resources available, the researchers decided to use the survey research design. Qualitative research methods in this study were also appropriate in order to explain how the teachers in schools conducted CA strategies. Straus (1998) noted that „...research projects where members are open to helpful criticism, can enjoy the play of ideas, and can appreciate the give and take that occurs in group discussions“.

The data was guided by the following questions:

What continuous assessment strategies were being used in Secondary Schools of Selected Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia?

What is the relationship between the continuous assessment strategies used and students' performance in Selected Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia?

What are the teacher's perceptions about whether students exposed to various continuous assessment strategies performed better in Selected Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia?

To what extent do teachers give feedback to their students in Selected Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia?

What are the conditions/issues that affect the use of continuous assessment in Selected Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia?

PARTICIPANTS AND SETTING

Recruitment of participants for the study was by stratified random selection, guided by the information provided by the different educators. Thus the participants for the study comprised 400 were students 122 were teachers, 12 were principals and their deputies in the sample secondary schools were included in the sample of the study. The respondent students (273 males and 127 females) were selected by using stratified sampling technique. The number of members from each group that is the number of male and female students from grade nine and ten of the sample secondary schools were selected proportionally. The study targeted in secondary school level classroom teachers and students of Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia. Teachers were selected because they taught and executed testing and examination of students. Students were also selected because they were the beneficiaries of continuous assessment strategies being used by the teachers in their schools and it was also the students that sat for the final examinations.

SELECTION OF SCHOOLS

Six secondary schools in Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia were randomly selected. Among these schools, four were government-aided secondary schools and two were privately owned secondary schools. The reason for the 4:2 ratio of government to private secondary school is that in Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia, majority of secondary schools are government-aided secondary schools. It is therefore reasonable that during the random sampling, government-aided schools outnumbered the private owned. However, all these secondary schools in the sample had comparable teaching facilities, teaching staff and school environment. Furthermore, the simple random sampling method was also used to select the school participants.

POPULATION SELECTION

In each of the participating secondary schools, 122 teachers were randomly selected to participate in the study, 400 secondary school students and 12 principals and their deputies and 20 education officials of studies were also randomly selected each school that participated in the study. Therefore, a total population of study 554 subjects was selected to participate in the study. The reason for this small sample was due to the limited resources and time constraints that the researcher experienced. A smaller manageable sample offered the researcher the ideal information needed and at the same time enabled

him to complete this research project in a timely manner.

PROCEDURE FOR DATA COLLECTION

Prior to the commencement of the programme, permission to conduct the study was sought from principals of the selected secondary schools where the study was carried out. Thereafter, the participants' consent was sought and obtained. They were equally assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Three instruments were used in the study, namely: questionnaires, structured interviews, and Focused Group Discussion (FGD).

Questionnaires: Two sets of questionnaires were used. One set of questionnaires was administered to teachers and the second one was administered to students. Although 400 questionnaires had been distributed to students, all 400 were returned. Out of the 122 questionnaires distributed to teachers, all 122 were returned. This made it possible to collect more than adequate information and opinions from the respondents within a short period of time.

Interviews: Face to face interviews were given to the 12 principals and their deputies and 20 education officials participating secondary schools. The interviews were used because of their advantages over questionnaires especially

to allow the researchers to probe for particular responses, clarifications and confirmations of information from the respondents.

Focused Group Discussion (FGD): Different groups of teachers were met at their respective schools for discussions. Litosseliti (2003) points out that compared with other qualitative methods where meaning emerges from the participants, focus group have an element of flexibility and adaptability. They were asked questions designed to draw their attention and response on topics related to this study. Respondents were allowed to answer in their own words rather than having to choose from predetermined options, as it is usually the case for survey techniques. Toward this end, four focus group discussions (one for each school) were held with the participants. Each discussion lasted for an average of 1 hour and revolved around one major theme: - Teachers' continuous assessment practices in relation to the major attributes that characterise continuous assessment. Although it was intended that all the 32 teachers participate in the FGD, only 24 teachers did actually participate in the FGD and the rest of teachers were not available for the discussion. Recording of the FGDs sessions was made through note taking and also by the use of audio-cassettes. The information from the groups helped to supplement data that was collected using interviews and questionnaires, which enhanced the possibilities for triangulation.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

In order to ascertain the validity of instruments, expert opinion was sought from the supervisor, teachers, and peers on face, content and format of the questionnaires, interviews and group organization. Consultations with the supervisors, other teachers, and peers helped to identify errors and offered the opportunity to modify and improve the instruments. Also to ascertain the validity and reliability of the research instrument, a pilot study was done in one secondary school within the same district that did not participate in the actual study. Following the pilot study, more errors were identified in the instruments. Drawing on the expert opinions from the supervisors, teachers, head teachers, and peers, appropriate corrections were made on the instruments. Thereafter, all instruments were administered by the researcher and collected immediately.

DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive analysis was used for the demographic characteristics of the participants and to present the participants' responses on their continuous assessment practices. All the information from the questionnaires was entered into Microsoft excel spreadsheets. The Microsoft excel program was used to generate descriptive statistics, graphics, tables and charts. The interpretation of the descriptive statistics made it possible to make appropriate inferences in terms of determining the influence of continuous assessment strategies to students' performance. The qualitative data was analyzed into

Table 1: Teachers', Principals and Their Deputies Background Information

Items	Characteristics	Teachers & Principals		Students	
		N	%	N	%
Gender	Male	96	62	224	56
	Female	68	38	176	44
	Total	164	100	400	100
Highest Qualification	Diploma	44	29	-	-
	Degree	110	71	-	-
Experience in Teaching	0-2yrs	20	13	-	-
	3-5 yrs	37	24	-	-
	Above 6yrs	97	63	-	-

Table 2: Methods of Assessment frequently used by Teachers

Types/Methods of Assessment	Responses									
	Always		Frequently		Some times		Not used		Total Response	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Class work	18	14.8	67	54.9	30	24.6	7	0.06	122	100
Oral Questions	65	53.3	37	30.3	12	9.8	10	8.2	122	100
Objective type of test	42	34.4	63	51.6	15	12.3	2	1.6	122	100
Subjective type of test	30	24.6	34	27.9	54	44.3	4	3.3	122	100
Take-home/ assignment	21	17.2	52	42.6	47	38.5	2	1.6	122	100
Field work	1	0.8	2	1.6	5	4.1	114	93.4	122	100
Project work	2	1.6	3	2.5	34	27.9	83	68.0	122	100
Practical exercises	30	24.6	54	44.3	4	3.3	34	27.9	122	100
Checklist	10	8.0	68	55.7	31	25.4	13	10.6	122	100
Observation	27	22.1	64	52.5	31	25.4	-	-	122	100

Table 3: Types of Test Items Frequently Used by Teachers to Assess Students

Types of Test Items	Responses									
	Always		Frequently		Some times		Not used		Total Response	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Essay	1	0.8	3	2.5	53	43.4	65	53.3	122	100
Fill in the blank	4	3.3	18	14.8	51	41.8	49	8.2	122	100
Multiple-choice	64	52.2	50	41	8	6.6	-	-	122	100
Matching	9	7.4	48	39.3	50	41	15	13.3	122	100
True/False	13	10.7	38	31.1	45	36.9	26	21.3	122	100
Short Answer	17	13.9	52	42.6	48	39.3	5	4.1	122	100

themes and concepts. Based on the grounded theory plausible relationships among themes and concepts were identified (Strauss & Carbin, 1998). The Grounded Theory was very ideal for this study as it involves inductive data analysis, which according to Ary et al (2002) type of data, analysis could lead to formation of a new theory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, findings of this study are presented based on the research questions. The study indicates that the largest percentages of teachers and principals (62 %) were male teachers compared to 38% who

Table 4: Teachers' Response on When They Used the Different CA Strategies

Types/Methods of Assessment	Responses													
	Daily		Weekly		Monthly		Every-mid semester		Every Semester		Not Used		Total Response	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Class work	38	31.4	68	55.7	9	7.4	06	4.9	01	0.8	-	-	122	100
Oral Questions	56	45.9	45	36.9	14	11.5	01	0.8	06	4.9	-	-	122	100
Objective type of test	-	-	18	14.8	33	27.0	62	50.8	09	7.4	-	-	122	100
Subjective type of test	14	11.5	55	45.1	21	17.2	32	26.2	-	-	-	-	122	100
Take-home assignment	16	13.1	74	60.6	20	16.4	12	9.8	-	-	-	-	122	100
Field work	-	-	-	-	2	1.6	7	5.7	10	8.2	103	84.4	122	100
Project work	-	-	-	-	-	-	17	13.9	14	11.5	91	74.9	122	100
Practical exercises	62	50.8	31	25.4	24	19.7	-	-	5	4.1	-	-	122	100
Observation	17	13.9	21	17.2	63	51.6	19	15.6	-	-	-	-	122	100
Checklist	-	-	13	10.7	64	52.5	25	20.5	20	16.4	-	-	122	100

Table 5: Students' Responses on the Number of Times their Teachers Used Different CA Strategies

Types of Test Items	Responses									
	Always		Frequently		Some times		Not used		Total Response	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Essay	24	0.6	68	17.0	257	64.3	51	12.8	400	100
Fill in the blank	4	3.3	18	14.8	51	41.8	-	28.2	400	100
Multiple-choice	90	22.5	254	63.5	56	14	-	-	400	100
Matching	96	24.0	238	59.5	50	12.5	16	4.0	400	100
True/False	93	23.3	231	57.8	45	11.3	31	7.8	400	100
Short Answer	87	21.8	202	50.5	48	12.0	63	15.8	400	100

were female (Table 1). Whether this imbalance between male and female teachers has a significant influence on students' performance, it is yet to be known. Given that usually female teachers serve as role models to students than male teachers, this might have an implication on students' performance. As Table 1 further showed, few the teacher respondents (29%) that formed sample for this study were under requirement, majority (71%) of teacher and principal respondents are according to the requirement of ministry of education in secondary school level. The Diploma in Education (10+3) is currently the lowest qualification in secondary school in Ethiopia. Table 2, also shows that male student respondents (56%) dominated the female student respondents (44%) from total sample population. This is quite usual especially at secondary school level for boys' enrollments to surpass that of girls. In this study student respondents were 52% compared to 48% of participants were from grade 9 and 10 respectively. This was because at the time of the administration of the questionnaires, there were more grade 9 students that had reported than grade 10 students. The findings showed that the teachers who are degree holders dominated the teaching force of secondary schools level especially in urban areas while in rural areas; most of the teachers were diploma holders. Thus, secondary schools levels in the rural areas are disadvantaged because most of their teachers being diploma holders are not qualified to teach at secondary school level. The discussions with principals/head teachers of rural schools revealed that the availability of diploma holders in secondary schools level was due to the failure of school administrator to give chance for upgrading diploma holders and raise enough salary for degree holders. Many teachers were relatively new in their rural areas and most of them had depleted 3-5 years in their schools, which

Table 6: Students' Responses on When Their Teachers Used Different CA Strategies

Types/Methods of Assessment	Responses													
	Daily		Weekly		Monthly		Every-mid semester		Every Semester		Not Used		Total Response	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Class work	101	25.3	219	54.8	72	18.0	06	1.5	02	0.5	-	-	400	100
Oral Questions	156	39.0	214	53.5	14	3.5	06	1.5	10	2.5	-	-	400	100
Objective type of test	-	-	21	5.3	43	10.8	218	54.5	109	27.3	09	2.3	400	100
Subjective type of test	14	3.5	225	56.3	121	30.3	40	10.0	-	-	-	-	400	100
Take-home assignment	106	26.5	234	58.5	40	10.0	20	5.0	-	-	-	-	400	100
Field work	-	-	-	-	-	-	21	5.3	86	21.5	293	73.3	400	100
Project work	-	-	-	-	-	-	17	4.3	87	21.8	296	74.0	400	100
Practical exercises	108	27.0	261	65.3	26	6.5	-	-	5	1.3	-	-	400	100
Observation	17	13.9	21	17.2	231	57.8	98	24.5	33	27.0	-	-	400	100
Checklist	60	15	58	14.5	225	56.3	09	27.3	48	37.0	-	-	400	100

was a short period. This implied that most teachers were inexperienced and less likely to carry out effective teaching and assessment of students.

Research Question One: What continuous assessment strategies were being used in Secondary Schools of Selected Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia? In response to research question one, teachers as well as students of secondary school level were probed and their responses are presented in Table 2 and 3 respectively.

Findings regarding the frequency in use of continuous assessment strategies as gathered from teachers and students are presented in Tables below.

When we consider the methods of assessments 'always' and 'frequently' used by teachers, the one used by a relatively large percentage of respondents are: Oral questions, objective items, class work and home work.

Table 2, above indicates that objective tests (true-false, matching and multiple-choice) were the most frequently used CA strategy i.e. (with 34.4% always and 51.6% frequently), and followed by practical exercises (with 24.6% always and 44.3% frequently).

Regarding the frequency with which teachers use different kinds of assessment, multiple-choice stands first by 52.2%, while short answer and matching holds the second and true/false third place. The finding in Table 3 indicates that written

tests were the most commonly used continuous assessment strategy by secondary school level teachers in Selected Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia followed by take-home assignment and practical exercises. Presentation strategy was the less utilized strategy by the teachers.

Findings in Table 4 indicates that take home assignment, class work and subjective type of test are respondents used on a weekly basis throughout the term, further, teacher respondents used observation and checklist on a monthly basis and while practical exercises were given on a daily basis. Table 4 also shows that field work (84.4%) and project work (74.9%) were never used according to teacher respondents.

Tables (5&6) indicate that secondary school level students concurred with their teachers' response in Table 3 and 4 of the teachers' response about the same thing. The table shows that objective tests (multiple-choice, matching and true-false), short answer and practical exercises dominated the teachers' continuous assessment strategies.

The findings in Table 5 illustrate that students were frequently given multiple-choice, matching and true/false, while essay tests and short answer were sometimes. Fill in the blank were rarely used.

The responses to when the teachers carried out the different continuous assessment strategies to assess students' work are summarized in Table 6. .

Table 7: Teachers' Responses on the contributions of CA to Students' Performance

CONTRIBUTIONS	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL RESPONSE	
					N	%
Build the whole mind of the student	46%	54%	0	0	122	100
Improves teaching-learning process	67%	33%	0	0	122	100
Help Identify weak students	51%	33%	16%	0	122	100
Students develop a revising habit	46%	49%	11%	0	122	100
Help students master the contents	59%	41%	0	0	122	100
Students perform better in final examination	46%	44%	5%	5%	122	100
Arouses students' desire for attention in class	36%	49%	15%	0	122	100
The more the CA, the more confident and ready students become for final exam.	71%	29%	0	0	122	100
Closes the gap between the students and teachers.	62%	23%	15%	0	122	100

Table 8: Students' Responses on the Contributions of CA Strategies to Their Performance

Contributions	SA	A	D	SA	Total Response	
					N	%
Help me to revise	46%	54%	0	0	400	100
I become more confident and ready for final exams	74%	23%	3%	0	400	100
Teacher gives me quick feedback	62%	33%	5%	0	400	100
Improves my understanding	46%	49%	5%	0	400	100
I learn answering techniques and question approach	59%	41%	0	0	400	100
Helps to master the notes	46%	44%	10%	0	400	100
Arouses my desire to attention and concentrate in class	36%	49%	15%	0	400	100
Helps me to interact with the teacher.	51%	49	0	0	400	100

In Table 6, student's responses concurred with those of their teachers mainly in the use of oral questions, class work, subjective type of tests, take-home assignments and practical exercises. The three strategies were more used than the rest of the assessment strategies. Furthermore, field work and project work were not used by teachers according to students and in fact fewer respondents of them responded about observation. This is in agreement with the responses given by their teachers. Checklist was the less used strategy. The researcher found out that teachers had gained very little training in the use of checklists. This was more evidence by the failure of any teachers to present any form of checklist to the researcher.

Research Question Two: The relationship between CA strategies and students' performance in secondary schools in Oromia, Ethiopia. The findings of the teachers and students' responses about this question are presented in Table 7 and 8 respectively.

From the Table 7, out of the total teacher respondents that participated in this study, 67% of them strongly agreed that CA improved the teaching-learning process, 51% of teacher respondents strongly agreed that CA helped to identify weak students and that student easily mastered the subject content. A large number of teacher respondents (71%) also strongly agreed that, the more CA strategies used and exposed to students, the more confident and ready the students came for the final exam.

From Table 8, it was clearly observed that majority of the student respondents (74%) felt that CAs contributed to their good performance. CA helped them to revise more effectively and to also gain confidence and become ready for the final examinations. Many student respondents (62%) also indicated that when their teachers gave them quick feedback, they were able to identify their weaknesses and therefore they made efforts to improve. It was very clear from the findings that CA strategies arouse students desire to pay attention and concentrate because they were expecting to be assessed most of the time.

The following findings were discovered on how different CA strategies related to students performance.

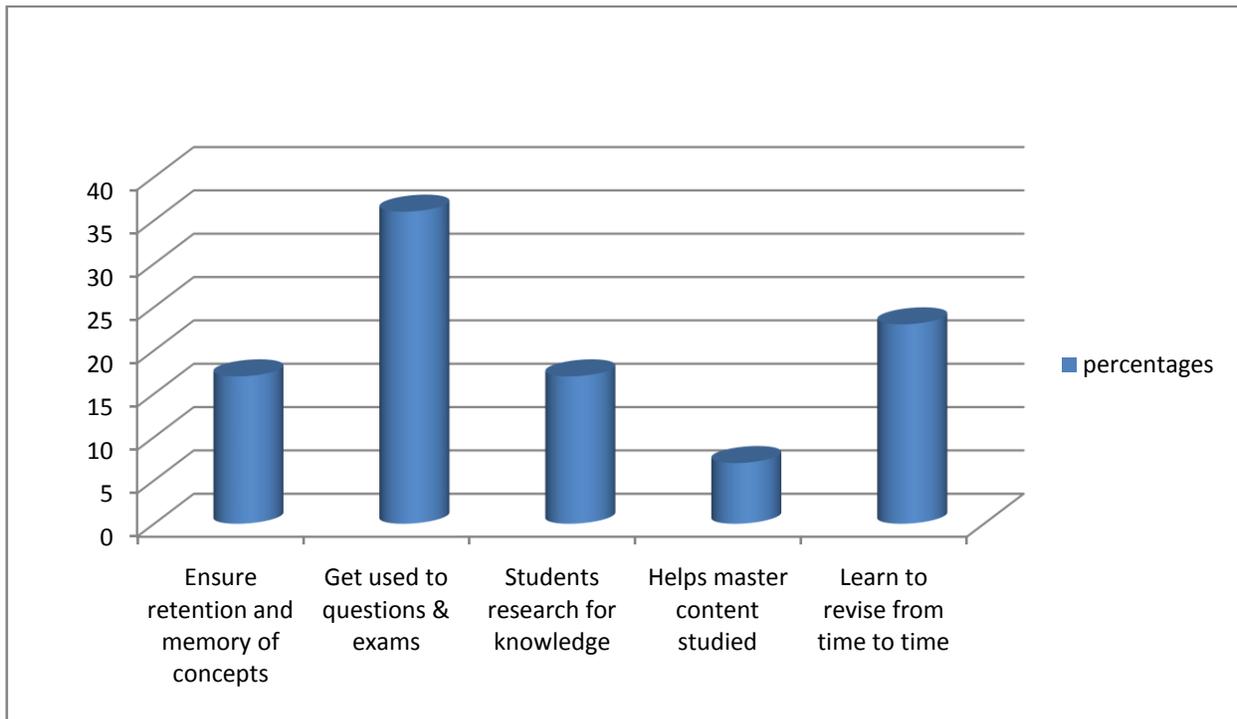


FIGURE 1: TEACHER'S RESPONSE ON HOW TAKE-HOME ASSIGNMENTS RELATED TO STUDENT'S PERFORMANCE

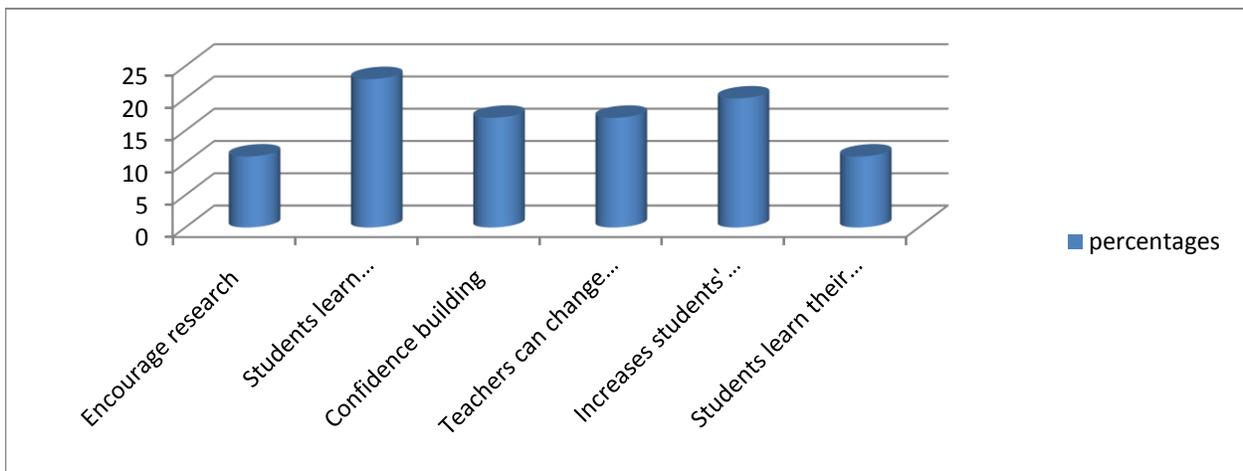


FIGURE 2: TEACHERS RESPONSE ON HOW PRACTICAL EXERCISES RELATED TO STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE

Further analysis of the relationship between continuous assessments strategies (take-home assignment, practical exercises, written tests, and projects) and students' performance in secondary level schools is presented in figures 2, 3, and 4 respectively.

Take-Home Assignments and Practical Exercises: Teachers were asked about the contributions of take-home assignment, practical exercises and written tests as strategies of continuous assessment to students' performance in secondary school teachers. The responses are summarized in the figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively.

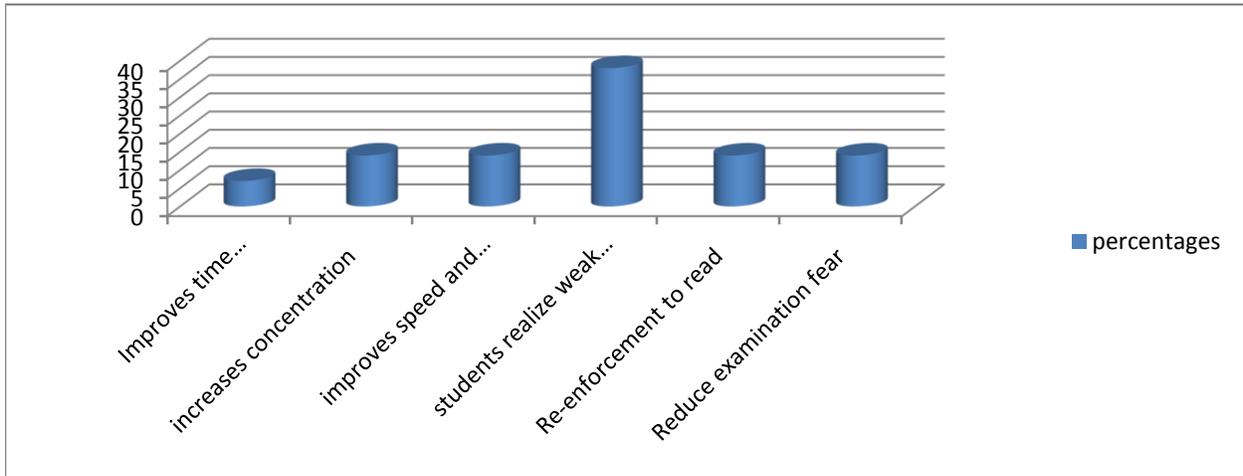


FIGURE 3: TEACHERS RESPONSES ON HOW WRITTEN TESTS ARE RELATED TO STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE

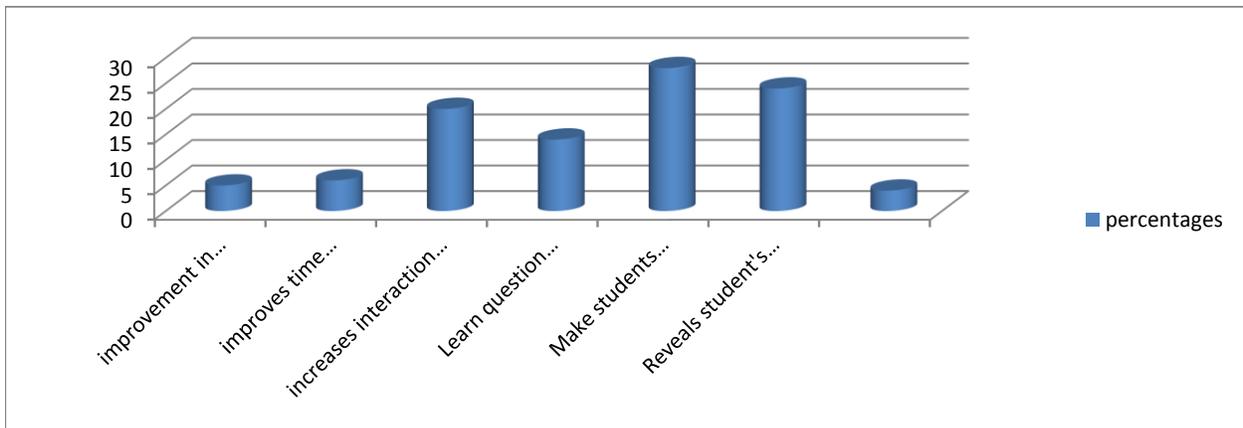


FIGURE 4: STUDENTS' RESPONSE ON HOW CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES RELATED TO THEIR PERFORMANCE

In the Figure 1, teachers responded that a take-home assignment was the best strategy for helping students to learn than the question-answer approach. This take-home assignment assisted them to develop a good revising habit. Teachers indicated that assignments enabled students to get exposed to a variety of questions more often and when given prompt feedback from teachers, students were able to learn the best ways of approaching questions and presenting their answers. Therefore, CA positively relate to students' performance. Take-home assignment was found out not to help much with students the mastering content they are taught. The reasons are discussed in chapter five. The findings in Figure2 indicate that the largest number of teachers responded that students learnt question approach through Take-home assignments. Majority of students felt that the practical exercises were useful in increasing their concentration and attention in class as well as building their confidence. Figure 3 shows the teachers' perceptions about the relationship of written tests to students' performance. It was revealed that through written tests students were informed of their main weak areas, which helped them to devise ways

of improving on their performance. Written tests contained questions selected from various topics already learnt after a given period of time. Therefore when students failed the questions, they could easily be forced to revise more. Other contributions that came true of the written tests were the increase in concentration, improvement in writing speed and handwriting, and reduction in examination fear. Written tests are neither shown to be reducing the fear of students for final examinations nor reinforcing students to read more. From the Figure 4, Students' responses concurred with those of their teachers that CA strategies equipped them with the skill and knowledge of question approach and answer techniques. Students also responded that, the practice of CA made them concentrate on their studies. This was because they were expectant of a test, an assignment or a Recap Exercise. Students therefore devoted most of their time on revising their books. Students also agreed that CA reduced the examination fears and increased their interaction with the teachers. The data analyzed in this chapter finally revealed that there were different CA strategies being used in schools that included; written tests, recap exercises, take-home assignments, presentations, observations, and checklists. Teachers and their students all agreed that CA strategies contributed to students' performance. This next part of the study has the findings of the study discussed in this study. Furthermore the conclusions and recommendations are also provided in the next part.

FINDINGS

This study was conducted to find out from teachers' and students' perceptions on whether CA strategies were related to students' performance in secondary schools of Oromiya Regional State, Ethiopia. In this part of the study, the results obtained are discussed systematically, question by question. Thereafter, conclusions, recommendations and areas for further research are given.

CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES USED IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS AT ORMIYA REGIONAL STATE, ETHIOPIA.

The study revealed that a variety of CA strategies were being used in secondary schools. Written tests (i.e. teacher made tests) were the most commonly used. This coincides with what Yoloye (1991), Carnoy (1999), Gaume and Naidoo (2004:101), Omoifo (2006) noted that teacher-made tests are the widely used in schools and in classroom. It was also revealed that the written tests used at secondary schools included matching, multiple-choice, completion and short answer items in biology, physics, mathematics, chemistry and language studies. Arranged items questions were also used in geography, chemistry, history, biology, civics and ethical education and language studies. In addition, tests also consisted of short answer questions particularly in science subjects. Essay type questions were mainly used in history, geography and language studies.

This study through teachers' discussions also revealed that teachers used questions at the end of every chapter in the textbooks to enrich their written tests. Teachers in a focused group discussion explained why written tests were dominating their continuous assessment practice. They revealed that:

Teacher A: *"I can set many questions in one test picked from many topics"*

Teacher B: *"A lot more subject content can be examined in a single test than in a classroom Exercise and many times students respect tests especially the examinations"*

Teacher C: *"...because a lot of subject content can be asked in a single test, I can know what my students did or did not understand from a wide range"*

These teachers' responses coincided with those of principals of studies. They all looked at tests as being relevant in assessing students and that they contributed to their overall academic performance. This implies that as far as teachers are concerned, CA carried out by a carefully planned testing provided them with the feedback on their own teaching and the learning of their students. This means that every aspect of performance of a student in secondary schools on a CA strategy is challenging to the teacher to

seek ways of improving the performance of their students. When teachers were asked how often tests were administered, most of the teachers responded that tests were administered on a weekly basis. This meant that teachers attached a lot of meaning/value to tests.

Findings from a focused group discussion and interviews held with teachers and principals of Studies indicated that CAs through tests were cumbersome and time consuming because enormous amounts of time went into setting questions and marking students' scripts and doing corrections. In some schools, where classes were larger, it made it difficult to implement CA. Principals of sample schools complained that there was a problem of part-time teaching on the side of the teachers that also hindered the implementation of tests. Though teachers only thought that tests were teacher-made and only designed for individual students or schools, they forget that tests could be administered in groups. Students could even test themselves if well oriented and this could solve many of the problems involved in administering tests.

When principals of sample schools (PS) were asked why they encouraged the use of take-home assignments as a strategy of continuous assessment to students, they responded that:

PS 1: "...students can consult more texts in the library or elsewhere to supplement on what the teachers give them."

PS 2: "students learn to answer questions using their own words, ideas while improving their reasoning"

The researcher realized that teachers and principals of sample schools wanted their students to be given opportunity to demonstrate their ability to organize ideas, views, and points and to express themselves freely after doing some research.

However, this has many limitations. It was difficult to make objective and reliable judgment of an essay from a take-home assignment where students often present different ideas expressed in different ways. Essay questions also took excessively long time for a teacher to grade. The researcher noted that, a student with good hand writing and language skills passed with distinctions while those who have internalized details of the subject but did not have the language skills to explain their views were permanently disadvantaged. As an alternative, the researcher would suggest short answer items as they allow a wide range of test techniques and possibilities, provided more thorough coverage of the syllabus, they give opportunities for details, they allow for accurate and precise feedback and discourage students from concentrating their efforts on selected areas which are thought to be examinable.

Further, teachers responded that presentation was another CA strategy used to assess students at secondary schools. According to teachers, the presentations were carried out either in a group or as individual students. What was identified in this study was that, teachers gave a question, theme, item or a topic to students so that they could research about it and present their findings in class. Two scenarios appeared; first, in the social science subjects of history, geography and language studies, it was found out that teachers gave different questions to either groups or to individual students and students were supposed to organize their notes, arguments to present to the whole class. In scenario two, in subjects like geography, languages, biology and chemistry, the teachers were giving topics, themes or schemes for students either to role-play or demonstrate in groups or as individuals in class.

In commenting about assessing work in the arts, Ross et al (1993) contended that talk was the most natural and the most productive way of evaluating pupils' creative process and their critical appreciation of their own achievement. Teachers revealed in an interview that, presentations helped them identify many other aspects of students' performance, which receives little attention such as interpersonal skills, disposition skills, reaction to criticisms and good oratory skills. However, respondents lamented that they usually found some difficulties mainly when a dialogue after presentation is begun. For instance, the teachers were required to allow a student ample time to think about a question before responding and must listen sensitively in order to understand a student' thinking which might need to be followed.

The study discovered that observation and checklists were other continuous assessment strategies used by secondary school level teachers. According to students, teachers awarded those marks by observing what they were doing through demonstrations, role-plays, presentations, recitations drawing and general business. For students, the results from these observations helped them to change their way of acting and modeling. These were commonly used in laboratories, geography, economics, languages, technical

and presenting information which always improved their performance. However the efforts of the researchers to get any example of the checklist from the teachers and director of studies were in vain. Therefore the researchers wondered whether the students differentiated the marking guide from the checklist.

Also to note, the other continuous assessment strategies that were used by the teacher were questionnaires and projects. The results indicated that, the two strategies are rarely used and most teachers had never used project and questionnaire to assess students in secondary school level. The findings from the interview with principals of studies and teachers revealed that, there was limited time for the two strategies. They stated that:

Teacher 1: *“if I use projects, will I ever complete the syllabus? I do not even have time to set questionnaires.”*

Teacher 2: *“it’s difficult to monitor projects due to limited time available during the term. Even the principals of studies do not recommend it because it wastes a lot of students’ time”*. The responses showed that, teachers are always teaching to complete the syllabus and anything beyond that is useless to them. This meant that, the limited time available in schools does not allow the diversity of CA strategies available for use. Therefore teachers opted for strategies that would work within the limited time frame. The downside of this is that little exploration and creativity of students in other areas is experienced. To the researcher, if teachers carried out the projects in a well-planned manner, the same projects would yield good results. Projects require enough time for planning and implementation, which requires teachers’ dedication. To manage the efficiency within the implementation of projects as a continuous assessment strategy, teachers can use group course works for students, the teacher can give enough time for the project. This helps to minimize the problems associated with time and classroom numbers. Continuous assessment requires the use of a diverse set of data for a purpose. That purpose is the modification of the learning work to adapt to the need that is revealed by the feedback from the student. The reaction of teachers to students’ feedback range from the immediate classroom objectives, lesson plan and the teaching, through to a comprehensive review of a variety of appropriate continuous assessment strategy in order to appraise progress over a whole topic or theme covered.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES BEING USED AND STUDENTS’ PERFORMANCE

The findings obtained through the use of questionnaires, interviews and focused group discussions with students, teachers and principals revealed a lot of important insights. The most salient insights and discussions are presented below:

Teachers strongly agreed that CA strategies improved the teaching and the learning processes. The argument was that through frequent use of CAs teachers realized the best ways of delivering their subject content so that students could easily learn and understand it. Teachers also argued that CA helped them to assess their own performance and effectiveness of their teaching. This is supported by the findings of Onuka (2005) about CA that; if consistently applied in the schools system, it would result into an enhanced performance of students and of course of the teachers, as both of these groups would strive to perform better. This is because the teacher would discover his/her own areas of weakness and strive to ameliorate them. This is in line with what Black et al (2005) noted that, all collection of formative evidence must be guided by a strategy for ensuring action. The distinctive features of CA in secondary schools of Oromiya Regional State were that, the information was used to modify learning program in order to make it more effective. Most of the teachers indicated that CA strategies strongly helped them to identify weak students. Teachers contended that written tests were the best strategy in revealing the students weakest points. According to Yoloye (1991), scores from CA help the teacher to identify the students’ difficulties and help them thereby to master those things they are yet to master. When interviewed, one of the principal of studies argued that, through the frequent use of CAs, teachers were informed of how students were progressing and the teachers would give more time to the weaker students to assist them improve.

Similar findings have been revealed by other studies, for instance, the National Assessment of Progress in Education (2003) in Uganda found out that monthly testing had the greatest positive effect on pupils' achievement.

This NAPE study also revealed that perhaps it allows time to plan, test, mark and use feedback to redirect teaching also for pupils to internalize what they have learnt (NAPE, 2003:165). Kelleghan et al (2003:47) found out that in Africa homework provided the opportunities for teachers to assess students' proficiency as well as to provide feedback

on problems students may exhibit. Greany (2003) noted that its role is to determine students' current level of knowledge, skills or understanding, to diagnose problems they may be encountering and to make decisions about the next instruction steps to take.

According to this study, the findings implied that CA at secondary school level provided a framework in which classroom objectives were set and students' progress chartered and expressed. It yielded a basis for planning the next topic or sub-topic in response to student needs. When questions were asked, whether take-home assignments, practical exercises, and written tests facilitated development of high order thinking, the research found out that majority of student respondents agreed that they learnt answering techniques and question approaches through CA. Students explained that when words like explain, identify, describe, state, compare and contrast, to what extent, were used in continuous assessment strategies, they got familiar with their interpretation.

They argued that they learnt how to approach a question with such terms, how to organize their answers which helped them to perform better when they sat for an exam.

The principals commented that, these CAs encouraged teachers to always to use terms that were also commonly used by the examiners in the final examinations.

To them, this gave enough practice to students as they got exposed to such questions that enabled them to give a good presentation during the final exam.

When interviewed, the principals revealed that, oral presentation and group work helped students to develop communication and interpersonal skills and they allowed in achieving course expectation. The principals stated that:

"Because the students are afraid of being looked at (observed) and graded as weak students by the teachers and fellow students, students will make an equal and worthwhile contribution in the planning, researching and presenting of the subject".

This statement shows that students involved themselves in self-work, personal research and innovation so that they could meet the required standards in the class.

This improved their retention capacity and ability making continuous assessment to have an impact on their performance.

While commenting about observation, Ezeudu(2005)noted that some teachers found it surprisingly useful if they suspended their active teaching interventional for a time making clear to a class what they were doing and why to concentrate only on looking and listening. In this study however, the research found out through a focused discussion with students that some teachers behave differently towards boys and girls and towards pupils from the different social classes.

In each of these cases, students complained that some teachers would rate a particular piece of work more highly if it came from one type of student rather than the other.

The researcher suggests use of checklists whenever observation is done. Checklists can be used to record the presence or absence of knowledge, particular skills, learning process, or attitudes.

They may be used to record such information in relation to written assignments, presentations, classroom performances, and test-taking behaviors.

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON WHETHER STUDENTS EXPOSED TO NUMEROUS CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES PERFORM BETTER THAN THEIR PEERS.

According to teachers, the Focused Group Discussions as a kind of continuous assessment is a good practice especially for improving the performance of students and in monitoring their progress. Teachers contended that every aspect of performance of a student in secondary school level on a CA strategy is challenging to the teacher to seek ways of improving it. Teachers also commented that, continuous assessment is not a physical thing, but rather the interaction they also have with their students, material

and knowledge while in classroom. To the researcher, this meant that continuous assessment is what actually happens in the classroom and what teachers and students do to measure how much learning is taking place.

It was found out that in continuous assessment, learners are not objects to be acted upon/assessed. They have a clear voice in the way that the continuous assessment sessions evolve. The teachers' perception here was more on interactions. This means that attention shifts from teaching to learning and assessment to learning itself. The idea of a teacher having a pre-specified assessment plan or program tends to direct attention to teaching. Teachers have to put learners first in continuous assessment which is also termed as student-centered approach. However, when we come to think about this way of approaching continuous assessment in practice, a number of possible challenges do arise. The first is a problem for those teachers and educators who want some greater degree of uniformity in what is taught and assessed. Secondly, because we are considering a learner-centered assessment approach, this can lead to variations in continuous assessment strategies being employed in classrooms. A teacher might need to try out and evaluate each continuous assessment strategy on individual students due to the uniqueness each student possesses.

All in all, this study found out that, if properly, professionally and honestly carried out, CA strategies have a great positive potential relationship with the students' performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made: It recommended from the study that test and project work/home work could predict students end of term examinations scores. From the study in continuous assessment test and project should be given higher weighting than class exercise.

The researcher recommends that, moderation of items generated in secondary schools should be encouraged by the teachers and principals. This will help teachers, come out with well constructed and reliable test items. This can be done by the schools forming committees that will occasionally moderate items.

This will make scores students obtain in test more reliable. In ensuring valid continuous assessment goals, effective supervision should be carried out by school administrators as well as officers in the district education offices, who are well informed about the procedure of continuous assessment, to ensure that continuous assessment procedures are followed by all teachers. This will serve as a means of standardization of continuous assessment scores and form the basis for comparison between schools and students. By so doing, scores received for schools can be said to be reliable and valid.

1. The Ministry of Education and Oromia Regional Education Office should put in place regulations, checks and balances to ensure that different CA strategies are used both in government funded and privately owned secondary schools. A uniform policy on this practice should be emphasized so that all schools benefit from it.

2. Higher institutions of learning should train teachers on how to use CA strategies for their implementation in secondary schools. It was found out through the interviews and focused group discussions that teachers complained of the many problems they found as they attempted to implement Continuous Assessments. Therefore the training should focus on how teachers can carry out continuous assessment in the different teaching and learning stations with ease.

3. Given the complexity of classroom assessment and evidence relating to teachers' skills and practice in this area, there is an obvious need for development of an infrastructure to support improvement of its quality. Therefore, regular training seminars/workshops should be constantly organized for teachers to update their knowledge of the process involved in the implementation of continuous assessment to further boost the realization of learning objectives as room still exists for improvement.

CONCLUSIONS

Going by the problems that this presentation highlights in relation to continuous assessment administration, it may be obvious that continuous assessment practices leave much to be desired. The

continuous assessment approach has many advantages over the short method of assessment. It will make assessment more meaningful and more representative of the learners overall abilities.

However, problems will occur from time to time in the course of its application in secondary schools of Oromia Regional State schools.

Drawing on teachers' and students' perceptions, there were very many continuous assessment strategies used and these were found to have a positive relationship to students' performance in the final examinations. This is because through CA, teachers tend to realize their own weaknesses in teaching and those of their students and strive to ameliorate them. Good application of CA using different strategies would help in moving towards accomplishing learning objectives and restoring greater confidence in the class and school systems. Enhanced performance of students would culminate in the reduction of the incidences of examination malpractices, as students would have been well prepared for the certificates examinations through CA. However, the contribution should not only be looked at as improving student performance but also as determining students' current level of knowledge, skills, or understanding of content.

The disparities and practices that have been discussed here are not healthy to overall learning generally in terms of lacking of fairness. The importance of the continuous assessment model is that students are induced to read whether examination is going to be the semester system has started to show positive results in terms of student-learning achievements. It appears, the students are more conscious of class attendance than ever before. However, it will do the nation's education system a lot of good by trying out this method of assessing students' progress at the Primary and secondary Levels.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

In order to have more comprehensive information, it would be good if the study could include schools in different settings of the country. However, to make the study more manageable and to complete the study within the available time, use of tools and depth of sources, it is confined to six selected secondary schools Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia. Further, the continuous assessment approach has many advantages over the other methods of assessment. Different limitations hindered the progress of this research, for instance; some respondents declined from participating in the study information while others continued to postpone the interview and focus group discussions. This slowed down the process of data collection.

Further, it will make assessment more meaningful and more representative of the learners' overall abilities. The researcher will suggest that researchers should be conducted into the following areas:

Teachers' perception and understanding of continuous assessment.

Teachers' knowledge of skills of test construction and administration.

Teachers' attitudes toward the programme.

The relationship between continuous assessment scores and the final scores in the Junior Secondary Certificate Examination.

SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

There is a need for this research to be carried out in other districts so as to compare and test how general the research findings of this study can be made.

There is a need to research about how the teachers carry out CA strategies in various school settings. This will also give a detailed picture of the adaptation of a strategy to various situations.

The role of the students, administrators and parents in CA need to be researched about. There should be some research to equip us with this information.

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