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Original Research

Instructors' Perception of Continuous Assessment at Wollega University

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Abstract

The study set out to examine how professors at Wollega University felt about the introduction of continuous assessment. This study used a mixed-methods cross-sectional survey design. Data was collected using questionnaires and focus group discussions. A total of 218 WU faculty members were randomly selected to complete questionnaires for the study, while 28 faculty members and 33 students were recruited from each of the three campuses to take part in focus group discussions (FGD). The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS for Windows, version 21.0, while the qualitative data was analyzed using theme analysis. There was no issue with the perception of sound teachers regarding the implementation of CA, according to the data. Since it seems unlikely that the respondents' self-reports are accurate (since people tend not to be critical of themselves), it was suggested that further investigation into its methods be undertaken.

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INTRODUCTION

One way to evaluate a student's progress throughout and after a course of study is through continuous assessment. It is reasonable to assume that teachers will be able to learn about their students' interests, feelings, attitudes, and values at any stage of the learning process (Ohuche, 1989). In order to determine all of these things from the student, several assessment tools such as end-of-program exams, assignments, projects, interviews, homework, etc. are utilized.

The Ethiopian Ministry of Education utilized CA in various educational institutions (schools, colleges, and universities) to reap the benefits of continuous evaluation. Implementing the new curriculum at the school level necessitates constant assessment as part of both the curriculum and the instructional process, as stated in the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy (MOE, 1994). The government and other interested parties have since made significant efforts to allow CA to use the conventional examination method. A similar pattern

emerged at Wollega University and other Ethiopian universities where a single exam served as the basis for evaluation up until quite recently.

However, the administration is cognizant of the fact that this kind of evaluation does not guarantee that pupils would gradually become better. The Ethiopian Education and Training Policy Proclamation (MoE, 1994) emphasizes the importance of ongoing evaluation in both academic and practical areas for students at all levels to gain a well-rounded understanding of their profiles. This regulation mandates the adoption of a continuous assessment approach for the evaluation of university students. Also, according to the updated National Education and Training Strategy (MoE, 2010), CA plays a crucial role in universities by making sure that students leave with marketable skills.

Poor assessment procedures are exacerbated when teachers lack enthusiasm or have a negative outlook on assessment, according to researchers and educators. Plessis et al. (2003), who also provided the guidelines, stated that in order for teachers to effectively conduct the evaluation process, they need both hands-on activities and instruction. Despite this, instructors still have a hard time understanding and implementing continuous evaluation due to a lack of resources, inadequate training, and nonexistent guidance from those in charge. Once the teaching-learning procedures at Wollega University's three campuses (Nekemte, Ghimbi, and Shambu) began in 2007, CA was immediately put into place. Wollega University is one of Ethiopia's higher learning institutions. The cumulative average is 70% based on the CA and 30% based on the final exam. Recent scholars, however, have learned the hard way that the assessment problem keeps cropping up. The researchers set out to conduct this study because they are concerned that many teachers may not be well-informed on CA and may not have a favorable impression of its implementation. The study's authors also think that teachers may see CA as something their pupils can easily gain from by working in groups. In addition, the researchers make the assumption that teachers may have misunderstood CA and implemented it incorrectly since they thought it was continuous testing. In order to improve CA tactics at Wollega University, it is believed that it would be good to examine instructors' perceptions towards CA.

The concept of assessment

Assessment is defined in several ways by researchers for essentially the same idea. It is a method of gathering data, making judgments, and testing students' knowledge, understanding, and abilities (Plessis et al., 2003). The purpose of assessment is to collect data regarding specific learner activities and behaviors so that they can be used for future actions. While this definition is comparable to the previous one, it focuses more on human actions and behaviors rather than learners specifically. Since learning activities are subcategories of human activities, the notion can be applied to learning situations (Ogduhmuha & Ugwuanyi, 2003; Zeleski, 2015). Throughout history, assessment has evolved, shifting from an emphasis on individual testing to its current state (Mugisha, 2010). The shift occurred in favor of a new paradigm in evaluation that places more emphasis on the process of learning than on its

quantitative quantification (Broadfoot, 1993). The idea of evaluation is not applicable here in the same way it was before. In modern times, it has replaced the practice of relying solely on tests to evaluate students' progress.

Instructors' knowledge about CA

Knowing something by hearing it said or seeing it in action is the most basic definition of awareness. The new curriculum's practical implementation at all educational levels and institutional processes is outlined in Ethiopia's 1994 Education and Training Policy (Takele, 2012). Therefore, before implementing CA, teachers should be knowledgeable about the concept and the steps involved (Ibid.). Failure to acknowledge this could lead to teachers mistaking CA for continuous testing. Takele (2012) found that teachers' ignorance and negative impressions of CA were the biggest obstacles to its nationwide implementation.

Teachers' Views on CA

The act of becoming aware of and making sense of data provided by one's senses is known as perception (Tefera, 2014). It is the process by which our senses take in all the data we encounter in the environment (Ibid.). A lack of enthusiasm or positivity among teachers regarding assessment might result from this, which in turn leads to subpar evaluation procedures. Perception influences actions, as shown by Ndalichako (2015). Danielson (2008) cites the same source when he says that teachers' views on assessment affect its implementation and the ways in which data from assessments can improve classroom instruction. Students' assessment habits are likely to be shaped by how their instructors perceive assessment. Teachers may use this strategy in a variety of ways, one of which is administering tests with the dual goals of gauging students' readiness for the final and assigning grades. On the other hand, teachers may view assessment as a tool to enhance student learning and use it appropriately (Ndalichako, 2015). The ability of students to focus on their studies, pay close attention in class, and feel prepared for the final test may also influence how teachers view evaluation. On the flip side, teachers may worry that CA will make it harder for their students and themselves to complete course material, which would in turn increase their workload.

Teachers may also view CA as something that ought to be flexible enough to accommodate their own or their pupils' busy schedules. Teachers' views of CA are also thought to be impacted by their own abilities, school support, and student cooperation (Awofala & Babajide, 2013).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The research strategy employed in this study was a mixed-methods cross-sectional survey. Since this was the case, we collected and analyzed qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously using a convergent, parallel mixed-methods approach. Each approach, quantitative and qualitative, was considered equally important.

Participants

Participants in the study were instructors and students from the three campuses of Wollega

University: the Nekemte, Shambu, and Ghimbi campuses.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

A faculty from the Ghimbi campus, a college from the Shambu campus, and five colleges from the Nekemte campus were chosen at random. The colleges included the College of Business and Economics, the College of Engineering and Technology, the College of Education and Behavioural Sciences, the College of Health Science, and the College of Natural and Computational Science. Every campus had at least 30 percent of the teaching staff chosen from within. The percentage was determined using the probability sample size determination technique proposed by Gay and Arasian (2005). Hence, out of 785 WU instructors, 30% were selected, which counts nearly 235. This number is proportionally calculated for the three campuses: the main campus (622 x 0.3 = 186), which was proportionally distributed to five randomly selected colleges: Ghimbi Campus (67 x 0.3 = 20) and Shambu Campus (96 x 0.3 = 29), totaling 235 instructors.

'Representativeness' and 'generalizability' to a larger population are less of a concern with qualitative data, which is believed to be more focused on describing and clarifying issues and concepts. Therefore, in order to find people to talk to in FGDs, we employed a non-probability sampling method called purposive sampling. FGDs included both faculty and students from all three of WU's campuses. There were a total of 12 instructors from the Nekemte campus, 10 from the Shambu campus, and 6 from the Ghimbi school who were intentionally chosen to participate. Equally represented at the FGD were ten students from the Gimbi campus, ten from the Shambu campus, and thirteen from the Nekemte campus, split evenly between two teams of six and seven responses each.

Instruments of Data Collection

The necessary information for the inquiry was gathered from a variety of primary and secondary sources. Questionnaires given to teachers and in-person focus groups (FGDs) with students and teachers both provided the bulk of the data.

Questionnaire

The purpose of this survey was to collect numerical data on how CA was seen by teachers. The survey used a Likert-type scale with 15 items, with 1 being strongly disagreed with and 3 being strongly agreed with. Twenty teachers from the Ghimbi school and ten from the Nekemte campus participated in the pilot study to establish the instrument's reliability. Consequently, the reliability coefficient for instructors' perceptions of CA, as measured by Cronbach's α, was 87.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Another useful tool for gathering qualitative information is focus groups. In this study, it was used to supplement the results obtained from the questionnaire by gathering information about how instructors and students perceive CA.

Method of Data Analysis

Statistical tests were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

(SPSS) for Windows, version 21.0, after the data needed for the quantitative technique had been gathered and coded. In order to reduce the sample size from 235 to 218 for data analysis, we removed participant replies having a large amount of missing data or that were not returned. To find out how teachers feel about CA, we used descriptive data (such percentages and frequencies). Thematic analysis was used for the qualitative data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Instructors' Perception of CA

Quantitative and qualitative data analysis were employed to respond to instructors' impressions of CA at WU. We used descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) to calculate the quantitative data, and we analyzed and discussed the qualitative data derived from the FGD transcriptions of both instructors and students. Table 1 summarizes the fifteen items that were selected for this purpose.

Table 1

Instructors' Perceptions of the Implementation of CA at WU

SN	Item	Rating Scale					
		DA		UD		A	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
1	CA is just giving a series of paper and pencil tests to measure students' performances	116	53.2	20	9.2	82	37.6
2	CA is suitable for determining learners' progress	49	22.5	13	6.0	156	71.6
3	CA enables lower-attaining students to receive daily attention from instructors	50	22.9	29	13.3	139	63.8
4	CA creates better opportunities for lower-attaining students to get support from their peers	37	17.0	29	13.3	152	69.7
5	CA enables lower-attaining students to experience success in learning	57	26.1	31	14.2	130	59.6
6	CA is time-consuming to implement	143	65.6	21	9.6	54	24.8
7	CA imposes students to take assessments on a tight schedule	52	23.9	47	21.6	119	54.6
8	CA increases competition among students for the best academic achievement	91	41.7	25	11.5	102	46.8
9	CA encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning	76	34.9	28	12.8	114	52.3
10	CA supports the shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning	58	26.6	29	13.3	131	60.1
11	CA consumes teachers' time and promotes dependency among students	125	57.3	30	13.8	63	28.9
12	Successful implementation of CA is impossible without teaching-learning facilities	163	74.8	23	10.6	32	14.7
13	CA can be implemented with a large number of students per classroom	125	57.3	23	10.6	70	32.1
14	CA imposes more workload that demands more time	29	13.3	23	10.6	166	76.1
15	CA improves students' participation in their courses	56	25.7	23	10.6	139	63.8

Table 1 shows that out of 320 WU professors, 116 said that CA entails more than merely giving students a series of typical tests to measure how far they've come. Out of the total number of respondents, 82 (36.6%) disagreed with the previously described idea, while 20 (9.2%) were undecided. While 156 people (or 71.6% of the total) believe that CA is a useful technique for monitoring pupils' progress, 22.5% of people disagree and 6.0% are not sure.

Among the many responses to Item 3 in Table 1 (above), 139 people (or 63.8% of the total) felt that CA enables instructors to focus more on students who are struggling academically. Of those who took the survey, fifty (or 22%) expressed disagreement with the item, while thirty-nine (13.3%) were unsure. When asked about the time and effort needed to implement CA, the amount of money required, and whether CA improves the access of lower-achieving students to peer support and learning success, nearly half of the respondents (152, or 69.7%), along with 37, or 17.0%, and 29, or 13.3%, respectively, were in agreement or disagreement.

Specifically, in Items 6 and 7 of Table 1 above, we asked respondents to identify whether they believe that CA is challenging to implement and places a pressure on students with limited time. Item 6 took a lengthy time, according to 143 respondents (or 65.6% of the total). While twenty-one (9.6%) were doubtful, fifty-four (24.8%) claimed it doesn't take much time. Similarly, 119 respondents (or 54.6% of the total) found Item 7 to be time-consuming. Of the students surveyed, 52 (or 23.9% of the total) stated that CA does not require them to take tests at specified times, while 47 (or 21.6% of the total) were either unsure or did not know whether CA did.

A large number of people think that CA encourages students to take on more responsibility and creates a more competitive atmosphere. Exhibit A: 102 students, or 46.8% of the total, said that CA pushes students to strive for the highest levels of academic achievement; 25 students, or 11.5%, were undecided. A little over half of the respondents (114 individuals) agreed that CA encourages students to take an active role in their own learning.

When asked about Item 12, 74.8% of the 163 respondents said that having access to classrooms is very important for CA to be effective. Of those, 23 (10.6%) were in disagreement and 32 (14.7%) were unsure. There were a lot of responses to Item 13. Specifically, 125 respondents (57.3% of the total) expressed the opinion that CA wouldn't be effective in classes with a lot of students. Even while 72.1% were in agreement, just 23.6% were unsure.

The majority of respondents to questions 14 and 15 agreed that CA increases student engagement but also increases teacher workload. According to Item 14, 166 people (or 76.1% of the total) believe that CA necessitates more work and time. Out of those, 29 (13.3%) stated that CA did not require extra time-consuming labor, while 23 (10.6%) were undecided. A majority of respondents (139, or 63.8%), according to Item 15, think that CA makes students more engaged in class. A smaller percentage, 56, or 25.7%,

disagree, and a smaller percentage, 23, or 10.6%, are uncertain.

Consistent with the results of the quantitative data analysis, the majority of the instructors questioned had a positive impression of continuous assessment (CA), according to the FGD replies. They argue that CA is more than simply a grading system; it's an assessment tool that may help students grow as learners. As far as the respondents were concerned, CA's stated aims were to facilitate skill development, assess performance in relation to established objectives, involve relevant parties in the learning process, ascertain students' potential for knowledge acquisition, and offer frequent formative assessments of their progress. For instance, it was brought up by someone from Social Science College that CA is used to help students develop their abilities. In my opinion, it's a good thing. Even though I found it challenging at first, I've figured out how to use its feedback to go back and fix my mistakes. I don't know where the claim that it is ineffective came from. This comment, along with the lines of analysis that came before it, makes it clear that the teacher thinks CA helps kids learn by giving them continuous feedback on formative assessments.

However, a small number of respondents made it plain that instructors who didn't actually believe in CA and viewed it more as a marking tool than a tool for growth neglected to follow these procedures. Some teachers may be hesitant to use CA because of this and similar evidence. Even one responder pondered, "What makes CA a standout approach starting with KG?" This becomes old fast. There is misunderstanding, to an extent, shown by this. Likewise, FGD is seen negatively by some pupils. An example would be this comment made by a student at the Social Science College: "From what I've seen, CA isn't doing anything to help students develop their abilities right now." For example, students have more time to complete assignments and conduct research when there is no continuous assessment. They fantasize of getting straight As. Our whole focus is on achieving high results, hence it will not assist us with our future coursework. Rather than cheating on our first-year exams, we based our experiences on CA. To improve it, finishing tests is a good idea. Earning academic credit is the main goal of student work. I was planning on competing, but I've decided to just do my best for the grade instead. a single SGC

Discussion

The majority of the survey's participating educators viewed CA as employing a battery of evaluation tools, including multiple-choice and timed tests. In support of this idea, prior research has shown that CA includes various forms of assessment such as class participation, quizzes, tests, course-related projects, term papers, homework, practical work, and a final summative assessment (Bichi and Musa, 2015; Kasahun, 2004).

Theoretically, CA suits the needs of assessing students' progress and enabling educators to focus on those with lower achievement levels, as stated by the participants. When it comes to deciding what to teach and how well students have learned, CA is described by Nitko (2004) as an ongoing process of gathering and assessing data regarding student learning. The positive

impression that the respondents have is in line with this comprehension. Therefore, it may be argued that educators should enhance their personal perception of CA in order for their pupils to benefit from it.

According to the focus group members, CA helps students become more independent learners, who take greater ownership of their education, and who actively participate in class. They continued by saying that CA is a type of evaluation that may actually aid students in improving their abilities, rather than simply a way to move them up the grades. The USAID (2003) report backs this assertion up, saying that CA is a great diagnostic tool for helping students find their areas of weakness and providing feedback on how they are doing in relation to learning goals instead of final scores.

CONCLUSION

Results from the questionnaire and focus groups with teachers showed that, aside from a handful of skeptics, most teachers thought CA was great. However, the researchers were skeptical about the teachers' practicality based on the informal observations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to address concerns related to instructors' perspectives on CA, the recommendation section suggests some possible corrective actions.

Previous studies and this one also point to the possibility that many educators' preconceived notions of CA were based on a lack of knowledge. Based on their findings, the researchers recommend that the university's Academic Quality and Assessment Office create a CA implementation guide. This guide should provide a standardized strategy for staff and student capacity building.

Some educators mistook CA for continuous testing because they were unaware that there were various forms of evaluation. Consequently, the manual should provide the numerous assessment procedures to be used in CA deployment.

The ways in which teachers use CA and the challenges they face should be recorded by researchers.

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DECLARATION

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author.

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