

An Assessment of the Impact of Instructors' Knowledge and Attitude Toward the Implementation of Continuous Assessment

Dagne Tafa Gemechu
Department of Psychology, Ambo University, Ambo, Ethiopia

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess the influence of instructors' knowledge and attitude toward the implementation of continuous assessment (CA). The study was conducted on a total of 273 instructors. The pertinent data were collected mainly using close-ended questionnaires. The collected data were analyzed using quantitative methods such as mean, standard deviation, correlation and regression. The result of the analysis disclosed that although participants have developed sufficient knowledge on some aspects of CA, they were found to have inappropriate view towards other aspects of CA. The finding also shows that the two variables such as awareness and attitude are found to be potential variables that certainly determine instructor's level of CA implementation. Relatively, knowledge accounted more variation (59.4%) in the total CA practice (y). It can be concluded that positive attitude toward CA and adequate awareness of CA enhances CA practices. Thus, I recommend that meaningful efforts should be made by all concerned bodies of the university so as to bring about the expected interest of instructors and learners towards CA with particular reference to its usefulness to pupils' learning progress.

Keywords: Continuous Assessment, Instructors, Knowledge, Attitude, Implementation

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1. INTRODUCTION

The teaching-learning process cannot be complete unless the students taught are examined, their scripts are marked and their results released as and when due (Alonge, 2003). According to him, this implies two things: (a) teaching, learning and assessment are inextricably linked and assessment is the most significant motivator for learning. (b) Assessment of students' learning is among the major duties of teachers at all levels of education. Similarly, (Adebowale & Alao, 2008) stated assessment as the barometer by which student instructional achievement outcome can be gauged. This shows that it is through assessment that one can be sure of whether or not learning has been achieved from the teaching-learning process undertaken. Linn and Gronlund (2005) described assessment as a general term that includes the full range of procedures used to gain information about students' learning and the information of value judgment concerning learning progress. Assessment, therefore, is a systematic process that plays a significant role in effective teaching and begins with the identification of learning goals and ends with a judgment concerning how well those goals have been attained. Assessment is an important component in the teaching and learning process as it provides teachers with information that is important for decision-making in the classroom. Information generated from assessment provides teachers with an insight into the meanings constructed or assigned by students to ideas or concepts taught in the classroom. Nitko and Brookhart (2007) stated assessment as a process that informs students about their progress and also allows them to identify the learning areas that need improvement. Students who receive regular feedback through assessment are better motivated to learn as they feel more involved in their own learning. Classroom assessment can be classified in to terminal and continuous assessment. The former is based on the premise that it is best to wait until the end of a course or course unit before carrying out the ultimately recorded part of the assessment, since it is only then that it is possible to form a realistic overall picture of what each student has achieved by working through the course or course unit (Ellington and Earl, 1997). According to them, contrary to the terminal assessment, continuous assessment is fundamentally based on a different premise; namely, the best and fairest way to assess students' performance. Thus, this approach of assessment is found to be much more useful to the students, since it provides them with ongoing feedback on their performance, helps them to become more self-critical, and encourages them to attempt to master material as they actually work through a course or course unit rather than leaving the real learning process to the very end. Continuous assessment involves the use of a great variety of assessment instruments and requires an operational plan for the purpose of guiding and improving the process of teaching learning in general and performance of the student in particular. According to Kapambwe (2010), such assessment practices pertain twofold objectives: firstly, to promote the use of formative assessment so as to improve the quality of learning and teaching and secondly, to establish a regular system of managing cumulative learners' performance marks for purposes of using them in combination with final examination marks for selection and certification. In striving to achieve these objectives, continuous assessment benefits both learners and teachers, in that; (a) learners receive feedback from teachers based on their performance that allow them to focus on topics they have not yet mastered. And (b) teachers learn which

students need review and remediation and which pupils are ready to move on to more complex work. In addition, it allows teachers to monitor the impact of their lessons on pupil understanding. As a result, instructors can modify their pedagogical strategies to include the construction of remediation activities for pupils who are not working at the expected grade level. It seems thus reasonable that there is increasing international interest in new approach to assessment, known as continuous assessment (Hassen, 1998). These days, many countries of the world such as Australia, England, Malawi, Nigeria, South Africa, Spain and others have incorporated continuous assessment in to their educational system (Little & Wolf, 1996). To them, this is because of that the result obtained from continuous assessment is more valid, reliable and motivating as compared to the traditional terminal based examination. For the first time this approach of assessment introduced in Ethiopia to overcome pupils' class repetition and school interruptions which are great sources of inefficiency in any educational system in the first four years of schooling (MoE, 2002). Through gradual process, the trend is getting due emphasis both at secondary and tertiary level of education. Hence, now a day's many universities in Ethiopia have been using continuous assessment in assessing learners' learning progress.

However, many factors certainly affect the effectiveness of an assessment carried out at all level of education in attaining the purpose for which it was supposed to achieve. Getachew (2008) pointed out that teachers' negative attitude towards continuous assessment, poor conceptualization of continuous assessment, and teachers' lack of commitment to devote time and energy which continuous assessment requires for its plan and implementation. Locally, even though few researchers tried to touch about the effect of awareness and attitude on teachers' practice of continuous assessment, no one studied their relationship in depth. Therefore, on the basis of the premises stated above, this research tried to answer basically the following research questions. These are:

- 1) To what extent higher education instructors have knowledge of continuous assessment?
- 2) What is the attitude of higher education instructors toward the implementation of continuous assessment?
- 3) Is there any significant relationship among instructors' knowledge (awareness), attitude and continuous assessment implementation?
- 4) What is the relative and composite effect of the instructors' knowledge and attitude towards the implementation of continuous assessment?

2. RESEARCH METHODS AND MATERIALS

2.1. Research Design

This study has tried to examine the effect of awareness and attitude of instructors towards CA practice in depth, and first degree profession (teaching/non-teaching), training, current level of qualification, teaching load, and teaching experience as complementary variables. To attain this, the researcher followed a cross-sectional study design. This was because, such design is simple as well as very useful in obtaining an overall picture as it stands at the time of study (Gay and Airasian, 2000); Somekh and Lewin, 2005). The researcher has employed both qualitative and quantitative methods because using mixed approach enables for triangulation purposes (Somekh and Lewin (2005) and Sarantakos (2005).

2.2. Population, Sample and Sampling Techniques

The population of this study was instructors currently engaged in teaching and related activities in Ambo University. The sampling technique used in this study was simple random sampling. To determine the sample size yemane's formula was employed. Accordingly, 306 instructors were selected as sample of the study. However, 273 instructors were directly participated in the study. Accordingly, when 18 instructors were not received the questionnaire, 11 instructors were refused to return the questionnaire and 4 instructors returned the questionnaire with incomplete response. In addition, to collect pertinent data through interview and classroom observation, sample respondents were purposively selected. This is due to two reasons

To supplement the accuracy of the information obtained through questionnaire, data collection instruments such as interview, classroom observation and document analysis were employed.

2.3. Instruments of Data Collection

The data inputs for the study constitute both primary and secondary sources. Thus, the data pertinent to the study were gathered by using mainly questionnaire. To supplement the accuracy of the information obtained through questionnaire, data collection instruments such as interview, classroom observation and document analysis were employed.

The questionnaire employed for this study contains both close-ended and open-ended items. It has four parts: instructors' background, level of awareness about CA, attitude towards CA and implementation of CA. Respondents' awareness items are completed or filled in the form of rating. The rating has three scales with possible scores ranging between "1" (for the lowest response) and "3" (for the highest response). Items for attitude was structured on a four point Likert type scale of strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1). The same is true for their implementation of CA regarding the range of possible scores of

respondent's response towards each item. The items regarding the implementation continuous assessment were adapted from Ajuonuma (2007) items which were designed to carry out a survey of the implementation of continuous assessment (CA) in Nigerian universities. He reported that the reliability of the instrument with Cronbach Alpha technique, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.81. On the other hand, the open-ended items were constructed to obtain information about respondent's understanding or knowledge of CA, attitude towards CA practice, how and when to practice CA, problems inherent in CA practice, and how to overcome such problems.

2.4. Pilot Testing of the Instruments

To ensure the quality of the instruments, the items constructed as well as adapted to measure the variables under study were thoroughly examined by senior researchers, and then they were tried out. A pilot test was administered to 30 instructors of the study area. However, effectively completing all what is required to be done, only 25 respondents returned back the questionnaire. To ensure the consistency of the results of the items, internal consistency of the items was computed. Accordingly, with Cronbach alpha technique the reliability coefficient of .778 for awareness measures of items, .707 for attitude measures of items and .835 for implementation measures of items was obtained. Generally, the reliability coefficient with a Cronbach alpha technique for the total items was found to be .781.

2.5. Method of Data Analysis

In order to examine the relationship between the explanatory variables (independent variable) among themselves and with the dependent variable (CA practice), both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed. Quantitatively, both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to test the information obtained from the close-ended items of the questionnaire. The quantitative statistical methods employed include Frequency, Mean, Correlation and Regression. On the other hand, information generated from other tools such as interviews, classroom observations and open-ended questions were presented and described qualitatively.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Instructors' Awareness and Attitude towards CA

The following two tables consecutively indicated how much respondents understood CA and what feeling they developed towards CA practice along with their first degree profession, level of qualification, training, teaching load and teaching experience.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics showing respondents' degree of awareness and attitude toward CA

NO	Demographic characteristics	Category	Awareness		Attitude	
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1.	First degree Profession	Non-teaching	43.10	4.156	29.08	4.445
		Teaching	50.13	3.811	32.16	3.618
2.	Current level of Education	1 st degree	44.09	5.224	29.83	4.962
		Masters	45.53	5.083	30.01	4.229
		PhD	43.51	4.561	29.84	4.454
3.	Teaching load	Not loaded	44.98	5.179	29.93	4.234
		Over loaded	45.36	5.129	30.01	4.817
4.	Training	Not taken	40.80	3.743	27.34	3.874
		Taken	47.53	4.165	31.43	3.055
5.	Teaching experience	<3	44.59	5.096	30.32	4.871
		3-6	45.25	5.067	29.44	3.866
		7-10	45.93	6.639	31.07	6.158
		>10	48.20	2.683	33.60	2.702
Total			45.12	5.153	29.96	2.73

As shown in the above table, there is more or less variability of awareness and attitude mean scores and standard deviations among instructors based on the categories made for each demographic characteristics identified for this study. 1 Regarding the first category, the highest mean score difference was observed for awareness ($x=7.03$) and the third highest mean score difference ($x=3.08$) was observed with regards to attitude. There were no more mean scores differences observed between the second and the third sample grouping made for both the variable awareness and attitude. The fourth category of sample group is where the second highest mean score difference with regards to awareness ($x=6.73$) and also that of attitude ($x=4.09$) was observed. With respect to the last category, it seems that respondents' mean score of awareness increases as their year of teaching experiences increases. Whereas, for the variable attitude, it is in this category of sample group that the highest mean score difference ($x=4.16$) was observed. However, critically observing the mean score of the first

three groups under this category, there is no more or significant mean difference shown among them except when they compared with the fourth category. In general, the total mean score for awareness and attitude by the total number of respondents found to be 45.12 and 29.96, respectively.

3.2. Correlation Analysis among All Variables.

The relationship among all the independent variables such as awareness, attitude and the dependent variable (CA practice) was explored below using Pearson product moment correlation coefficient analysis.

Table 2: The degree and direction of relationship among variables

Variables	X ₁	X ₂	Y
X ₁	1.00		
X ₂	.490**	1.00	
Y	.771**	.581**	1.00

**significant at $p < 0.01$

As it can be shown, table 2 contains the inter-correlations between the independent variables and also the correlations of independent variables with the criterion variable. As indicated in the table, both the predictor variables correlated significantly with the criterion variable (y). Accordingly, x₆ (awareness) has shown the highest correlation ($r=.771$) with the criterion variable(y). The inter-correlations between predictor variables also indicated that there is substantial relationship between awareness and attitude ($r=.490$).

3.3. The relative and composite effect of predictor variables on continuous assessment practice.

As it was hypothesized, the following table displays the extent to which instructors' awareness of CA and their attitude towards CA both separately and jointly explains the variation of CA practice.

Table 3: Stepwise regression analysis of the effect of predictor variables towards the criterion variable

Step No.	Number of variables entered	Multiple correlations and related values			Values in the final analysis			
		Multiple R	Multiple R ²	ΔR^2	Variables entered	Coefficients		T
						B	Beta	
1	1	.771	.594	.594	Awareness	.836	.771	17.976
2	2	.805	.648	.054	Attitude	.336	.267	5.818
All variables included in the model		.845	.744	-	-	-	-	-

Constant=1.935

As can be observed from table 3, using the stepwise regression technique, a multiple correlation index of 0.805 was observed between participants' CA practice (y) and their awareness of CA (x₆) and attitude towards CA(x₇) in combination. The independent variables (x₆ and x₇) jointly explained about 64.80 of the variance in CA practice (y). Evaluating the relative contribution of the two variables, awareness (x₆) by itself accounted significantly for about 59.4% of the total CA practice (y) variance. On the other hand, controlling for the effect of x₆, instructors' attitude towards CA(x₇) significantly increased the proportion of CA practice (y) by about 5.4%.

Table 4: Summary table of stepwise regression

Source	SS	Df	MS	F
Regression	4490.656	1	2245.328	202.498*
Residual	2439.398	271	11.088	
Total	6930.05	272		

*significant at $P < .05$

In the above section of table 4, it was indicated that the two potential predictor variables contributed about 64.8% of the total variance in respondents' CA practice. This portion of variance in the criterion measure due to the combined effect of participants' awareness of CA (x₆) and their attitude towards CA (x₇) is statistically significant ($F(2/270) = 202.498, P < .05$).

3.2. Discussions

In this section, discussions of the major findings were made directly referring to the research questions raised in the introductory part of the paper.

3.2.1. Instructors' Knowledge toward CA

We believe that without having deep knowledge towards something to be performed, no one could be effective. Similarly, instructors with shallow understanding of the meaning, scope, and nature and purpose of classroom assessment can not be effective in assessing pupil's learning progress on one hand and also their own teaching methodologies. Closely related to this idea, ICDR (2004) stated that for CA to be practiced properly, teachers

must have an adequate knowledge about basic assessment techniques it demands. This is due to the fact that CA requires understanding of how assessment can be integrated in the teaching learning process and how it could be used to improve learning besides marking what pupil's performed (Alausa, 2003 and Nitko, 2004). The findings of this study revealed that participants were found at different level in terms of CA understanding. The independent assessment of items constructed to show to what extent each instructor understood CA indicated that the majority respondents have good CA understanding. Some of them perceived CA as an ongoing, comprehensive, cumulative and guidance oriented in which the overall assessment of learners in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor is taken in to account. The result obtained from interview also indicated that to some extent participants understood CA. They described CA as an approach of assessment which requires an operational planning and the use of varied assessment techniques, and used to know learner's knowledge, interest and skill toward what they have learn. More specifically, the result revealed that respondents agreed on the importance of CA especially for pupils' learning if it is handled properly. In line with this, Puhl (1997) asserted that CA contributes largely to the full development of learners' potential if it is properly implemented. However, as it was reported by indigenous researches conducted so far (e.g., Getachew 2008 and Muluken, 2006), many respondents perceived CA as simply giving a series of paper and pencil tests at the end of instruction. Such conception, however, does not give a full meaning of CA in its true nature. This is due to the fact that a test is not the only but one of assessment techniques employed in CA practice. Literatures disclosed that CA is more than testing, hence, which gives an overall picture of learners' progress, but tests are only one aspects of CA (Puhl, 1997 and Livingston, 2001). Moreover, Black and William (1998) argued that using a series of tests in measuring pupils' performance encourage rote and superficial learning. Indeed using few or very few fixed assessment techniques continuously does not give the full meaning of CA. Rather, to some extent it resembles to the SCA component. Continuously testing, thus, implies no more formative continuous assessment. This shows that though instructors seem to understand CA, what they understood might be only one aspect which is relatively no more useful to the other. Similar to this finding, it was reported that teachers did not understand the formative components of CA (Adobewale and Alao, 2008; Animaw, 2009 and Obioma, 2008).

3.2.2. Instructors' Attitude towards CA

The findings from the independent items constructed to dig out instructors' attitude towards CA revealed that participants already had favorable attitude in some aspects of CA and negative attitude on other aspect. Results from the questionnaire shows that respondents have an interest to provide constructive comment to pupil's work. Similarly, they believe that CA implementation favors learners and also instructors in one or many ways. They feel that CA enables instructors to get a complete picture of learners learning progress. Similar to the findings of the present study, Ajayi et al. (2011); Alausa (2003) and Barko et al. in Bekiroglu (2008) reported that teachers developed positive perspective toward the value of quality assessment to pupil's progress. Locally conducted research findings also coincided with the finding of the present study. Birhanu (2004) and Animaw (2009) reported that teachers have developed positive attitude towards CA regarding its role in assessing pupils' progress and also interested to apply in the assessment of pupil's progress. However, participants of the current study have shown their unfavorable feelings towards some aspects of CA. These participants believed that CA practice restricted to promote learners to the next semester and/or year with no consideration of bringing the desired behavioral changes on them. The information from interview revealed that there are instructors who believe CA is simply giving marks to students. In addition, believing the time and resource that effective CA practice demands, it was reported that many respondents developed undesirable attitude towards CA. Though they conducted their research on elementary school teachers, and college teachers, Getachew (2008) and Muluken (2006) reported that teachers have developed negative attitudes towards CA. Moreover, broadening to the general assessment that teachers use in assessing pupils' learning progress, it was reported that most teachers have unpleasant feeling to this aspect of the teaching learning process (Arends, 1997 and Little and Wolf, 1996).

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Conclusion

From the findings obtained in the foregoing section, the following conclusions were made.

- Participants' perception of CA differs though it was found to be good. However, critically viewing to the items to which respondents forwarded their response, it was observed that highly relevant and determinant items were not answered appropriately by many respondents. A substantial number of respondents considered CA as simply giving a series of tests. Contrary, some respondents somehow perceived CA from its holistic aspects; comprehensiveness, systematic, comprehensive and guidance oriented. The wrong and the right conceptualization and administration of CA by participants heavily coincided to the level of awareness and attitude they developed towards it. Generally, participants have developed unsatisfactory perception. This implies that although participants have developed constructivist perception on some aspects of CA, they were found to have inappropriate view towards other aspects of CA.

- The finding disclosed that participants' awareness of CA, attitude towards CA and their CA practices significantly correlated. This implies that an improved attitude leads to improved understanding and vice versa. Similarly, positive attitude toward CA and adequate awareness of CA enhances CA practices.
- Many factors affect the implementation of CA. Factors like large class size, un favorable classroom environment, lack of supervision and support, scarcity or complete absence of highly relevant resources, students' misconception of CA and so on were found to prohibit instructor from using CA effectively and efficiently.

4.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings obtained and the conclusion drawn the following recommendations were made.

- To fill or minimize the gap observed in light of CA knowledge among instructors, intensive trainings, workshops, seminars, HDP programs, etc. should be organized regularly for instructors in the university to help them acquire the skills required to practice CA in the university. Due to the fact that such programs found to be certainly increases instructors' understanding of CA and how to implement it effectively, the authorities of the university should encourage instructors to participate effectively in these seminars, workshops and conferences by sponsoring their attendance.
- Experience sharing programs should be organized among instructors mainly emphasized on how they see and how they have been using the variety of classroom assessment techniques. If this is done per semester or two times at a semester, those instructors who do not have basic understanding of CA especially how to implement it might acquire the required knowledge easily, and practice it accordingly. To this end, it is advisable that the selection and awarding of model instructors in CA practice and also identification of those with problems of CA practice would be undertaken.
- Efforts should be made by all concerned bodies of the university so as to bring about the expected interest of instructors and learners towards CA with particular reference to its usefulness to pupils' learning progress. Especially, awareness creation programs should be always launched for freshman students just before the beginning of the class.
- To ensure whether instructors are actually implementing CA or not, and to provide assistance when required, each and every schools (previously called faculties) should establish their own CA committee who shall make continuous follow-up. This continuous follow-up would be effective if all department heads empowered for monitoring and supervising each and every instructors' CA practice in their department. However, since it was reported that administrators have shallow understanding of CA, first and foremost intensive awareness creation programs should be given for them, especially to what extent and what student assessment techniques to be used by an instructor up to the completion of the course.
- Further research on the area should be conducted by the university per semester so as to be sure to what extent and how instructors practice CA since there are situational factors heavily prohibit instructors from properly practicing CA.

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