Journal of Education and Practice
ISSN 2222-1735 (Paper) ISSN 2222-288X (Online)
Vol.6, No.4, 2015

Problems and Prospects of Implementing Continuous Assessment at Adigrat University

Teklebrhan Berhe[1] Samuel Embiza[2]
1.Department of Psychology, Adigrat University, Tigrai, Ethiopia Email:teklitoo@gmail.com
2.Department of Psychology, Adigrat University, Tigrai, Ethiopia
Email: samuelembiza@ymail.com

Abstract
The purpose of the study is to assess the prospects and implementing continuous assessment (CA) in in higher education. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire from instructors and students of Adigrat University as well as Mekelle and Aksum Universities for comparison purpose. Both quantitative and qualitative data were carried out. Result of this study indicated that, instructors were not continuously collecting information about student progress, small number of assessment is used in courses and few instructors give feedback at all. Significant number of instructors and students had poor knowledge and negative attitude towards CA. Based on the results, it can be concluded and recommend that instructors need to use the results from CA as a means of identifying students' progress and thereby providing support. Accordingly, departments need to have strong documentation and reporting systems, the maximum and minimum numbers of students in a class need to be put at a standard level. In addition, concerned officials of the university need to closely examine the challenges. On the other hand, offering pre remedial classes on specific courses, putting tests on the exam banks, establishing and following student networking programs and peer learning groups, tutorial classes, providing consultation hours, ensuring classroom size, continuous assessment, encouraging students participation in the classroom and providing incentives for instructors had positive effect on academic performance.
Keywords: problems, prospects and implementing of continuous assessment.

Introduction

According to the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy proclamation of (MOE, 1994), states that, continuous assessment in academic and practical subjects should be conducted to ascertain the information of all rounded profile of students at all levels. As a result of this policy, University students are supposed to be assessed using continuous assessment procedure. Furthermore, the revised national education & training strategy stated that, assessment is the very important part of the higher Education Institutions as it ensures that the quality of education is reflected in real and practical skills (MOE, 2010).

For effective implementation of continuous assessment, manageability of class size, nature of course, professional skills of instructors in line with the new approach is important. Commitment of instructors towards continuous assessment, the presence of appropriate working loads and resources seem necessary in the implementation of continuous assessment.

Some scholars argue that, educational quality in Ethiopia is low in that students are not achieving the desired standards and that there is a wide dispersion in educational outcomes. A general consensus has emerged regarding the country's need to improve its educational outcomes, that education quality has to increase to boost productivity and foster growth and at the same time that the country needs to reduce the education gap between top-bottom achievers as a way to reduce income inequality among Ethiopians. These facts along with others had initiated the researchers to conduct the research with the intention of improving the implementation of continuous assessment and remedial instruction at the University. Therefore, the objective of this study was assessing problems and prospects of implementing continuous assessment at Adigrat University.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Site

The study was conducted in Tigrai Regional state Northern Ethiopia where the three Universities are located. Communities of the region are more engage on agriculture and live in rural areas.

Data collection and analysis

The data for the analysis were collected from instructors, department heads and college deans. The target population for the study consists of all students at Mekelle and Axum universities. Each college will be purposively selected for the study in order to have a representation of all college students'. 500 students were randomly selected from both universities. Two-stage random sampling procedure was used for data collection. In the first stage, colleges and departments were selected purposively and in the second stage cohorts of students defined from the year attended were selected randomly.

Both primary and secondary data were used in the study. Primary data were collected through

administering a structured questionnaire to students and instructors. Following the data collection, responses were coded and entered in SPSS version 20 software for statistical analysis. Qualitative data were analyzed through systematically organizing the information whereas the quantitative data were carried out using simple statistical methods such as average, percentage, frequency distribution and T-test for Means.

Results and Discussions

Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Table 1: Questionnaire collected from each university

Sample respondents	Students	Instructors
Mekelle University	210	50
Adigrat University	321	99
Aksum University	150	50
Total	681	199

As can be depicted in table 1, we have distributed and collected data from Mekelle University 210 students and 50 instructors, Aksum University 150 students and 50 instructors and Adigrat University 321 students and 99 instructors for analysis purpose.

Table 2: Questionnaire collected from each college

s/n	College	Respondents	Analyzed questionnaire
1	Engineering &Technology	Students	274
		Instructors	62
2	Natural and Computational Sciences	Students	204
		Instructors	68
3	Business and Economics	Students	124
		Instructors	38
4	Social Science& Humanities	Students	79
		Instructors	31
Total		Students	681
		Instructors	199

As can be seen from Table 2, 681 questionnaires were collected from student respondents and 199 instructors from the four colleges were collected. And all the collected copies of the questionnaire were analyzed, i.e. no questionnaire was rejected.

Instructors' practice of continuous Assessment (CA)

In the questionnaire prepared for both instructors and students, an item was included and asked them to indicate the number of continuous assessments used by instructor. Their reply is summarized as follows.

Table 3: student's attitude regarding the amount of CA used by instructors

S/N	Use CA	Respondents in %
1	All	97.58
2	Some	2.42
3	None	-
Total		100

From the above table, it could be said that many of the student respondents (95.19%) believed that all instructors used CA as part of their teaching. Similarly, from the instructor respondents 95.19% of the instructors said that they used CA as part of their teaching. Therefore, it could safely be concluded that most of the instructors use CA as part of their teaching. This finding is in line with MoE's idea of involving CA as part of each course in the teaching learning process (MoE, 2010).

Frequency of CA practice

Both instructors and students explained that instructors used CA as part of their teaching. But it is also important to look into the frequency of CA practice. For this purpose, both respondents were asked to state the frequency of instructors CA usage and replies are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Responses of students and instructors on frequency of CA practice

S/N	Frequency of CA Use	Respondents	Respondents in %
1	Very frequently	Students	30.17
		Instructors	31.85
2	Frequently	Students	62.12
		Instructors	59.76
3	Some times	Students	7.71
		Instructors	10.07
4	Seldom	Students	-
		Instructors	-
5	Never	Students	-
		Instructors	-
6	Don't respond	Students	-
		Instructors	-
Total		Students	100
		Instructors	100

Table 4 reveals that from the 99 instructor respondents, (10.07%) said 'sometimes', (59.76%) 'Frequently' and the remaining (31.85%) 'Very frequently' to the item which let instructors rely about the rate of their usage of CA. in addition, the table shows us that no instructor replied 'seldom', and 'Never' to the item.

We can also understand from the table that most of the students and instructors believed that instructors were using CA Frequently. The very positive thing depicted in the above table is that a significant number of instructors used CA Very frequently.

As explained earlier, CA is an ongoing process of information collection (Nitko, 1990; and AED, 2010). It is therefore, possible to deduce form the findings of the present study that the CA implemented in the university is an ongoing process of collecting information.

Reports of instructors on the type of assessment used

To examine the reports of the instructors, it would be good to look at the types of assessment relation to the number of courses they offered in the semester.

Table 4: Responses of instructors on types of assessment

Type of asse.	# of courses	# of asse.	#of courses Asse. Is used	Total marks	%of asse used	#of asse. course	Marks for each
Graded Quiz	1	10	8	48	72.72	1.25	4.8
	2	25	11	134	68.75	2.27	5.36
	3	12	3	60	14.29	4	5
Graded Tests	1	15	11	247	100	1.36	16.47
	2	21	13	285	81.25	1.62	13.57
	3	25	17	385	80.95	1.47	15.4
Group assignment	1	6	6	27.5	54.55	1	4.58
	2	17	13	180	81.25	1.31	10.59
	3	16	14	310	66.67	1.14	19.38
Individual assignment	1	7	7	21	63.64	1	3
	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
	3	7	7	70	33.33	1	10
Ungraded tests	1	11	4	-	36.36	2.75	-
	2	7	4	-	25	1.75	-
	3	2	2	-	9.25	1	-
Ungraded assn	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2	-	-	-	-	-	-

	3	-	-	-	-	-	-
Oral present.	1	4	4	15	36.36	1	3.75
	2	5	4	14.5	25	1.25	2.9
	3	3	3	25	14.29	1	8.33
Project work	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2	5	5	107	31.25	1	21.4
	3	-	-	-	-	-	-
Others*	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2	3	3	25	18.75	1	8.33
	3	2	2	10	9.25	1	5

As can be seen from Table 5, instructors who offer a course in the semester assign 247 marks and 48 marks for graded tests and graded quizzes, respectively. These instructors didn't assign marks for project works and other assessment types. The Table also shows us that graded tests were used in 100% of the courses, graded quizzes were used in 72,72% of the courses, and un-graded assignments, project works and other assessment types were used by no instructor who offered a course. The average marks assigned for a single graded test and graded quizzes were 16.47 and 4.8, respectively and no mark was assigned for project works and others.

The Table also indicates that instructors who offer 2 courses assign 285, 180, 25, 25 and 0 marks for graded test, group assignments, oral presentation, others and individual assignments respectively. In addition, each graded test and group assignments each were used in 81, 25% of the courses and other assessment techniques were used in 18.75% of the courses offered by instructors who taught 2 courses respectively. With regard to marks assigned for each assessment 21.4, 13.57, 2.9 and 0 marks were assigned for a single project work, graded test, oral presentation and individual assignments, respectively by instructors who offered 2 courses in the semester.

Table 5 also indicates the total marks assigned the percentage of assessments used and the marks assigned for each assessment type employed by instructors who offered 3 courses. The total marks assigned for graded tests, group assignments others and project works were 385, 310, 10 and 0 respectively. Similarly graded tests were used in 80.95% of the courses, group assignments in 66.67% and un-graded assignments and project works in none of the courses offered by instructors who taught 3 courses in the semester. The marks assigned for a single group assignment, graded test, other assessment technique and project work were 19.38, 15.4, 5 and 0 respectively by instructors who offered 3 courses in the semester.

From the analysis that follows table 4 and 5, one can say that

- ⇨ The majority of the instructors use high percentage of graded tests followed by group assignments and graded quizzes;
- ⇨ Oral presentation, project works and other assessment techniques are the least used techniques;
- ⇨ Small numbers of teachers are using un-graded test, quizzes and assignments;
- ⇨ High marks are assigned to tests, quizzes and group assignments;
- ⇨ Oral presentations, project works and other assessment techniques receive less marks;

In general one can conclude that instructor are implementing a variety of techniques and mostly focus on graded tests, quizzes, and group assignments. These practices show that instructors are focusing on summative CA rather that formative CA. this means that they are using assessment of learning at the expense of assessment for learning.

Feedback Provision

One of the key characteristics of assessment for learning (continuous assessment) is that it provides feedback which leads to students recognizing their next steps and how to take them (MoE, HDP Handbook, 2010). Thus in assessing the implementation of continuous assessment, it would be critical to look into the feedback provision of instructors to students. A question was included in the questionnaire developed for both students and instructors which asked them to rate the feedback instructors provided for students after tests, quizzes, assignments and presentation. Their reply is presented in the following table.

Table 7: Instructors and students' response on instructors' provision of feed back

Type of assessment	No. and % of Respondents	Give feed back				Total
		Always	sometimes	Never	Don't respond	
After tests	Students %	38.54	42.17	12.05	7.23	100
	Instructors in %	80.77	15.39	-	3.85	100
After Quizzes	Students %	26.51	34.94	18.07	20.48	100
	Instructors in %	53.85	23.08	-	23.08	100
After assignments	Students %	28.92	32.53	24.10	14.46	100
	Instructors in %	53.85	11.54	-	34.61	100
After Presentation	Students %	34.94	31.33	18.07	15.66	100
	Instructors in %	50	15.39	-	34.61	100
Total	Students %	32.23	35.24	18.07	14.45	100
	Instructors in %	47.69	13.08	-	19.23	100

As can be seen from Table 7, out of the 681 student respondents, (42,17%) said that instructors gave feedback after tests 'sometimes', (34.92%) replied that instructors gave feedback after quizzes 'sometimes', (32.53%) replied that instructors give feedback after assignments 'sometimes', and the remaining of them(34.49%) replied that instructors give them feedback after presentation 'always'.

From Table 7, we can say that most students report that the majority of the instructors give feedback sometimes although most instructors report that they give feedback always. It can also be said that students report that a small number of instructors didn't give them feedback although none of the instructors said so. In addition it can be said that significant number of instructors didn't reply to items which asked them about feedback provision after assignments and presentations (34.61% each). This could be related to the least number of assignments and presentations they gave stated earlier.

Thus, it can be concluded that the majority of the instructors didn't give feedback always and there were instructors who didn't give feedback at all to students. This tells us that students are not getting the benefits of feedback mentioned by MoE at the beginning of this sub-topic.

Students' knowledge and attitudes about continuous assessment

Student respondents were asked to state whether continuous assessment was helpful for students in higher education institutions. Out of the 681 respondents, (86.31%) replied 'Yes' it is helpful and (13.69%) 'No' it is not helpful for university students.

From the above analysis, it can be said that the majority of the students have good knowledge on the advantage of CA which is consistent with the advantages mentioned by different scholars (Alausa, 1999; Ellington and Earl, 1997; and others). However some of the advantages mentioned by students could be a disadvantage particularly in cases where instructors improperly implement CA. for example, students reported that CA will create close relationship between students and instructors. Whereas Ellington and Earl argued that "continuous assessment can, if not properly managed, adversely affect the relationship between students and their tutors" (1997:3).

With regard to the acceptance of the application of CA in HEIs, out of the 681 students respondents, (71.08%) replied 'Yes' (22.89%) 'No' and the remaining respondents (6.02%) didn't reply for the item, 'Do you favor the implementation of CA in HEIs?'

Furthermore, out of those students who think CA is helpful, 79.71% favor the application of CA, 15.94% didn't favor the application of CA and the remaining 4.35% didn't respond to the item. Again out of the students respondents who replied CA is not helpful for students, (54.14%) didn't favor the application of CA , (28,57%) favor the application of CA and (14.29%) didn't respond to the item neither in favor nor against application of CA.

Instructors' knowledge and attitudes about continuous assessment

In the questionnaire prepared for instructors, an item was developed to ask instructors to state whether CA was helpful for students in HEIs. Out of the 199 respondents, (94.64.%) replied 'Yes' and (5.26%) 'No'. With regard to the acceptance of application of CA, of the instructors (87%) replied 'Yes', (13%) 'No' .In addition, all of the instructors who didn't think CA was helpful for students didn't favor the implementation of CA and those who though CA was helpful for students favored the implementation of CA.

All in all it could be argued that most instructors and students had good knowledge of and positive attitude towards CA implementation in institution of Higher education. It could also be argued that a significant number of students and instructors had knowledge of and negative attitude towards CA implementation in

institutions of Higher education. Particularly instructors' poor knowledge and attitude about CA is of a great concern. Alausa (1999) emphasized that instructors are the main implementers of CA programs; thus, they need to have enough knowledge and positive attitude about CA.

Controlling mechanisms in CA implementation

The role of controlling the effective implementation of CA and feedback provision of instructors is shouldered by Deans and Department heads. Thus there is a need to ask the Deans and Department heads about the mechanisms that they use to check the implementation of CA and feedback provision of instructors. Two items in the interview guideline focus on these issues and the replies of the Deans and Department heads are summarized and presented as follows:

It is believed that it is the role of Deans and Department heads to check the implementation of CA, in the interview guideline and item was included which asked respondents to mention the mechanisms they use to check instructors' implementation of CA. Their replies are summarized and presented as follows. The mechanism that the Deans used was requesting instructors to submit CA mark list to the center. Similarly, the department heads mechanisms of checking CA implementation was collecting feedback from students- some from all students and some from student representatives. Formal and informal discussions with both students and instructors had been used by department heads as a mechanism.

Opportunities of Implementing CA

Respondents to both the questionnaires and the interview were given a chance to list the opportunities they have in implementing CA in the university. In addition Deans and department heads were asked to state the opportunities they have in implementing CA. Their replies are summarized and presented as follows:

- ✓ Well established government policies
- ✓ Young Instructors who can work if given a lot of trainings.
- ✓ Great demand of CA in the University

Challenges in implementing CA effectively

Respondents to both the questionnaires and the interview were given a chance to list the challenges they faced in implementing CA in the university. In addition exam center coordinators and department heads were asked to state the measures they used to alleviate or at least minimize the challenges they faced. Their replies are summarized and presented as follows:

Challenges mentioned by students

- ✓ Instructors don't announce the exact time of quizzes and tests
- ✓ Little attention is given for assignments by students and instructors
- ✓ Some instructors show CA results after exams
- ✓ Some students are not ready to take CA
- ✓ There is no way to control instructors
- ✓ Instructors give quizzes and tests after two or more chapters at a time
- ✓ Instructors belief that quizzes are always sudden
- ✓ Problem of understanding between instructors and students about CA
- ✓ Some instructors evaluate students by their feelings without evaluating students knowledge and skills
- ✓ Instructors give short time to complete home –take assignments which inhibit students chance to dig-out different materials

Challenges mentioned by instructors

- ✓ Cheating in exams, coping in home – take assignments
- ✓ Large class size (up to 80-120 students in a class)
- ✓ Shortage of time particularly to follow up every individual students progress and give feedback accordingly
- ✓ Course over load (Teaching different courses in a semester)
- ✓ Uncomfortable classroom like unmovable desks
- ✓ Students refuse taking CA (students failure to prepare themselves for CA)
- ✓ Lack of teachers pedagogical knowledge

Challenges mentioned by Deans and department heads

- ➢ Poor communication between department heads and the exam center
- ➢ There are no documentation and formal reporting systems
- ➢ Poor awareness about CA on the side of both students, instructors and exam center staff
- ➢ Most teachers use tests and quizzes as the only techniques

- Poor communication between department heads and Instructors
- The large number of students and the very few in the center makes coordinators busy and this in turn creates boredom on the side of workers on the center

Conclusion and Recommendation

In general, it can be concluded that the overall implementation of CA in the university was good.

Moreover, this study was proved that remedial instructions were effective and beneficial to low academic achievers. Students made substantial gains in building their confidence and they also self-perceived improvement in their overall competence. The pre and post remedial programs were met student needs and learning level. The student networking program (peer learning) was effective in terms of assisting weak students' had gotten a chance to discuss their academic problems and other issues. With regard to students' learning motivation, the results revealed that weak students' motivation was moderately enhanced after taking remedial courses. Based on the results, we can conclude that remedial instruction combined with continuous assessment, providing consultation hours, tutor programs and having exam banks works effectively to improve low-achieving students' academic performance. A well-designed continuous assessment and remedial program with teachers' encouragement and supportive attitude may help students elevate their academic performance to survive in a university learning environment and be prepared for the upcoming social challenges after they complete their education.

References

AED (2010) continuous Assessment and how to use it: Module 3. HY international printers:
Addis Ababa

Aloa, K.A and F. Abdebowale (2005) Continuous Assessment policy Implementation in selected Local Government Area of Ondo State (Nigeria): Implication for a successful Implementation of the UBE program. Obafemi Awolowo University Nigeria

Aluasa, A (1999) The Impact of Assessment on students learning. Oxford brooks university UK.

Alfred, R. & Lum, G. (1988) Remedial programme policies, student demographic Characteristics and academic achievement in community colleges. *Community/Junior College Quarterly of Research and Practice,* 12(2)**,** 107-20.

Angrist, J. & Lavy, V. (1999) Using Maimonides' rule to estimate the effect of class size on scholastic achievement*. *Quarterly journal of economics,* 114(2)**,** 533-575.

Bettinger, Eric and Bridget Terry Long. 2007. "Institutional Responses to Reduce Inequalities in College Outcomes: Remedial and Developmental Courses in Higher Education." In *Economic Inequality and Higher Education: Access, Persistence, and Success*, eds. Stacy Dickert-Conlin and Ross Rubenstein, 69-100. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Boylan, Hunter and D. Patrick Saxon. 1999. "What Works in Remediation: Lessons from 30 Years of Research." Prepared for The League for Innovation in the Community College. Boone, NC: National Center for Developmental Education.

Collier, T. & Millimet, D. (2009) Institutional arrangements in educational systems and student achievement: A cross-national analysis. *Empirical Economics,* 37(2)**,** 329-381.

Crowe, Edward. 1998. "Statewide Remedial Education Policies—State Strategies that Support Successful Student Transitions from Secondary to Postsecondary Education." Denver: SHEEO and ACT, Inc., September.

Dobbelsteen, S., Levin, J. & Oosterbeek, H. (2002) The causal effect of class size on scholastic achievement: Distinguishing the pure class size effect from the effect of changes in class composition. *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics,* 64(1)**,** 17-38.

Ellington, H. And S. Earl (1997) Making effective Use of continuous Assessment and portfolios. The ropert Gorgon University: Aberdeen

Greene, Jay and Greg Foster. 2003. "Public High School Graduation and College Readiness Rates in the United States." New York: Manhattan Institute, Center for Civic Information, Education Working Paper no. 3, September.

Greenwald, R., Hedges, L. & Laine, R. (1996) The effect of school resources on student achievement.*Review of Educational Research,* 66(3)**,** 361.

Hanushek, E. (1997) Assessing the effects of school resources on student performance: An update. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis,* 19(2)**,** 141.

Hoxby, C. (2000) The effects of class size on student achievement: New evidence from population variation. *Quarterly journal of economics,* 115(4)**,** 1239-1285.

Jacob, B. & Lefgren, L. (2004) Remedial education and student achievement: A regression- discontinuity analysis. *Review of Economics and Statistics,* 86(1)**,** 226-244.

Lavy, V. (2003) *Paying for performance: The effect of individual financial incentives on teachers' productivity*

and students' scholastic outcomes. Report for Working Paper, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and CEPR.
Lavy, V. & Schlosser, A. (2005) Targeted remedial education for underperforming teenagers: Costs and benefits. *Journal of Labor Economics,* 23(4)**,** 839-874.
McCabe, Robert H. (2001) "Developmental Education: A Policy Primer." *League for Innovation in the Community College* 14(1): 1-4.
Ministry of Education (2010) Higher Diploma program Handbook: Module1. Addis Ababa.
NItko (1990) Continuous Assessment in school settings. Oxford University press:New York
Robin, S. & Sprietsma, M. (2003) Characteristics of teaching institutions and student's performance: New empirical evidence from OECD data. *IRES Discussion Papers,* 28
Sacerdote, B. (2001) Peer effects with random assignment: Results for Dartmouth roommates. *Quarterly journal of Economics,* 116(2)**,** 681-704.
Soliday, Mary (2002). *The Politics of Remediation*. Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press. Universtiy of Gondar, Education Quality Asuurance and Audit Office (2010) Draft policy on Assessment of Students learning presented for discussion UOG: Gondar. University of Gondar, Revised implementation plan of BPR:
Weissman, Julie, Carol Rulakowski, and Marci Jumisko (1997) "Using Research to Evaluate Developmental Education Programs and Policies." In *Implementing Effective Policies for Remedial and Developmental Education*, *New Directions for Community Colleges No. 100,* ed. Juan M. Ignash, 73-80. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
Wößmann, L. (2003) Schooling resources, educational institutions and student performance: The international evidence. *Oxford Bulletin of Economics an Statistics,* 65(2)**,** 117-170.

The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open-Access hosting service and academic event management. The aim of the firm is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the firm can be found on the homepage:
http://www.iiste.org

CALL FOR JOURNAL PAPERS

There are more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals hosted under the hosting platform.

Prospective authors of journals can find the submission instruction on the following page: http://www.iiste.org/journals/ All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Paper version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

MORE RESOURCES

Book publication information: http://www.iiste.org/book/

Academic conference: http://www.iiste.org/conference/upcoming-conferences-call-for-paper/

IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digtial Library , NewJour, Google Scholar