

Perceptions and Practices of Continuous Assessment in Government Higher Learning Institutions in Ethiopia

Chala Mosisa Hunduma Garkebo Basha Abo Abdi Nugusa Gursha
College of Education and Behavioural Sciences
Haramaya University, Ethiopia
P.o.Box 138 Dire Dawa, Ethiopia
Corresponding author: gamulemos@yahoo.com

Abstract

The study aimed to investigate the perceptions and practices of continuous assessment in government higher learning institutions in Ethiopia. A survey research design with both qualitative and quantitative approaches involving concurrent triangulation strategy was employed. The study period was from February 2020 and November 2020. A total of 354 respondents (219 students, 125 instructors, 3 college deans, 4 department heads, 3 Quality Assurance and Cooperative Learning Coordinators (QACLCs)) were the participants of the study. Except for deans, heads, and QACLCs, who were selected by purposive sampling, all the rest were selected randomly. Questionnaires, and interviews, were tools/sources of data. The data gathered through questionnaires were analyzed using percentage, frequency, mean, combined mean, standard deviation, and combined standard deviation, one-way ANOVAs, and interview data were analyzed by narration and direct quotation of the respondent idea. The result of the study showed that the perception of both teachers and students towards the CA was positive. Regarding the practice of CA, there was low extent of CA practices. The implication is that CA as a means to improve students learning and academic achievement is not practiced in line with student assessment guidelines (such as MoE students assessment guidelines). Thus, to make the maximum academic benefits out of the practice of CA, all concerned bodies/actors (at all levels (higher level - Ministry of education/Ministry of science and higher education) to the lower level (department/staff level) should give special attention to the CA implementation policy. Appropriate training (particularly related to conceptualization, methods, techniques of CA including its practice, and academic integrity) should also be delivered to instructors and students. Finally, to properly implement CA, it is recommended that countrywide research, involving all other variables and higher learning institutions not considered in this study, should be conducted in the future

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1. Introduction

1.1. The Context

The Ministry of Education (MoE) (general education) and Ministry of Science and higher education (MoSHE) of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), in their various national documents (such as policy documents, directives, guidelines, proclamations, education development roadmap, etc) emphatically addressed about continuous assessment (CA), and its academic importance to learners at various ladders of educational institutions. For instance, the Ethiopian education and training policy of 1994 declared CA implementation as one of the strategies to assure the quality of education at all levels of academic organizations. The policy states: "CA in all academic and practical subjects, including aptitude tests, will be conducted to ascertain the formation of all-round profile of students at all levels"(MoE, 1994, p.18).

Furthermore, the FDRE (2009), in its Higher Education Proclamation document (Article 22 sub-articles 2; P. 49), states:

The internal system of quality enhancement of every institution shall provide for clear and comprehensive measures of quality covering...student evaluation, assessment and grading systems, which shall also include student evaluation of course contents together with the methods and systems of delivery, assessment, examinations and grading.

Finally, on top of the aforesaid assessment/CA related documents, individual HLIs have their own contextual CA implementation guidelines, directives, and manuals, including senate legislations. The ultimate goal of all these (national and institutional level documents) is to enable instructors and students to effectively implement CA principles, and make maximum benefit out of it.

1.2. Statement of the problem

Assessment is a way of observing, collecting information, and making decisions based on information (Chilora, et al. 2003, in Desalegn, 2004). Greaney (2001) also described assessment as any procedure or activity designed to collect information about the knowledge, attitude, or skills of the learner or group of learners. The fundamental purpose of assessment in education is to establish and understand the points that students (either as

individuals or groups) have reached in their learning at the time of assessment (Diamond, 1998). Assessment, in its various forms (be it assessment for learning, assessment as learning, assessment in learning and/or assessment of learning or in broad terms formative, summative and/or diagnostic assessments), intends to either improve student learning and/or measure their overall performances and competencies in the program of study.

Cognizant of the profound significances of the student assessment (henceforth, continuous assessment - CA), and due to the ineffectiveness of the traditional paper and pencil examination (summative assessment), the MoE/MoSHE of the FDRE legitimately declared CA to be implemented throughout all academic institutions – be it general or higher education. The policy article reads, “Continuous assessment in all academic and practical subjects, including aptitude tests, will be conducted to ascertain the formation of the all-round profile of students at all levels” (MoE, 1994). Since then (here HLIs are focused), implementation guidelines/manuals, strategies, and directives have been issued and distributed by MoE or prepared by the HLIs by themselves to guide the practices of the CA. From this, it is clear that MoE/MoSHE has deep ambition and aspiration to CA and, improve student learning and achievements. Although inconsistent and vary in its degree of realization, the policy has been in place, and efforts have been made by the HLIs to implement it.

However, myriads of literature show that CA has not been practiced as per the presumed guidelines. Empirical studies (such as Birhanu, 2018; Abera, and Patel, 2017; Ashenafi, 2017; and Abera and Tolessa, 2019; Getinet, 2016; Gemechu, Mohammed and Maaregu, 2017) conducted on CA in Ethiopian HLIs revealed that CA has not been practiced to the level it should be and thus, expected results have not been registered and the goal has not been met. MoE itself (MoE, 2018), in its new education development roadmap (EDR) (a master document), reported poor performances in the practice of CA in HLIs, among many other education system reform agendas. However, what counted for the poor performances of HLIs on practices of CA in the present study areas has not been well studied and documented in a comprehensive and informed way. The current study, unlike the previous local studies, focused on perceptions and practices of CA, involved students, instructors, and middle and lower-level management as the respondents of the study. In addition, it involved multiple tools and methods of data collection and analysis. Thus, the purpose of the present study is to make a close investigation of the perceptions and practices of CA in the HLIs located in the Eastern part of Ethiopia.

1.3. Research Questions

To address the above problem, the following research questions were set. Viz:

1. What is the extent of CA practices by students and instructors in the study areas?
2. Is there statistically significant mean differences in CA practices across the selected Public higher learning institutions in Eastern Ethiopia?
3. What are the perceptions of students and instructors toward CA in the selected study areas?

1.4. Significance of the Study

The present study will have the following significance. First, its practical significance. The findings of the present study will help the practitioners to be aware of the extent of CA practices as per the guidelines. Second, policy implication. The findings can be used as input for policymakers at different levels. Lastly, this study may serve as a stepping stone for further studies in akin areas.

1.5. Scope of the Study

The present study is mainly confined to perceptions and practices of CA. In addition, the study is delimited to the HLIs found in the Eastern part of Ethiopia. Overall, to make the study manageable, it is conceptually, theoretically, methodologically, and geographically delimited.

1.6. Limitation of the Study

Since the present study is mainly focused on the HLIs found in the Eastern part of Ethiopia, its findings can't be generalized to all the HLIs found throughout Ethiopia.

1.7. Operational Definitions of Terms

- Practices refers to the process of putting CA methods, principles, and strategies into effect
- Management body- refers to deans of colleges (CDs), heads of the departments (HoDs) and Quality Assurance, and Cooperative Learning Coordinators (QACLSc).
- Instructors pertain to teachers, lecturers, academia, scholars, and educators. And thus, whenever required, used equivalently.
- Eastern Ethiopia – Includes Dire Dawa administrative region, Harari region, Somali region and East and West Haraghe Zones of Oromia regional state
- HLIs – refer to government Universities.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1. *The Concept of Continuous Assessment*

Continuous assessment (CA) is conceptualized differently by different scholars. For instance, Passigna (2003) defined CA as a process of gathering information to make decisions about the learner, based on what they know and can demonstrate as a result of instruction. According to Adolfsen (2020), the term CA is used to describe assessments that are completed during the course module. He equated the term with curriculum-integrated/embedded assessment. Furthermore, Mkhonta (2003), conceived CA as a way of finding out what learners know, understand and can do in order to improve their learning. Furthermore, Reece and Walker (2003) perceived CA as the method of acquiring data about how much the student knows.

Continuous assessment pertains to a range of methods or tools that teachers employ to measure, evaluate, and document the academic readiness, learning progress, skill acquisition, or educational needs of the students to be met. In his words, Curzon (1990) described CA as a comprehensive term that particularly denotes inquiring into the learners' knowledge, skills, attitudes and competence through visions, and students' profiles using different assessment techniques to enhance learning. From this, it can be understood that CA is a process, way, procedure and method used to examine and improve students' learning, performances and achievements.

2.2. *Reasons for Using Continuous Assessment in a Classroom*

There are many reasons for teachers to use CA in their classrooms. According to Capper (1996); Plessis, Prouty, Schubert, Habib, and George (2003), cited in Desalegn (2014), the reasons for employing CA in the classrooms are to (a). find out what students know, can do and need to do, (b). gain confidence in what teachers say their students know and can do, (c). provide all learners with opportunities to show what they know, (d). promote learning for understanding as CA is an ongoing process, (e). improve teaching, (f). identify which students need assistance and not, (g). let the students know how well they are progressing in their own learning (feedback emphasized), (h). let parents know how their children are progressing, and (i). lead to an overall evaluation of the student's achievement.

2.3. *Purposes of Using Continuous Assessment*

Assessment serves a number of purposes. It works best when its purpose is clear, and when it is carefully designed to fit that purpose. According to Heritage (2010), the primary purpose of the CA process is to provide evidence that can be used by teachers and students to inform instruction and learning during the teaching/learning process. Effective CA, he added, involves collecting evidence about how student learning is progressing during the course of instruction so that necessary instructional adjustments can be made to close the gap between students' current level of understanding and the desired goals. CA is not an adjunct to teaching but, rather, integrated into instruction and learning with teachers and students receiving frequent feedback.

Nitko (1994) stated that CA focuses on monitoring and guiding student progress through the curriculum. According to him, CA primarily serve purposes such as: identifying a student's learning problems on a daily and timely basis and giving specific, action-oriented feedback to a student about his/her learning. USAID-AED, (2009, in Walde, 2016) declared that CA functions as a means for the transaction of feedback between students and teachers. It also asserted that feedback is not just a simple number or symbol rather good feedback is descriptive of the students' work, is specific to the work and learning outcomes and contains help for the student on how to improve. It describes to student strengths, improvements needed, and ways of improving (Ibid).

2.4. *Tools and Methods of CA*

To achieve the purposes of CA, teachers can use a variety of assessment tools. The following assessment tools, techniques and/or methods include, but are not limited to, Quizzes, Tests, Exams, Portfolios, Oral/Paper presentation, Practical test and Demonstrations, Group/Individual work, Dance/Movement, Science activity, Debate, Athletic skill, Dramatic reading, Roleplay, Song, Interviews, Illustration or Drawing, dialogues, making models, Essay/Composition, Reporting, Projects, Exhibitions, etc can be used by teachers to assess learning and/or academic achievements of the learners (Desalegn, 2004; Hart, 1994; Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006, Gemechu, Mohammed and Maeregu, 2017). For the successful implementation of the CA, these tools should be designed thoughtfully taking into account questions such as why, what, how, and when to assess. During the designing of assessment tools, they must be checked if all the domains of educational objectives (cognitive, affective and psychomotor), in a balanced manner, are addressed or not.

2.5. *Principles of Continuous Assessment*

There are principles and procedures teachers should duly attend to them before, during and after assessment to make their assessment effective. These principles of good assessment, as suggested by Jorolimk and Paker (1997) & Ruddell (1997), cited in Takele Amenu (2012), include the following. Assessment should:

- a. focus on learning.

- b. reduce competition and increase cooperation among learners.
- c. build a feeling of self-worth and competence.
- d. be aimed at looking into students' ability to apply knowledge & skills fruitfully.
- e. be equitable (fair, just and impartial).
- f. include consistent (reliable), valid and meaningful reporting.

Comparable principles of good assessment/CA are also reported by Namibian National Institute for Educational Development (1999), cited in Desalegn (2004).

2.6 Perception of Continuous Assessment

The quality of assessment depends on how the instructors and students perceive their assessment practices. In research conducted by (Samuelowicz and Bain 2002, Nguon, 2013), respondents interpreted the assessment in different ways. Many believed that the assessment made it possible for students to learn, while others emphasized the importance of providing feedback on the work of students where more assistance was required. Others perceived that grading the students is the main purpose of the study. Many instructors interpreted the aim of the assessment to be to assess the ability of students to replicate data, while others considered the objective of the assessment to assess the ability of students to absorb, turn and use information.

Fisseha (2010) conducted his research on the lecturers' perceptions of authentic assessment. The study findings revealed three key topics: the purposes of assessment approaches, the types of learning to assess, and the modes of assessment, and the criteria used. Firstly, the purpose of the assessment was to grade and rank student achievement. Secondly, the assessment of content knowledge was held to be useful, important, and necessary. Finally, respondents suggested that the assignments assigned should be presented to students with clear assessment criteria.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Variables of the Study

A survey research design with both qualitative and quantitative approaches involving concurrent triangulation strategy was used to address the research problems. In this design (Creswell, 2014), the investigator collects both forms of data at the same time during the study and then integrates the information in the interpretation of the overall results.

The variables selected to address the research problems were:

Dependent variable (DV) – continuous assessment (CA)

Independent variable (IV) – perceptions and practices

3.2. Sources of Data

Both primary and secondary sources of data were used. Accordingly, the primary data were collected from the respondents (teachers, students and management body), whereas secondary data were gathered from document analysis (CA manuals, guidelines, directives, etc).

3.3. Study population, Samples and Sampling Techniques

In this study, three HLIs (Universities), namely, Haramaya University (HU), Dire Dawa University (DDU) and Jigjiga University (JU) were randomly selected from a total of five HLIs found in the Eastern part of Ethiopia. From these HLIs, three colleges (three from each) were randomly selected. Accordingly, the College of Social Sciences and Humanities (CSSH); College of Business and Economics (CoBE) and Colleges of Natural and Computational Sciences (CNCS) were selected.

Respondents (instructors and students) who belong to the abovementioned colleges were selected by using a stratified random sampling technique. In addition, CDs, HoDs and QACLCs were chosen purposively. Target population, samples and sampling techniques are depicted in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Population, sample size and sampling techniques

Universities	Instructors			Students			College Deans			Department Heads			QACLCS Coordinators		
	P	S	%	P	S	%	P	S	%	P	S	%	P	S	%
HU	80	51	63	290	98	34	3	1	33	6	2	33	3	1	33
DDU	70	45	64	240	81	33	3	1	33	6	1	17	3	1	33
JJU	73	47	65	250	85	35	3	1	33	6	1	17	3	1	33
Total Sample	223	143	64	780	264	34	9	3	33	18	4	22	9	3	33
Sampling Techniques	Stratified			Stratified			Purposive			Purposive			Purposive		

Key: HU-Haramaya University; DDU- Dire Dawa University; JU- Jigjiga University; QACLCS - Quality assurance and cooperative learning coordinators.

3.4. Tools of Data Collection and Analysis

Questionnaires, and interviews were means of generating the required data. Opinions of the instructors and students were surveyed through questionnaires, whereas those of college deans (CDs), department heads (HoDs) and QACLCS were explored through semi-structured interviews. Before gathering the actual information, the reliability and validity of the items were checked. The average reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha value) for the items was 0.77 for perception and 0.79 for practices of CA and indicating that the items were internally consistent and hence, reliable. Quantitative data were analyzed by using descriptive (mean, sd) and one way ANOVA, whereas qualitative data were interpreted through narration, direct quotations and paraphrasing.

4. Results and Discussions

In this chapter, the major findings are presented and interpreted briefly. The detailed discussions of the same are made under chapter five. The interpretations of the data during the data analysis were made by using Anderson (2003) suggestion of cut-points for the rating scales (agree/disagree and/or high/low). Accordingly, if the computed mean score (M) = [1.00-1.50), Strongly disagree/Very low assumed; if M=[1.50-2.50), Disagree/Low assumed; if M=[2.50-3.50), Undecided/Medium assumed, if M = [3.50-4.50), Agree/High assumed, and if M = [4.50-5.00] assumed, it is Strongly agree/Very high assumed.

4.1. Characteristics of the Respondents

The analysis and description of the characteristics of the respondents (in terms of sex, age, work experience and educational level) revealed that all the respondents were eligible to take part in the present study.

4.2. Extent of Continuous Assessment Practices

Instructors and students were inquired to reveal their level of agreement about the extent of continuous assessment practices.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics regarding the extent of CA practices

No	Item	Students N=219		Instructors N=125		Total N= 344	
		M	SD ₁	M	SD ₂	CM	CS
1.	Teachers commitment to practice CA	2.04	0.93	2.74	1.22	2.29	1.09
2.	Students participation on group assignment or project work	2.22	0.88	1.92	0.74	2.11	0.84
3.	Provision of timely feedback	2.35	1.21	2.21	0.86	2.29	1.09
4.	Currently, existing assessment tools help to examine what students have learned	3.26	1.15	3.67	1.16	3.41	1.16
5.	Cheating on exam	4.12	0.65	4.24	0.66	4.16	0.66

Key: N= number of respondents, M= mean score, SD= standard deviation, CM= Combined mean, sd1= standard deviation for students, sd2=standard deviation for instructors.

As indicated in table 2, the combined mean score of students and instructors for items 1, 2,3,4, is very low and very high mean score for item 5 . This shows that the extent of teachers commitment to practice CA, students participation on group assignment or project work, provision of feedback, existing assessment tools and cheating on exam, resulted for low extent of CA practices under the study area. To begin with, item 1 of teachers commitment to practice CA, Google search for the word 'commitment' hits meanings such as 'the act of binding oneself (intellectually or emotionally) to a course of action'; 'The state or quality of being dedicated to a cause, activity, etc.' The synonyms are dedication, devotion, allegiance, loyalty, faithfulness, obligation, responsibility, and so forth. It is a high level of attachment to one's profession (Curzon, 1990). Commitment to achieve a goal is

a drive/fuel behind success. When used in the context of teachers' professional commitment (TPC), all these meanings and synonyms imply that teachers have a prodigious responsibility to love their profession, take care, nurture and inculcate learners with the right knowledge, skill and attitude and engender them to be competent citizens with the 21st century and lifelong skills. As an area of TPC, students' learning assessment and their achievements should be properly handled.

However, the results of the present study unveiled that instructors' commitment (in terms of designing, delivering and facilitating CA as per the module/course syllabus and assessment guidelines) was low. This finding was incongruent with the results obtained from the interview participants. Accordingly, one of the interviewed department head (HoD₂) reflected his view when he uttered:

Teachers' commitment and motivation are low to practices of CA. In our departmental meetings, staff agrees to implement CA. But, it is not put into practice. To me, this is against the rule. And thus, this has been a point of dispute. Some staff complains that they are not even clear about what, why and how of the CA, students too. Others, mentioned resource constraints, workload, lack of training, large-class size, and lack of support and guidance from the management body (27 Feb 2020).

Comparable research findings were reported by authors such Ashenafi (2017); Sintayehu and Ashenafi (2017); Gemachu and Teklu (2020); Desalegn (2004); and Ramalepe (2015). For instance, Ashenafi (2017) in his study investigated that a significant number of teacher educators lacked commitment, interest, and skills of CA implementation. In addition, Desalegn (2004) reported that lack of teachers' commitment is a barrier to CA implementation. In another study, Berhanu (2018) indicated that teachers' professional commitment and their job satisfaction are significantly correlated and are central to improve students' academic achievement and behaviour.

The other issue to be dealt with was students participation in group assignments or project work, In a study performed by Passigna (2003), when the students are ordered to do different assessment tasks by their instructors, they have no confidence to do the given task independently. The UTDC Guideline (2004) also supports the above idea, stating that one group member may sometimes take the responsibility of doing the bulk of the work, which means the other members are dependent on him/her. This finding was incongruent with the results obtained from the interview participants. Accordingly, one of the interviewed college deans (CD₁) asserted:

When group tasks, like assignments, are given based on 1 to 5 grouping, only one or two students do the assignment and the remaining students are dependent on capable students. They simply write their name and identification number (ID) and put their signature on the assignment (04 Jan 2020).

Feedback is another point of interest for discussion. As can be noted from Table 2, item 2, respondents were requested to make their reflection about the academic feedback instructors give to their students. Accordingly, a great majority of the respondents indicated that timely feedback was not given to students by their instructors. In relation to this, in the open-ended part of the questionnaire, most of the students revealed similar feelings and presented verbatim as follows. 'Our instructors are not willing to give us any comments and suggestions in our tests, quizzes, and assignments'; 'our teachers do not write comments on our exam papers, projects and assignments. Thus, we do not know what were our mistakes. Only our scores are posted on the notice board'. On the other hand, only a few students said, 'yes, but feedback/comments are given after a long time, e.g. after a semester break or after weeks by some of our instructors', whereas, student assessment guideline of Haramaya University (HU-2015, p.8), declares, "...the feedback should be immediate, individualized, specific, honest, manageable, and constructive.'

Thus, from the foregoing reflections of the students, one can generally infer that feedback (in any form – written or oral) were not given on the academic exercises (exams, assignments, projects, etc) they attempted by most of their instructors in the studied HLIs. Even those who gave their feedback did not do it on time and systematically. The experience of the researcher of this study, as an instructor, researcher and position holder, he doubts that relevant, timely and cyclic feedback were given by the instructors, for example, in the HLI where he works.

Overall, although feedback is the backbone of effective learning and teaching process, and an indicator of the level of success of teachers and students attained in their academic endeavor, it can be inferred that feedback (in any of its forms) was neither designed, nor delivered by the instructors in an organized way so as to facilitate students' learning, achievement and/or assess their learning.

In relation to this, one of the interviewee (HoD₃) asserted that instructors in his department were not usually committed to offering feedback to the students' works (be it test, assignment, presentation, etc). He added that some instructors can make it on the exam papers. But the problem is that exam papers are not usually returned to students even after they are scored. They remain with the instructors. As their right, students usually complain to see their test papers and know what went right and wrong with their test results, etc. Some of the reasons he listed (why teachers do not give feedback) included: lack of transparency; lack of awareness that getting feedback is the right of the students; huge compiles of test/exam papers due to large class sizes; tight academic schedule/calendar and shortage of time where courses are given in different modalities (block, parallel, semester-

wise, etc) simultaneously, which make instructors too busy not to give timely feedback to their students.

Congruent to these findings are research reports, e.g., by Liu and Carless (2006); Bashir, Kabir and Rahman (2016); Ashenafi (2017); Banerjee (2014); and Gemechu, Muhammed and Maeregu (2017). For instance, Bashir, Kabir and Rahman (2016) stated that although feedback is acknowledged as an essential element of improving the learning process of the students, it is usually difficult to get it easily implemented in the higher education arena. They added that in a National survey, both in the UK (Higher Education Funding Council for England 2011) and in Australia, giving timely and relevant feedback to students was difficult. The other finding aligned to this report exists in the study of Sintayehu and Ashenafi (2017) in which they investigated that lack of timely feedback on the progress and achievement of students, among other factors, seems to be instructor-related challenges of CA implementation at Dire Dawa University, Ethiopia. Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth program (2006) concludes that when students (and teachers) become comfortable with a continuous cycle of feedback and adjustment, learning becomes more efficient.

With regard to table 2, item 3 that states the extent to which existing assessment tools help to examine what students have learned, the study was consistent with Gemechu et al., (2017) that found out quality of students learning is poor due to the fact that poor assessment quality that comes from traditional paper-pencil test. Regarding cheating on exam, the majority of the respondents (CM=4.16) indicated that cheating practice on the exam was very high. This finding was cross-validated through interviews and personal experiences of the researcher. For instance, one of the interviewed QACLCs (QACLC₁) stressed:

These days, cheating among students during the examinations such as tests is a serious problem. Cheaters use various tricks and ruses during the exam and deceive invigilators. For e.g., the 'cheater' and the 'cheatee' connive ahead of the exam. Accordingly, the cheatee, I mean the transmitter either transfers answers through a piece of paper or intentionally makes his/her exam paper/answers visible to the cheater. The other strategy is coming to the exam hall with crib notes and searching potential answers from it; writing answers on their body (e.g. palms, thighs, and so forth). To me, large class size, lack of invigilation skills and students' academic dishonesty, among others, contributed much to cheating on exams (02 March 2020).

Similar opinions were given by other interviewees. But one of the interviewees (QACLC₂) said, "some students don't work hard on their studies, assignments, exams, etc. They, for e.g., copy assignments, homework, project works from their friends. They also deceive invigilators during the exam administration, and also try to threaten some clever students." As an instructor, I observe that opinions made by the above interviewees are genuine reflections. There were students accused of due to infringement of the exam rules, and whose cases had been examined by the exam committee and disciplinary measures have been taken almost in each exam period throughout the year and the same is reported to the office of the registrar frequently.

Related findings were reported by, such as McCabe (2005), MoE (2018), Ashenafi (2017), Sintayehu and Ashenafi (2017) and the like. For instance, McCabe (2005) being impressed by the prevalence and seriousness of cheating among student, he conducted a study on "Cheating among college and university students: A North American perspective" and collected and analyzed (three years data) from over 80 000 students and 12 000 faculty in the United States and Canada, and he reported that cheating among students in US and Canadian campuses on tests and exams and plagiarism were problematic and significant issues on the college and university campuses. He further explained that, as roughly, one in ten students admit to one or more instances of copying, using crib notes and/or helping someone else to cheat on a test or exam. As worrisome as cheating on tests and examinations, cheating on written work seemed to occur even more frequently. Unauthorized collaboration, paraphrasing or copying a few phrases or sentences from either a written or web source ('cut and paste' plagiarism) and fabricating or falsifying a bibliography occur frequently. In addition, over two-thirds of faculty reported they had observed cut and paste plagiarism. Poor participation, carelessness, cheating on examinations and unwillingness to participate in CA were other findings communicated by Sintayehu and Ashenafi (2017) and Ashenafi (2017) from Ethiopian HLIs.

Alike reflections and concerns about the severity and pervasiveness of the cheating (also referred to as academic dishonesty, academic cheating) were aired by the interview participants. The researcher of this study also shares the reflections made by the interviewees and agrees with the research report by McCabe (2005).

So far discussions implies that there is a low extent of CA practices in eastern Ethiopian public HLIs. This finding is far from the suggested strategies of MoE (2010) modular curriculum implementation policy that suggests CA in the form of tests, reports, assignments, presentations in modular delivery which shall count for 50% of the total module/course mark should be on regular basis. Despite awareness by many scholars regarding the value of CA, its practices is not compatible with suggested strategies made by most literature. In connection to this, Esere and Idowu (2009) found out that CA has not made the expected contribution to students' school performance due to inherent problems in its operation. Similarly, Diamond (1998) described the fundamental problem in assessment practices to be the mismatch between the learning targets established and the methods and criteria teachers use to assess their students. Therefore, more effort is needed to improve the current CA

practices under the study area.

One way analysis of variance was conducted by the researchers to see whether there is a statistical significance mean differences lie across the three selected HLIs in terms of CA practices.

Table 3: Summary of ANOVA regarding practices of CA across the three HLIs

Variable	Sources of variation	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Implementation of CA	Between Groups	255.871	2	127.936	14.026	0.00
	Within Groups	3110.289	341	9.121		
	Total	3366.160	343			

Key: df=Degree of freedom; F=F-test

In Table 3, the ANOVA summary indicated that the selected HLIs differ significantly in the practices of CA ($F(2, 341) = 14.026, p < 0.05$). That means the selected HLIs did not have similar institutional practices. Hence, it was concluded that there was statistical significance mean differences across the three selected HLIs in the practices of CA. This indicates that the institutes have a difference in the practices of CA principles and strategies. Meanwhile, to find out the institutes that are statistically different from each other's, post hoc multiple comparisons were made using the Tukey test as shown below.

Table 4: Post hoc tests for issues related to practices of CA across the three HLIs

(I) Name of the Institutions	(J) Name of the Institutions	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
HU	JJU	1.59434*	0.38955	0.00
	DDU	1.91717*	0.39796	0.00
JJU	HU	-1.59434*	0.38955	0.00
	DDU	0.32283	0.41712	0.72
DDU	HU	-1.91717*	0.39796	0.00
	JJU	-0.32283	0.41712	0.72

* shows statistically significant mean differences across the HLIs

In Table 4, the Tukey test indicated that the mean score in practices of CA, HU (Haramaya University) significantly different from the rest of HLIs. The implication is that even though all the selected HLIs have lower CA practices, DDU (Direwawa University) and JJU (Jigjiga University) have not shown better implementation than HU. Therefore, HU is better in the practices of CA activities than the other HLIs.

4.3. Perception about Continuous Assessment

Table 5: Descriptive statistics regarding perception of respondent about CA

No	Item	Students N =219		Instructors N =125		Total N= 344	
		M	SD ₁	M	SD ₂	CM	CS
1.	I believe that instructors' assessment tools help to examine students learning.	2.45	1.35	2.62	1.31	2.51	1.34
2.	I understand CA plays an important role in improving students' academic performance.	4.06	0.85	4.41	0.69	4.19	0.82
3.	I perceive that CA helps students to become more self-reflective about their learning.	4.12	0.65	4.24	0.66	4.16	0.66
4.	I perceive that CA helps to focus on my instruction more effectively.	3.99	0.54	4.01	0.95	3.99	0.71
5.	I feel that CA strengthens the relation between teacher and learners than summative assessment	3.91	0.69	4.17	0.90	4.00	0.79
6.	I believe that CA helps to provide feedback to the student about their learning progress.	3.89	0.72	4.27	0.72	4.03	0.74

As indicated in table 5, the combined mean score of students and instructors for items 2,3,4,5, 6 is at agree score and item 1 is indicated undecided score and the combined standard deviation result indicated that there was little and no variability among the respondents in their response. This implies that the respondents has positive perception toward continuous assessment. In relation to this, an interview was conducted to support the above findings. Accordingly, one of the interviewed department heads (HoD₂) stated:

In my opinion, the majority of students and instructors perceive CA as essential components of classroom instruction. However, there are perception differences between and within students to students and instructors to instructors. From the instructors perspectives, there are some instructors who perceive CA for grading purpose only. There are also some students who feel discomfort in participating different CA activities due to much time and effort needed to complete the task (27 Feb 2020).

In line with this, the other interviewed college deans (CD₂) asserted:

In our college for all courses, we give more attention for CA practices in collaboration with college deans and QACLCs coordinators. However, the major reason for the ignorance of students and instructors for CA practices were they take it all efforts made by management body for political goal. (07 Jan 2020).

This reflection shows that officials like department heads, college deans, and QACLCs coordinators had a positive perception towards CA and perceive their students and instructors' CA practices negatively. In summary, the above analysis was based on the information collected from interviews and questionnaires, there was a positive perception toward the CA and there were perception differences among the respondents. This is the reason behind the difference among respondents in their response.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The assessment practiced in HLIs affects the quality of education, transfer of knowledge, and skills. However, from the finding of the study, it can be concluded that there was low extent of CA practices even though majority of the respondents have a positive perception toward CA. From one way analysis of variance, it was concluded that there were statistically significant mean differences across the selected HLIs in practices of CA. This implies that there is no similarity in the practices of CA across the three selected HLIs. In addition, from the Post hoc comparisons of Tukey HSD ("honestly significant difference"), it was concluded that HU was better in the practices of CA than DDU and JJU.

Thus, for the effective practices of CA and harness its full academic benefits, it is strongly suggested that the following recommendations should be taken into account. First, CA as a policy package should be supported by/associated with the implementation guidelines, reinforcement directives, incentives and penalties. Second, commitment emanates from a due understanding of the issues (CA here) and thus, awareness creation trainings related to instructors' commitment and skills in assessment tools designing and delivery including skills in the management of timely, cyclic and relevant feedback provision should be given. Third, academic dishonesty among students (such as cheating, copying, etc), their inability/unwillingness to participate, and lack of interest in group work, assignments, etc can be attributed to many factors such as lack of controlling system by the institutions, and students' misconception about the importance of CA as well as lack of proper understanding of the assessment rules and regulations stated in the *students' assessment guidelines and senate legislation of the HLIs*, which when infringed by students, expose them to simple (warning) to serious (suspension and/or dismissal) disciplinary measures. Thus, proper awareness creation should be continuously given to students as well as instructors. Finally, to have a full understanding (image) of the practices of CA, it is recommended that countrywide research, involving all other variables and HLIs not considered in this study, should be conducted in the future.

6. References

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