



Assessment of the implementation of continuous assessment: the case of METTU university

Walde, Getinet Seifu

School of Mathematics, Beijing Institute of Technology, Beijing 100081, China

Department of Mathematics, Mettu University, Mettu, Ethiopia

For correspondence: getinetseifu@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper examines the status of the implementation of continuous assessment (CA) in Mettu University. A random stratified sampling method was used to select 309 students and 29 instructors and purposive method used to select quality assurance and faculty Deans. Questionnaires, focus group discussion, interview and documents were used for data collection. Quantitative data were analyzed in terms of descriptive statistics whereas qualitative data qualitatively. The finding of the study revealed that; instructors considered it as continuous testing, students perceived it as a method of assessment used to increase their academic result. The major challenges were: lack of clear manuals and guidelines, lack of continuous and adequate training, awareness and skills on the part of instructors, large class size, lack of infrastructure and instructional materials, poor communication of staff with concerned bodies. Based on the results recommendations were forwarded.

Keywords: University, Instructors, Continuous assessment, Implementation

Introduction

Assessment is the process of making judgments about a student's performance on a particular task (Harlan, 1994). Arends (1997) also defined assessment as the full range of information gathered and synthesized by teachers for making decisions about their students. According to Gipps, C. V. (1994) it is a wide range of methods for evaluating pupil performance and attainment including formal testing and examinations, practical and oral assessment, classroom-based assessment carried out by teachers and portfolios. These definitions suggest that Educational assessment is a broad term that includes many procedures used to obtain information about student achievement and learning progress.

As correctly pointed out by Cone and Foster (1991), good measurement resulting in accurate data is the foundation of sound decision making. According to them there is little doubt among educational practitioners about the special value of assessment as a basic condition for effective learning. This is because of the fact that traditional ways of testing can only deal with a fraction of what some body want to evaluate. Therefore, (Alausa, 2004) indicated the major problems of assessment of learners have been in the approaches or methods of assessment. To solve these problems experts and educational policy makers' come up with the concept of continuous assessment (CA). Many educational systems all over the world have adopted this approach in assessing learners' achievement in many subject areas. This is because CA approaches can help to rectify the problem of mismatches between tests and classroom activities.

According to Bolyard (2003) CA is a strategy used by teachers to support the attainment of goals and skills by learners over a period of time. It occurs as part of the daily interaction between teachers and

students, revealing valuable information about student learning, in terms of knowledge, thinking and reasoning (Ali & Akube, 1988).

There is increasing international interest in CA approaches to assess students' achievement (Njabili, 1999). According to the New Education and Training Policy, the practical task of implementing the new curriculum at school level requires CA as part of the curriculum in general and the instructional process in particular (MOE, 1994). This shows that enough attention is given towards the implementation of CA in Ethiopia, too. The Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO) program of the country has also placed attention on the practice of CA. Hence, CA has established its usefulness in Ethiopia as a major tool of providing quality education thereby making the whole education system productive.

The teaching learning process requires continuous follow up and the educational progress of the learners need frequent assessment. According to Alausa (2004), the various dimension of learning activities of the learners should be assessed by various methods. The understanding is that the variety of assessment strengthens the quality of education and fulfill the weaknesses each assessment techniques. The practice of CA continues at the higher education of Ethiopia. Policy makers and educational administrators often view assessment scores as a measure of educational quality. Quality of education is related to how well instructors implement CA appropriately and design strategies that enhance the implementation of CA.

The main concern of this study is to examine the practice of CA and to determine the status of implementation of CA in higher education of Ethiopia. Examining the ongoing practice and challenges of CA implementation is helpful in improving strategies of CA in Mettu University (MeU). Therefore, this study is designed to answer the following basic research questions. These are: What are MeU instructors' interpretations of Continuous Assessment? What are the major challenges in implementing continuous assessment in MeU? What should be done to ensure appropriate implementation of CA?

Literature Review

What is assessment? Scholars, based on what want to give more emphasis, have different views regarding educational assessment. Assessment is the purposeful gathering, interpreting and communicating of information about students' achievement (Mulu & Daniel 2005). According to Linn and Miller (2005, p 26), "assessment is general term that includes the full range of procedure used to gain information about students learning (observation, rating of performance, or projects, paper and pencil tests) and the formation of value judgment concerning learning progress." Assessment as stated By McTighe and Ferrara (1994) is a process that provides information about learning that can be used to diagnose learner strengths and needs. Other scholars, like Harlan W. (1994, p 1-2), argued that:

'Assessment is the process of making judgment about a student's performance on a particular task. The result will clearly depend up on what the task is and how the judgment is made, in relation to what standard or criteria. It also depends up on other factors, which affect performance such as student's motivation, perception of the relevance of task and anxiety about the consequences of success or failure.'

Assessment has to be very comprehensive in a system of education, which aims at the many-sides development of personality of the child. According to Airasian (1997, p 24), 'there are many purposes for classroom assessment: diagnosing pupil problems, judging pupils' academic performance, providing feedback to pupils, placing pupils, planning and conduction instruction, and establishing the classroom society.'

According to Wintle and Harrison (1999), the important principles that guide good assessment are:

'The purpose of assessment must be clear, worthwhile and agreed by all those involved in the process. What is to be assessed should be related to the purpose, clearly understood and gain agreed. Gathering the evidence should become a simple and straightforward task. Assessment need to be both systematic and timely. The record of result of assessment must be useful and accessible. Children should be involved in the assessment of their own work and progress. The demand of assessment should enhance good classroom organization not hinder it. Assessment practices should contribute towards the achievement of equal opportunities. The intended access to children's record should be known before anything is written. Parents and governments should be involved in creation and monitoring of the assessment policy. The result of the assessment of pupils' progress should be reported regularly to parents with appropriate detail. The policy should be review and evaluate regularly. Additionally assessment process will be more effective if there is more clarity about the assessment itself.'

From nine assessment principles established by American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) one of it is emphasis as assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated and revealed in performance over time (Pausch & Popp, 1997).

Continuous Assessment: CA is the periodic and systematic method of assessing and evaluating a person's attributes. Continuous Assessment of learners' progress could also be defined as a mechanism whereby the final grading of learners in the cognitive; affective and psychomotor domains of learning systematically takes account of all their performances during a given period of schooling (Faleyalo, 1986). From this definition, one could infer that Continuous Assessment is an assessment approach which involves the use of a variety of assessment instruments, assessing various components of learning, not only the thinking processes but including behaviors, personality traits and dexterity.

According to the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture (1999) of Namibia, CA consists all the processes and tools teachers use to make decisions about their students' progress. These include observations of students' seat work, their voluntarily responses, and answers to questions and there results on teacher made tests. It also involves decisions such as assigning grades, re teaching a topic, and providing supplementary instruction. When combined, these elements make up the teacher assessment system (Eggen & Kuachak, 1997). But CA does not mean testing often; rather it means communicating with the students often to find out whether they are truly learning or not (Capper, 1996).

As cited in USAID-AED (2009)..... "feedback is in formation, you give to student to let them know about their performance or achievement Feedback is not a simple number or symbol rather good feedback is descriptive of the students' work, is specific to the work and learning out comes and contains help for the student on how to improve. It describes to a student strengths, improvements needed, and way of improving."

From problems of Implementing Continuous Assessment Quansah (2005, p 2-3) found that current continuous assessment system involves class tests, class exercises and homework and no attention is given to project work, which is the most important learning medium that allows pupils to take active part in their own learning. According to Kapambwe (2010) factors challenging the implementation of CA are: large class size, shortage funds to fulfill necessary resources, teachers still felt that the CA took a lot of time for teachers and lack of adequate training of teachers. As a result, they did not believe that they would finish the syllabus with CA. Some teachers are of the wrong view that CA is

synonymous to continuous written test. Since the program of continuous assessment is an additional responsibility for teachers special incentive should be introduced so as to motivate them.

Method of the Study

A descriptive study design which employed mixed research method approach of data collection was conducted to collect data. Descriptive study method of research design can allow gathering comprehensive information concerning the existing phenomena with the intent of employing data to justify current conditions and practices Koul (1996).

The study participant: The source of population was all faculties in MeU. The Study population was four faculties selected as sample faculties by using simple random sampling method. Stratified random sampling techniques were used in selecting instructors and students by stratifying them by faculty and department. Thus, 26 instructors and 303 students were selected from the four faculties. Whereas purposive sampling was employed in order to collect data from the corresponding faculty deans and quality assurance director.

Procedures for data collection: for the purpose of this study, both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered and analyzed. Primary data were collected from instructors, students, quality assurance director, faculty deans and department heads, whereas, secondary data were collected from students record office. The quantitative data was collected from MeU instructors and students by using structured and pre-tested questionnaire. While qualitative data were collected using focus group discussion (FGD) with MeU instructors and interview with short and clear open ended questions with quality assurance director, faculty deans and department heads.

Data entry: after data collection, each questionnaire was checked for completeness and code was given before data entry. Data was entered, cleaned for outliers, missed values and missed variables and analyzed for windows version 16. Different frequency tables and descriptive summaries were used to describe the study variables.

Data analysis and interpretation: quantitative data were analyzed, described using descriptive statistical tools (frequency and Percentage). Whereas qualitative data were analyzed, described and interpreted through conceptualization and explanation.

Results and discussion

Quantitative results and discussion

Table 1: Summary of MeU Instructors' interpretations of CA

Items	Agree		Undecided		Disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
I consider CA as giving a series of paper and pencil testes to measure students performances	9	47.37	2	10.53	8	42.11
CA is suitable to determine learners' progress.	16	88.89	1	5.56	1	5.56
CA enables lower attaining students receive daily attention from the instructor.	17	89.47	2	10.53	0	0

CA create better opportunities for lower attaining students to get support from their peers	19	100	0	0	0	0
CA enables lower attaining students to experience success in learning	16	84.21	3	15.79	0	0
CA is time consuming to implement	7	58.33	1	8.33	4	33.33
CA increases my burden or overload.	10	52.63	1	5.26	8	42.11
CA needs a lot of resources.	16	84.21	3	15.79	0	0

As one can see from Table 1 above, as compared to others, majority of MeU instructors were agreed as CA is giving a series of paper and pencil testes to measure students' performance. This contradict the concepts of CA (Capper, 1996) which says it does not mean testing often; rather it means communicating with the students often to find out whether they are truly learning or not. Suitable to determine learners' progress, give better opportunities for lower attaining students to get attention from their instructors and support from their peers, consume time, increase burden of instructors and needs resources to implement it.

In the focused group discussions even though few respondents were not in favor of this opinion, although the instructors are not practically implementing, the majority of them perceived continuous assessment as beyond continuous testing. Moreover, the result obtained from focus grouped discussions, indicated that all participants agreed in general on the importance of continuous assessment for instructional purposes.

In line with this, in USAID (2003) it is stated that continuous assessment is an important and a powerful diagnostic tools that enables pupils to understand the areas in which they are having difficulty, it enables teachers to assess the curriculum as implemented in the classroom and it provides information on achievement of particular level of skills, understanding and knowledge rather than achievement of certain marks or scores etc.

From the above result, one can observe that the instructors' responses on continuous assessment practices were not well understood by the majority of the respondents and the quite few who were aware did not practice it due to shortage of time, recourses and considering it as overload.

Table 2: Summary of CA techniques used by instructors' (as reported by instructors)

Assessment methods	Agree		Undecided		Disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Test	16	84.21	3	15.79	0	0
Quiz	18	94.74	1	5.26	0	0
Assignment	19	100	0	0	0	0
Observation	18	94.74	0	0	1	5.26
Oral question	18	94.74	0	0	1	5.26
Field work	7	36.84	0	0	12	63.16
Project work	5	26.31	2	10.53	12	63.16
Final exam	17	89.47	2	10.53	0	0

Regarding CA techniques, as the results presented in the Table 2 above shows the most commonly used assessment techniques were tests, quiz, individual and group assignment, oral question and final exam. While fieldwork and project work was not common. In line with this on the open ended question most instructors responded as they used tests, quiz and assignment at the end of each unit final exam at the end of the semester to assess students.

This finding indicates that instruments for assessing the cognitive domain were highly used by the instructors, and the instruments for assessing the effective and psychomotor domains were less used. This was not satisfied the definition of CA as stated by (Faleyalo, 1986) and inconsistency with study results of Quansah (2005).

Table 3: Summary of instructors’ views on the provision of feedback on CA (as reported by instructors)

Items	Alternatives and responses	Respondents			
		instructors		Students	
		F	%	F	%
Is there detailed and timely feedback for students’ in relation to their CA?	Yes	14	73.68	120	60.61
	No	5	26.32	78	39.39
	In each CA task	7	36.84	75	37.88
If your response is “Yes”, what was its frequency?	When test papers were returned	12	63.16	123	62.12

The result presented in table 3 above shows that majority of instructors replied that, instructors provided detailed and timely feedback for students’ when test papers were returned to the students. On interview part with department heads instructors way of giving feedback is returning paper and giving general answer for all students but not giving feedback for each student independently. This result is inconsistency with results on USAID-AED (2009) on the way of giving feedback.

From the above finding, one can conclude that provision of detail and timely feedback to each student was very poor. Thus the absence of detailed and timely feedback for the students can negatively affect the implementation of CA.

Table 4: summary of participation of students in assessment (as reported by instructors)

Items	Alternatives and responses	Respondents			
		instructors		Students	
		F	%	F	%
Is there opportunities given for student to evaluate their peer assessment tasks?	Yes	8	42.11	69	34.85
	No	11	57.89	129	65.15
What do you do if some / more than half of your students get below an average result?	Record the	6	31.58	88	44.44
	I teach again	5	26.32	5	2.52
	I re-exam	5	26.32	87	43.94

I teach again and re-exam	3	15.79	18	9.1
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The above finding implies that most students (57.89%) have no participation in their peer evaluation (table 4). This result is inconsistency with principles of good assessment (Wintle & Harrison (1999). If students are given opportunities to evaluate their class mate's tasks, they can give their own ideas and opinions in evaluation. This can contribute to improve assessment practices of instructors and to investigate the difference between them in learning performance. In line with this, Kyrincov (1998) noticed that cooperative activities are very important in active learning and its assessment method because they enable people to obtain greater insights in to the conduct of learning through observing the performance of their peers and sharing procedures and strategies.

On the same table majority of instructors 6(31.58%) responded as the record students results when they score below average in their assessment. While only 3(15.79%) of instructors responded as they re-teach and then re exam the students under consideration. This result is inconsistency with the process of CA implementation stated by (Eggen & Kuachak, 1997). Form this one can see that instructors used assessment for the purpose of recording, but the purpose of assessment is not only for recording purpose particularly for those students who preformed below average should be helped by using different means such as re-teaching or re-exam.

Table 5: Existing practice of implementing CA (as reported by students)

Items	Agree		Undecided		Disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Instructors used different assessment techniques like projects, class works, home works, group works etc regularly to assess us	25	12.6	20	10.1	153	77.3
Instructors assess your progress in your day-to-day activities rather than at the end of the unit	28	14.1	37	18.7	133	67.2
Instructors give us immediate and continuous feedback for your achievements	41	20.7	32	16.2	125	63.1

From the above table one can observe that, most of the students 153 (77.3%) responded that as instructors were not used different assessment techniques, their instructors assess them at the end of the unit rather than their day-to-day progress 133 (67.2%), and not give immediate and continuous feedback for their achievements 125 (63.1%). This shows that as instructors were not use different assessment techniques and continuously follow up the progress of their students daily. These contradict assessment principle established by (Pausch & Popp, 1997).

Table 6: Major challenges in implementing CA in MeU (as reported by instructors)

Items	Alternative	Respondents	
		F	%
teaching load per Weak	< 6 Cr Hr	7	36.84
	[6 – 12] Cr Hr	10	52.63
	>12Cr Hr	2	10.53

Number of Students in a class	Below 40	3	15.79
	40 – 50	7	36.84
	Greater than 50	9	47.37
The extent of participation of instructors in workshops or seminars prepared on awareness creation on implementation of CA	Very High	0	0
	High	2	10.53
	Average	2	10.53
	Bellow Average	3	15.79
	Never	12	63.15
To what extent university management help you in implementing CA?	Very High	1	5.26
	High	2	10.53
	Average	4	21.05
	Below Average	6	31.58
	Never	5	26.32

The above table reveals that majority 12 (52.63%) of the instructors of respondents were having teaching load [6 – 12] Cr Hr per week, number of students in a class is greater than 50 9(37%), instructors had not got any chance of participation in workshops and seminars concerning CA 12(63.15%) and university management contribute below average for the purpose of CA implementation 6(31.58%). This result does not satisfied principles of good assessment Wintle and Harrison (1999).

For the proper implementation of CA, time is one of the important factors and instructors should have enough time outside classrooms so that they could have enough time to prepare their lesson and different assessment tools required of them. In focus group discussions some instructors from faculty of engineering considered high work load as one of the factors that hindered them in their effort to utilize CA.

However, from the data obtained through interview from faculty deans, due to the maximum number of students that should be allowed in the University is 80 and shortage of class rooms the number of students is above 50. Moreover, instructors' on the focused group discussions said that teaching more than 40 students in university, where individual students are expected to perform practical work, is impossible. As a result most of them assessed students by giving paper and pencil tests, group assignment. Because of these it is difficult to identify weakness and strengths of students in learning and to provide proper feedback and remedial lessons for each student.

Involvement of instructors in workshops, seminars ..., plays a crucial role in updating the knowledge and skill of instructors in implementing CA and university managements, very significant in facilitating learning and teaching processes, were below expected. Thus, the low awareness of teachers on the CA and its implementation could as well affect their behavior negatively towards CA implementation in class rooms.

Table 7: Summary of challenges hindering effective implementation of CA (as reported by instructors)

Items	Agree		Undecided		Disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Lack of university infrastructure has impact on my CA	13	68.42	3	15.79	3	15.79
The large classroom affects my CA techniques by taking more of my time	16	84.21	0	0	3	15.79

There are clear manuals and guidelines on how to implement CA	3	15.79	4	21.05	12	63.16
Insufficient time allocation for the course	13	68.42	3	15.79	3	15.79

Referring to table 7 above, the most challenges affecting effective implementation of CA were lack of university infrastructure 13(68.42%), class size 16(84.21%), clear manuals and guidelines on how to implement CA 12(63.16%), insufficient time allocation for the course 13(68.42%). In line with this faculty deans mentioned on interview part as they prepared assessment formats and sent to all instructors to use. This shows as instructors were not supported much on implementation CA rather than getting format.

According to the above results, the most commonly mentioned challenges to implement CA were lack of infrastructure, large class size, clear manuals and guidelines on how to implement CA and Insufficient time allocation for the course. This result is consistency with results of (Kapambwe, 2010).

Qualitative results and discussion

From instructors open ended questionnaire and FGD, department heads, faculty deans and quality assurance interview we obtained that most MeU instructors interpret CA as giving a series of paper and pencil testes to students without intervention on their gap, it consumes time and increase burden of instructors, without instructional materials such as reference books, laboratories it is impossible to implement. The actual practice of CA by instructors were; tests, quiz, individual and group assignment were the most commonly used assessment methods at the end of each unit. But according to Linn and Miller (2005) paper and pencil tests are not the only assessment technique to assess the full range of students' information about learning.

Students were also took second test before they see their first test result and they did not know the gap to improve on the second assessment. This is not help to diagnose students' strength and needs (McTighe & Ferrara, 1994). Instructors provide general feedback for all class students at the same time while returning test results rather than for each students individually, department heads see students achievement at the end of the semester, students did not have opportunity for peer assessment, instructors assess students without plan and hence they didn't know when they assess and report their progress in each step, some instructors gave assignment for those students failed in test but this is not show students progress.

Challenges found in implementation of CA were; Instructors consider it as not part of their job, the availability of instructional materials, large number of students in a class room especially in engineering faculty barrier them to follow the progress of each and every students, it is difficult because it needs continuously to prepare correct and return students assessment result, shortage of time to use different assessment techniques for block course, lack of knowledge on different assessment techniques and poor communication of instructors with concerned bodies on its implementation. Students also run for mark but not motivated to know their knowledge gap to improve themselves and this affect the judgment about the students (Harlan, 1994).

There is also no systems to control its implementation, both instructors and students are not clearly understand the basic concepts of CA, due to this on each CA students are trying to cheat from others to score good mark on written test and also on group and individual assignment and hence it is difficult for instructors to know the students difficulty, Some instructors has no positive attitude towards the implement of CA due to lack of training, support and encouragements from university management on its implementation instructors were not interested to implement as intended and

instructors couldn't come and discuss with concerned bodies on the implementation were mentioned as challenges that prohibited them from using CA as desired.

Possible solution provided by most of them were; minimizing the number of students per class rooms by building enough class rooms & increase numbers of instructors', provide instructional materials and adequate guidelines, installing laboratory, create awareness and capacity building continuously through training among instructors and students, give incentive for instructors as a positive feedback, instructors should consider as CA is one of the part of teaching-learning, all academic sectors should work together, department should take responsibility and prepare way to follow up its implementation, faculties and department should preparing reflective training and discussion session on the implementation of CA.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study were aimed to assess the status of the implementation of CA by determining how instructors interpreted CA and then to identify the major challenges and put appropriate solution in implementing CA in MeU.

The results of the present study showed that MeU instructors' interpreted CA as giving a series of paper and pencil testes to students without intervention on their difficulty. The motives and objectives behind the implementation of CA were not even clear to most instructors and a student, due to these CA was carelessly handled and randomly implemented. This was due to lack of adequate training on the part of instructors and students, shortage of resources, no system to control. The actual practice of CA by instructors were; tests, quiz, individual and group assignment were the most commonly used assessment methods at the end of each unit. Valid form of assessments like presentation, practical and project works were not used.

The major challenges found in the implementation of CA were; Instructors were not considered it as a part of their job, the availability of instructional materials, large number of students in a class room, lack of knowledge on different assessment techniques, poor communication of instructors with concerned bodies on its implementation, students run for mark but not need to know their knowledge gap to improve themselves, support and encouragements from university management on the implementation CA as desired.

Possible solution provided by most of them were; building enough class rooms & increase numbers of instructors' to decrease the number of students per class rooms, provide instructional materials and adequate guidelines, installing laboratory, create awareness and capacity building continuously through training among instructors and students, give incentive for instructors as a positive feedback, all academic sectors should work together, faculties and department should preparing reflective training and discussion session on the implementation of CA.

In light of the findings of the study and conclusions drawn, the following recommendations were forwarded to improve the implementation of CA in the university under study. These are:

- ✓ The successful outcome of assessment depends on careful keeping of accurate records and giving feedback for each student's independently and so instructors should be trained on how to keep records and provide feedback.
- ✓ It is suggested that a committee should be set across faculties and in each department to manage the implementations of continuous assessment. Because this will enable to identify problems encountered in the teaching-learning process on time and take appropriate actions before it is late.
- ✓ Students' population in each class should be optimum to manageable size.

- ✓ Intensive trainings on the concepts and roles of CA should be organized in the form of on the job-trainings, workshops, seminars and in service programs to raise the level of awareness of instructors towards CA and its implementation thereby to positively influence the attitude of instructors towards the scheme. In addition to this, higher diploma program in the University should be strengthened to address all instructors.
- ✓ Lack of instructional materials and facilities were among the main hindering factors in the teaching-learning process in general and in the implementation of CA in particular. Thus, more should be done by concerned bodies to allocate enough budgets for the implementation of CA.
- ✓ CA guides or work books on each field of study area should be prepared and the guide's workbooks should embrace different types of assessment techniques that are relevant to assess practical skills and performance of students in their areas of study.

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