Perceptions of Educators on the Implementation of Continuous Assessment at the Secondary School Level in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province

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Abstract

The importance of assessing learning outcomes using a variety of assessment strategies or techniques and containing data from many sources, rather than the sole dependence on the one-shot examination, has long been recognised worldwide. This has led to major assessment policy changes in both developed and developing countries. Continuous Assessment (CA) has been introduced as part of the examination and assessment innovation in the Zimbabwean education system. CA is intended to be added onto the traditional assessment, that is, summative assessment in order to improve the assessment and evaluation of pupils' performance, and ultimately the whole process of teaching, learning and assessment. Qualitative data was generated through the researcher as a data generating instrument, questionnaires, interviews, Focus Group Discussion, documents analysis, and observations. The generated data was analysed through Thematic Content Analysis. Results showed that the CA practices done by most of the teachers were faulty and deviated remarkably from policy guidelines except for practical learning areas. Teachers do not possess the required competencies for the implementation of CA. It was also observed that the tasks weighed the teachers down. Their greatest attention was on measuring cognitive attainment rather than including the affective and psychomotor behaviours of the pupils. The study concludes that the majority of the teachers in the secondary schools exhibited a high level of incompetence in the use of statistical tools, a skill which is necessary for presenting the pupils' performance in a neat and logical manner.

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1. Introduction

Successful instruction and learning depend heavily on assessment. Regular, accurate, and timely assessment is necessary for enhancing learning and the quality of education, according to [1:4]. High-stakes exams are being criticized more and more in the educational community as having a negative impact on student learning and should be minimized. According to [2], if properly implemented in schools, formative assessment, which takes the form of continuous assessment, is a potent tool for enhancing learning. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [3] notes that a number of Western countries, including Australia, Canada, Denmark, England, Finland, Italy, New Zealand, and Scotland, have already implemented CA in their educational systems. Assessment is a key component of educational reform in the current policy environment. Each educational system should develop and put into place an assessment policy that is specific to the needs of the local populace. Notably, Zambia's education policymakers recognized the high quality of education that was reflected in the education reforms of 1977 [4]. Education policy has once again emphasised the importance of school-based CA in improving educational quality in light of the introduction of an outcomes-based curriculum in 2001 and the requirement for more thorough assessment techniques that have a positive impact on learning attainment. CA has faced difficulties on a global scale. To accommodate pupils' diverse interests and aptitudes, there has been a recent push to broaden the school curriculum and assessment. The need to create an educational system that is pertinent to and responsive to the needs of specific countries, their citizens, and their aspirations supports this. The Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training (CIET) of 1999 laid the groundwork for institutionalising the practice of regular review to guide educational provision, which includes assessment, according to [5,6]. The commission recommended a genuine paradigm shift away from examination-focused education and toward one that places a strong emphasis on experiential learning and the development of desirable skills.

2. Literature review

The need for a reliable assessment system to monitor pupils' progress was also suggested by the 2015 Ministry of Primary and Secondary School Education (MoPSE) Curriculum review process. The MoPSE Assessment Framework for Primary and Secondary Education 2015–2022 [7] is in line with the recommendations for assessment in the MoPSE Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education 2015–2022 [8], and it embodies the Ministry's efforts to provide pupils with higher-quality, more equitable, and inclusive education. The Primary School Curriculum and recent policy documents in South Africa support the idea that assessment is crucial to both teaching and learning. Parents, other teachers, community members, and pupils themselves are just a few of the significant education stakeholders with whom teachers might communicate assessment data. Parents can learn about their children's progress through regular reports from the teachers based on ongoing evaluations. With this information, parents can help and support their children in an efficient manner. National standards now set the parameters for how pupils are taught and evaluated in South Africa. During the South African educational reform movement, a lot of emphasis was placed on problems, but less so on causes [9].The foregoing argument implies that, "…assessment as an agent for reform is affected by the specific pressures and demands of real life as well as by the existing changeable South African context" (9: 15). The same argument of perceiving assessment as both a tool and agent for reform, applies to Zimbabwe where a competence-based curriculum has been

introduced in schools.Innovations and reforms have been made to better adapt education to the needs of Zimbabwean society. [6] contend that the Zimbabwe Curriculum Development Unit (CDU), which is now known as Curriculum Development and Technical Services (CDTS), has failed to fulfil its original mission due to a fiscally constrained environment brought on by the global economic downturn. Significant focus was given to issues, but less to causes, during the educational reform process in South Africa. Each type of assessment has got its own demanding requirements. Teachers have difficulties as a result of this. [10] contend that teachers must comprehend and be knowledgeable about a range of crucial assessments and methods. However, there isn't much focus on the difficulties or elements that affect how teachers assess pupils in the classroom.In order to get input from stakeholders on the kind of educational programme they wanted for their nation, the MoPSE in Zimbabwe started a consultation process on the revision of the curriculum in October 2014. Stakeholder input was used to create a people-driven curriculum that spans Early Childhood Development (ECD) and the final year of secondary education. The results of the national curriculum review consultation exercise were presented in [11]. The MoPSE has since observed that, pupils do not have exit profiles packed with survival skills to merge with knowledge, values, attitudes, attributes, dispositions and national identity, when they leave primary, secondary and high schools before or after completing Grade Seven, Form four and Form six respectively [6]. Additionally, examinations have been used for certification and selection without official consideration of school-based CA as a component of school final examinations. According to earlier research, both internal and external examinations have been used to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum, pinpoint issues, offer solutions, advise on policy, and award pupils who would have performed well [12]. The perseverance and dedication to their academic work are acknowledged for pupils who would have excelled in a variety of learning areas in internally designed mid-year tests. More significantly, parents attend to see their children succeed, especially when they are among the winners, which bodes well for their chances in external examinations. [13] asserts that assessment is now very much influenced by intimidation, vulnerability, stress, and anxiety brought on by a fear of failing. The rating of schools by regional and national educational offices as 0% schools and the top fifty (50) has reportedly increased the pressure on school administrators and teachers to guarantee that their pupils score well on public examinations, according to [14]. In a similar spirit, the study by [15] bemoaned that, due to the predominance of old rote teaching and learning methods, unreflective and teacher-centred pedagogy due to tests, making learning a strait jacket, pupils have not acquired vital and basic life skills. Therefore, this means that there are detrimental effects to the teaching process and the quality of pupils produced. Their education appears to be less important after exams. In this situation, teachers are given specialized technical examination skills that they impart to pupils. The tendency to "idolize paper academics, whose intellectual justifications extend as far as passing a test without using creativity to get out of a job," laments [16:15]. Examinations have led to a broken educational system where pupils pass with flying colours but receive insufficient education to enable them to make meaningful contributions to their own development and the development of the entire nation [17]. The education that pupils receive seems to lose value after examinations. In this circumstance, the teachers learn and impart specialized technical examination skills. According to [16], there is also a tendency to idolize and even worship academics who produce academic papers, whose intellectual justifications go so far as using passing a test as a means of emancipation. One cannot overstate the importance of building and transforming practices. Pupils shouldn't view themselves as helpless victims of a system that is entirely focused on examinations and unprepared to help them in the future [18].Zimbabwe, like the majority of developing nations, is having difficulty developing a standardized assessment

to compare pupil performance to the established standards or benchmarks as determined by the curriculum during assessment. National values or philosophies that serve as a guide for pupils need to be changed. According to [6], the evaluation of learning areas that emphasize the benefits of independence and entrepreneurship is not taken into account. [8]'s MoPSE section indicates that very little is being done to help pupils develop their innate abilities and talents. It goes on to say that, generally speaking, the educational system in Zimbabwe, like others around the world, prioritized acquiring in-depth subject-matter expertise at the expense of critical skills and competences. But it's becoming more widely accepted that knowing the material inside and out is insufficient for an exit qualification. At this time, developing competences and higher-order thinking abilities is the main focus.According to [6], school-based continuous assessments must be used in addition to public examinations. The problems that the educational system currently finds in the assessment process, according to stakeholders, could be solved by combining CA, methods, tools, and techniques. The emphasis is on final examinations at the expense of ongoing evaluation. Stakeholders also believe that combining CA with other methods, such as end-of-term evaluations and public tests, will result in an accurate assessment of students' performance. As opposed to assessment of learning, there is advocacy for assessment for learning [19]. Learning should be promoted primarily through assessment. It is past time to switch from traditional teacher-centred assessments to student-centred ones. One strategy to boost engagement and foster a stronger commitment to the learning process is to involve pupils in assessment. According to [6], learner-centred assessments also give pupils a new role in assessment, turning it into a learning experience where they are assessed for learning rather than for learning itself.Reference [20] compared the marks from the final examination to the outcomes of the psychomotor assessment. They also came to the conclusion that it is possible to accurately quantify each pupil's psychomotor domain. The development of assessment methods is consistent with evaluating pupils for the 21st Century, putting an emphasis on school-based assessment using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) [21]. Teacher-developed assessments, according to commentators like [22], can be crucial in fostering learning. Traditionally, teachers have evaluated students' knowledge and performance using recall tests or by asking questions during instruction. The various CA methods, including profiling, portfolios, rubrics, performance-based, task-based, peer assessment, pupil teacher assessment, student, classroom, and audience response systems, and the public examination driven system, have been proposed [21]. Now, the question that remains unanswered is that of whether the curriculum is being assessed to measure pupil performance against the set standards or benchmarks as defined by the competence-based curriculum, by key curriculum implementers at secondary school level. There is need to discuss how the different forms of CA are implemented at this level. There is also need to look at the negative effects of lack of knowledge in the different forms of CA by facilitators. There should be focus on how knowledge, skills, attitudes, attributes, abilities, traits and values based on the philosophy of (Ubuntu/ Unhu) are highlighted during implementation. The challenges faced by the competence-based curriculum implementers in the area of CA should be ascertained. There is demand to explore strategies which can be adopted by the education system, to mitigate CA challenges. [8] is rather silent on guidelines on how CA should be implemented, hence the need of the MoPSE Assessment Framework. Despite the premium placed on education, there continues to be challenging and persistent issues negatively affecting the curriculum and its assessment in secondary schools in Zimbabwe.

3. The conceptual framework

The conceptual framework used in this study is based on the model put forth by [23]. The technological, cultural,

political, and postmodern perspectives that are highlighted in this model are meant to take teacher assessment practices into consideration. This model is provided in an effort to comprehend the difficulties that teachers' assessment practices face. The "how" and "why" are questioned, along with the application of CA's tools, strategies, techniques, and methodologies. Determining that the term "CA" is an expression of values and epistemological beliefs about teaching and learning forms the foundation of this model. This model focuses on both micro and macro contexts, offering a broad view of the practice of teacher evaluation. It values a critical, multifaceted analysis of the problems with classroom assessment that takes into account pertinent social, political, and philosophical issues [23]. It also covers regional issues like resource accessibility and collaborations between the various stakeholders in the schools. Referring to the literature and the discussion highlighted by [24], the use of various forms of evaluation is not only an innovation but also a highly conceptual one. The [25] model is designed to study innovation in education. It explores strategies and tools that can be adopted by education systems to alleviate the challenges faced by curriculum implementers during CA of learning outcomes defined by competency-based curriculum at the metropolitan secondary school level. This is the case in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, which is why research is necessary. From a different angle, theory-based assessment holds that the design and implementation of the assessment must be constrained by a conceptual framework known as PT [26]. A participatory theory (PT) is a collection of explicit or implied claims made by participants regarding the actions required to address a social, educational, or health problem and the reasons why the problem responds to those actions. The goal of theory-driven evaluation, which is described as hypothetical, is to determine not only whether an intervention is effective but also how and why it is effective. For stakeholders to improve current or future programmes, they need this information.

4. Methodology

The guiding philosophy for this work was interpretivism, which derives from the interpretive paradigm. [27] contends that interpretivism, which challenges the objectivist idea that meaning exists in the world independently of consciousness, is connected to the philosophical stance of idealism and is used to bring together various viewpoints, including phenomenology and social constructionism. He continues by saying that it emphasizes meaning and may use various techniques to reflect various facets of the problem. It is more challenging to interpret in terms of stable realities when using interpretivism, which holds that there are different and relative realities [28]. I used the case study to generate data that contributed uniquely to the knowledge of CA as individuals, organisational and social phenomenon within the education system. A case study attempted to explain why one or more decisions were made, how they were made, how they were implemented, and what the consequences were. The case study was employed as a research methodology in the field of public administration, which falls under the social work umbrella both academically and professionally. To discuss how assessment focusing on knowledge, skills, attitudes, attributes, and values was being implemented at the secondary school level, a case study approach was adopted.I asked the participants about their past experiences in CA in order to avoid distortion of facts during data generation. I also avoided unintentionally encouraging people to answer the questions in a particular way, in order to avoid biases in the conduct of this research. The research was done within Bulawayo Metropolitan province, in order to cut down on travelling costs and consumption of time. Making use of a variety of the Information Communication Technology (ICT) gadgets and programmes cut down quite significantly on time. The wide variety of applications, use of deviant approaches and making use of a variety of processes that

could have compounded the situation, was avoided by all means. The sample was limited to 5 District Schools' Inspectors (DSIs), 27 school administrators including Head of Departments (HODs), 24 teachers, 30 pupils at secondary level from the 3 sampled schools and 2 ZIMSEC staff members. All the participants were sampled from Bulawayo Metropolitan Province, and the total sample size of eighty-eight participants was determined by data saturation.

5. Results and discussion

The results were methodically arranged and presented in narrative form with a strong emphasis on the opinions of the participants through direct quotations. During the interpretation, the explanation or recommendations inferred from the data were taken into account, but not the conclusions.

5.1 Bio data of research participants

I issued out 48 questionnaires, carried out 10 interviews and I moderated three Focus Group Discussions (FDGs) with 10 pupil participants in each group. This gave me a sample size of 88 participants. Comments on the critical bio data of research participants are presented as follows:
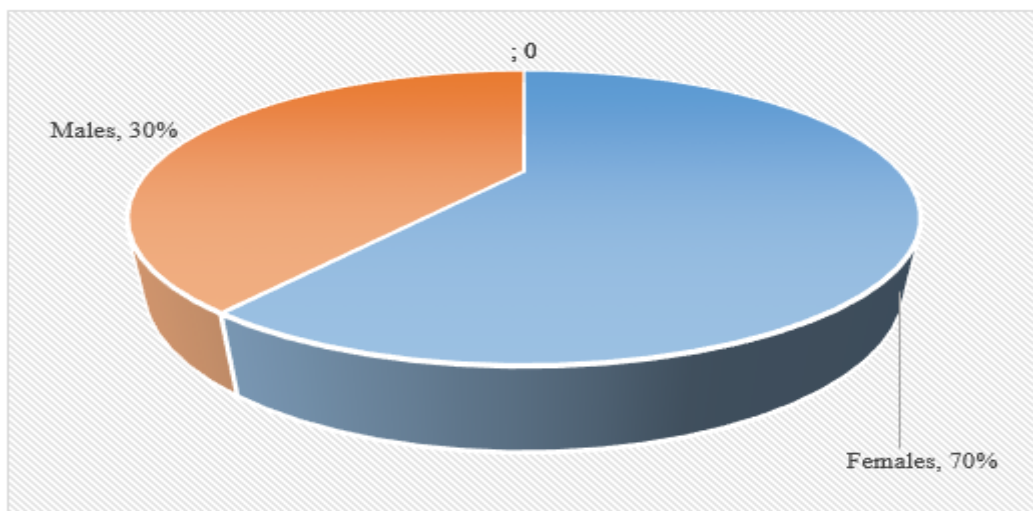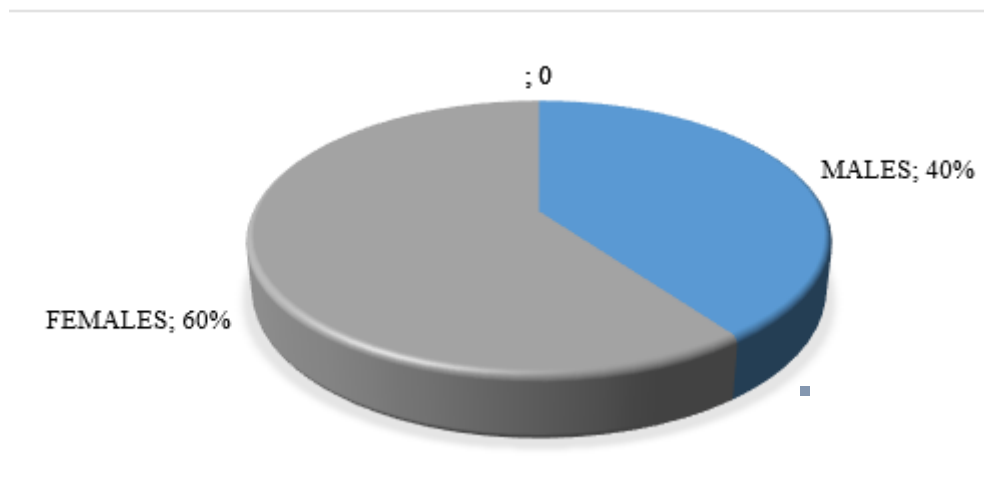

Figure 1: Distribution of adult participants by gender

Figure 1 above shows that the majority, 41 out of 58 which is 70% of adult participants, were ;females, while only 17 out of 58 which is 30% of the adult participants, were males. The gender composition signifies that there were more females than males in this study. The adult participants that were interviewed were 10 out of 58 (17%), while 48 out of 58 (83%) filled in the questionnaires.
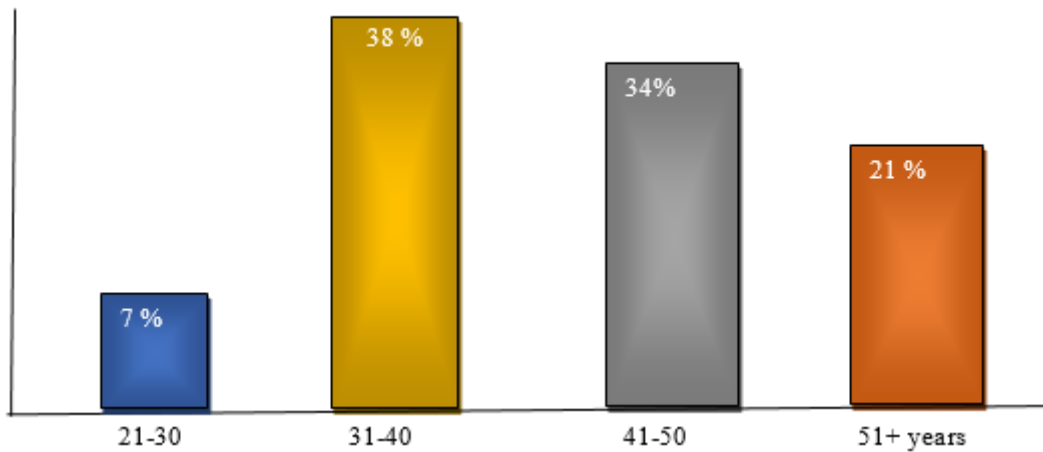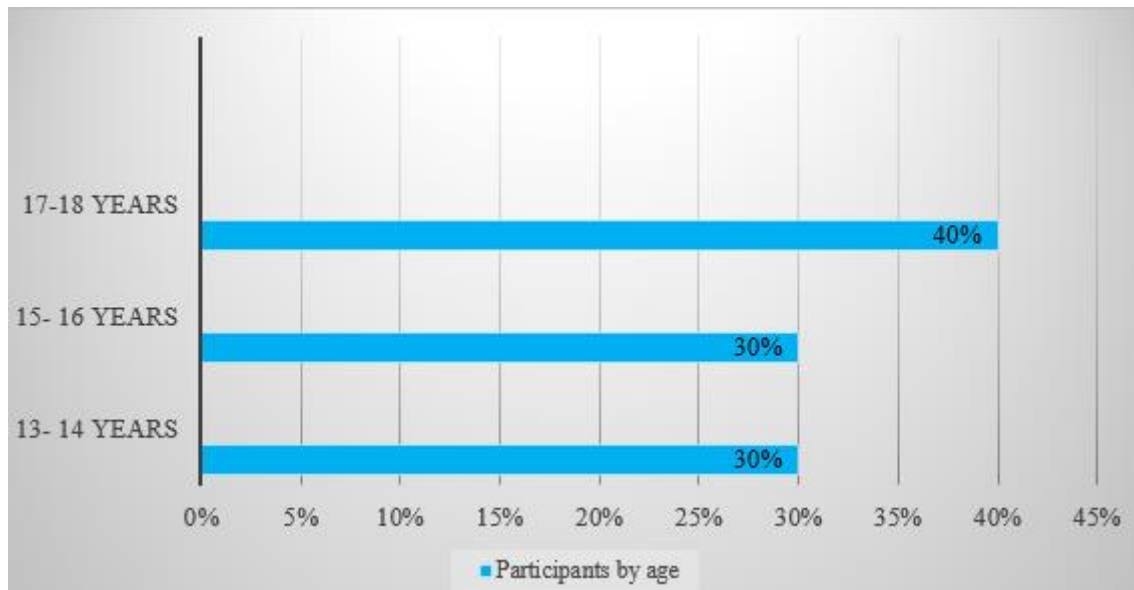
Figure 2: Distribution of pupil participants by gender

Figure 2 above shows that the majority, 18 out of 30 which is 60% of pupil participants, were females, while only 12 out of 30 which is 40% of the pupil participants, were males. Each of the 3 focus groups consisted of 10 pupils, that is, 4 boys and 6 girls. The gender composition signifies that there were more females than males in this study.
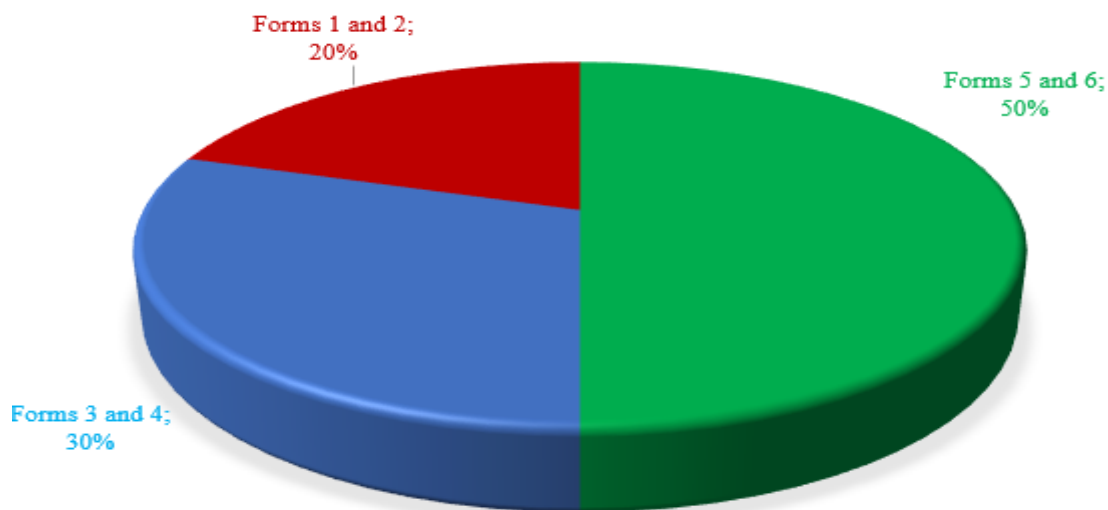

Figure 3: Distribution of adult participants by age

According to Figure 3 above, the majority 22 out of 58 of the adult participants which is, 38% were in the age group range of 31 to 40 years. The age ranges of 41 to 50, 51+ and 21 to 30 years was 34%, 21% and 7% respectively. The above information reflects that, the age ranges 31 to 40 and 41 to 50 years were the ones more involved in the facilitation of CA. These two age ranges contributed more information during the interviews and filling in of the questionnaires according to their numbers that were higher as compared to the age group range of 21 to 30 years and 51 + years.

Figure 4: Distribution of pupil participants by age

According to Figure 4 above, 12 out of 30 pupil participants, which is 40%, were in the age group range of 17 to 18 years, and have contributed more information during the Focus Group Discussion.

Figure 4: Distribution of pupil participants by Form

Focus Group Discussions were carried out in 3 schools and these involved a total of 30 pupils. There were more pupil participants in Forms 5 and 6 in the Focus Group Discussions conducted as indicted in Figure 5 above. This was so because of the assumption that, they had participated in the CA which was done and then abandoned in 2017. The 2 Forms also contributed more information during the Focus Group discussions according to their number which was higher when compared to the other 4, that is, Forms 1 & 2 and 3 & 4. Pupils in Forms 5 & 6, Forms 3 & 4, and Forms 1 & 2 were 50%, 30% and 20% respectively.

5.2 The current status of CA in secondary schools (Implementation)

The research question number one sought to analyse the current status of CA practices at secondary school level. The views of School Heads (SH), Deputy Heads (DH), Senior Masters (Snr. M) and Senior Women (Snr. W), Heads of Department HOD, teachers, pupils, District Schools Inspectors (DSIs) and the Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council (ZIMSEC) managers, on the implementation of CA as the first theme are discussed under the following subthemes:

- Definition of CA;
- Policy documents that guide teachers in the implementation of CA;
- Current type of assessment;
- Preferred type of assessment;
- Reasons for selecting both summative and CA;
- CA as a measure of knowledge;
- CA as a measure of skills;
- CA as a measure of attitudes, attributes, abilities and traits and
- CA as a measure of values of (Ubuntu/ Unhu).

5.3 Definition of CA

Participants believed that CA is a robust process that, if properly implemented and managed, has the potential to improve the quality of secondary education. Tr. 4S1 said this, "…a process of gathering data, documenting usually in measurable terms, knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs with respect of individual pupil's outcomes." Focus Group Discussion One Pupil Three (FGD1 P3) concurred by saying, "…it is organising measurable data into interpretable forms, so as to obtain valid and reliable information about the level achievement." Deputy Head Secondary One (DHS1) echoed the same view and said:

A decision-making process about a pupil's performance is called assessment. It entails gathering and arranging data as proof of learning in order to assess the accomplishments of the pupils. It guides educational decision-making and aids teachers in determining whether pupils are performing to their potential and moving closer to the standards or levels of performance specified by the curriculum framework.

CA is viewed as a process rather than an event. "A method of acquiring information that is utilized to make educational judgments about a pupils, to give feedback on his or her progress, strengths, and weaknesses, to rate instructional effectiveness and curriculum appropriateness, and to inform policy," according to School Head Secondary Three's (SHS3's) definition of CA. ZRM defined CA as, "...the educational policy in which pupils are examined continuously by over most of the duration of their education." FGDP4 viewed CA as, "... a system of regular assessment of pupils' work throughout a course of study with the evaluation contributing to the overall results." The DSI2 summarised the meaning of CA by saying, "…it is an informative, process oriented, informal, internal, pupil- involved, and/ or self- referenced in nature." Since the process involves both facilitators and pupils, there is need to improve the quality of the facilitators and, then the quality of education is likely to improve.

Some participants who answered the questionnaire did not define CA but either gave a wrong answer or indicated that they did not know the definition. SHS1 indicated that, "CA in general is a prerequisite in the teaching and learning environment in every school where a given curriculum is being implemented." This is consistent with the opinion of [29] who claim that using daily, weekly, monthly, termly, or annual exercises, tests, and tasks, it is a way to formatively assess students' progress. The certification of each pupil under a school's care is one of its functions. According to [30], CA also becomes crucial for teachers to perform this role successfully. It gives teachers a way to discover how much their pupils have learned, how their behaviour has changed, and other aspects of their growth.

The HODS2 pointed out the fact that, "…it involves the deliberate effort of the teacher to measure the effect of the instructional process as well as the overall effect of school learning on the behaviour of pupils." SHS2 added that, "…it covers all aspects of school experience both within and outside the classroom and it covers the cognitive, the affective as well as the psychomotor aspects of learning." DSI5, defined CA as, "…the mechanism whereby the final grading of pupils in cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning systematically takes account of their performance during a given period of schooling." Teacher Two Secondary Three (Tr. 2S3) also emphasised that:

Teachers are more aware than ever before their part in the national initiative for competency-based curriculum innovation, which aims to integrate CA in assessment of the teaching and learning process. The old learning areas now feature new learning area platforms and new learning area contents.

The formalisation of CA as an integral part of the assessment process has also led to fundamental changes in the assessment system of pupil achievement, of which the same sentiments are echoed by [29] in Nigeria. The educators in general felt that educational assessment provided the necessary feedback teachers require to minimise the outcome of educational efforts. DSI3 said, "… teachers have always made judgments about the progress of their pupils from the assessment, as these are part of the learning process." It also came out that, "…the assessment of pupil performance provided the objective evidence necessary in the decision making process." Tr.3S2 stated that, "… good measurement resulting in accurate data is the foundation of the sound decision making."

These sentiments affirm the proposal by [6] that a competency-based curriculum framework for primary and secondary education would be the best way to improve learning, support the conclusions of this study on the definition of CA. It lists three evaluation models: assessment as learning (CA), assessment of learning (summative assessment), and evaluation (formative evaluation). Its purpose is to interpret the data that pupils and their teachers have used to support their learning. Pupils who participate in CA continuously evaluate their own learning. In order to achieve a deeper understanding, pupils reflect on and modify their own learning.

The robust CA process has the potential to raise the standard of secondary school instruction when properly applied and managed. Most participants agreed that CA is the process of making ongoing decisions about a pupil's performance as well as gathering and organizing information on learning evidence to determine what pupils have accomplished. It assists teachers in determining whether pupils are performing to their potential as described in the Competency-Based Curriculum Framework and achieving the required achievements. It also informs

educational decision-making. It helps you determine if you are progressing towards a level or standard. Continuous evaluation is thought of as a process rather than an event. In accordance with this educational policy, pupils are continuously tested for the majority of their academic careers. It was perceived as educational, process-oriented, informal, internal, learning, and/or having a self-referential quality by some participants.

The curriculum framework [8] provides that assessment in our school system should include summative evaluation and CA. The participants were aware of the fact that educational assessment and evaluation shall be liberalised by their being based in part on a given percentage on summative assessment and the remaining percentage on CA of the progress of the individual pupil, depending on the different pathways. One short summative evaluation, which was used before the establishment of the CA procedure of evaluation, received harsh criticism. [31] notes that it constituted a threat to pupils who saw examinations as the sole determinant of their future academic and career destinies. Teachers could not introduce innovation both in the teaching and evaluation of their pupils, partly because of the straight jacket syllabus followed by the external examining bodies. Therefore, the CA system of evaluation was aimed at correcting the anomalies in the one- short summative evaluation. The CA should involve a formal assessment of pupil's affective characteristics and motivation, in which they will need to demonstrate their commitment to tasks over time, their workforce readiness and their competence in team or group performance context [31].

Based on this definition, CA uses a number of tools. By assessing different elements of learning, we can capture the full range of pupil performance, not just thought process approaches. Teachers and administrators have time to assess pupil progress and resolve issues. The definition of CA is confirmed by many scholars, among them, [32,33,34].

5.4 Policy documents guiding facilitators in the implementation of CA

The majority of participants identified CA's guiding document as [8]. DSI1 explained that, "There is only one chapter in the Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education on assessment and learning. The CA Framework is being crafted by the Ministry, working with ZIMSEC and this is work in progress." SHS1 indicated that, "…at the moment we are using the new Curriculum Framework and the Ministry based syllabi where we draw our own school based syllabi at departmental level."

All the participants that were interviewed, and the pupils who were involved in the focus group said that they had not seen an Assessment Framework [7] so far in the system, SHS2 said that, "…in 2017 when CA was being implemented in secondary schools, there was no framework which had been distributed to the secondary schools or given to the implementers." SHS3 said, "…the assessment is supposed to be both formative and summative. The Curriculum Framework for Primary and secondary Education 2015 - 2022 emphasises CA profiling by nurturing and recording the pupils' abilities and competences from infant level to secondary level." The policy document which had the second highest number of participants indicating that it guides facilitators during the implementation of CA was [35]. DSI4 pointed out that:

One of the professional skills and abilities expected to be known by teachers is pupil assessment. The teacher

should have the ability to conduct formative and summative assessment, provide the pupils with regular feedback, and mark accurately and constructively following the relevant policy documents.

Pupils with special needs also need to use aids during assessment. The various policy documents that guide teachers in conducting CA varied. A participant emphasised that from 2015 he has very limited content for CA in the 2022 curriculum framework. All surveyed participants indicated that the assessment framework was not visible within the MoPSE system. The findings of this study on policy documents to guide facilitators in conducting CA are endorsed by South Africa's Ministry of National Basic Education. The Ministry expects all teachers to assess pupils according to policy guidelines. Several researchers have argued that various factors impede teachers' evaluation practices in the classroom, including [36,37,38].

Regarding evaluation policies and procedures, the National Testing and Evaluation Agency (DNEA) report cited in [39] noted that evaluation-related deficiencies also included a lack of understanding of policy guidance by some policy implementers. indicated that [8] states that assessment of each learning area should reflect the pupil's achievement of goals, particularly in terms of knowledge, concepts, and skills, and should take into account the full range of pupil competences. One of the features of the revised framework is that it incorporates a hybrid evaluation model of continuous and summative evaluation. A holistic approach also applies to assessment. The syllabus outlines the weighted contributions of these assessment methods and aligns them with the most recent Curriculum Framework 2015–2022. Additionally, it considers various needs like various talents, skills, gender, disabilities, socioeconomic status, and vulnerabilities.

5.5 Current type of assessment

Most of the participants in the different learning area platforms selected summative assessment as the type of assessment that is currently in use in different learning area platforms in their schools. Different reasons for the selection were given. The pupils in the Focus Group Discussion had to be guided on what summative assessment was. FGD2L9 said, "…the current type of assessment which is done in form of examinations at the end of the term, year, after Form 4 and also after Form 6." DHS2 echoed the same sentiments by defining the current type of assessment being implemented in secondary schools as:

"Summative assessment which is currently being implemented in secondary schools is assessment of learning which is administered at the end of a learning period in the form of public examination in all learning area platforms. There is also standardised CA which is being implemented in practical subjects"

The participants had different reasons for selecting summative assessment as the current type of assessment being implemented as follows: "Fast in testing, not too demanding…" Senior Master Secondary One (SMS2); "Effective and cost effective…" (HOD3S3); "Reflects final ability…" Senior Woman Secondary One (SWS1); "Maintains high standard of work…" (Tr. 6S3); "Less expensive in hard economic conditions…" (Tr.4S1); "Conducive when considering the high teacher pupil ratio in schools…" (Tr. 6S2); "Caters for pupils in different parts of the country including rural schools…" (HOD4S2). Tr. 1S3 highlighted that "…the reasons for selecting summative assessment as the current type of assessment is that skills take more time to mature and summative assessment

allows the pupils to grasp concepts without any pressure." On current type of assessment SHS1 indicated that:

"As a school at the moment we use to some extent formative and then mainly summative but we would love to have CA especially for our practical learning areas such as Food Technology and Design, Wood Technology and Design, Art Technology and Design and Textile Technology and Design"

Summative assessment which was identified by participants as the current type of assessment being implemented in secondary schools is assessment of learning. In all learning area platforms, it is given at the conclusion of a learning period in the form of a public examination. The participants took note of the common CA that was applied to the platform for the Design and Technology learning areas, which also included the learning areas of Wood Technology and Design, Metal Technology and Design, Food Technology and Design, Building Technology and Design, Textile Technology and Design, Art, and Agriculture.

Grades and periodic recording of grades are a series of 'minimal' assessments rather than CAs [40]. Decisions made within and by schools affect pupil prospects and opportunities. More important are national examinations and test scores [41]. [42] argues that assessment is in the form of an exam that emphasises recall of a wide range of information systems, particularly the very specific ones used by teachers that require pupils to retrieve information only by retrieving information from lectures and passing textbooks. The views cited above are summative in nature and confirm that the current type of assessment practiced in most areas of learning is not CA.

5.6 Preferred type of assessment

The majority of the participants in the different learning area platforms selected CA as their preferred type of assessment. One SHS2 said "…it is a learning experience or system for assessment where quality of pupils is judged by various pieces of work during a course throughout their schooling years." The different reasons that came from participants who selected CA as their preferred type of assessment are indicated below: CA helps to identify strengths and weaknesses through self- evaluation with the assistance of the teacher. "It gives feedback early enough and correct where there is room for improvement before the final mark…" (HODS1); "Best for practical subjects through hands on experiences and where psychomotor skills are developed…" (Tr. 2S3); "Concepts and principles require regular assessment so that pupils revise and study the syllabus topics not effectively covered in summative assessment…" (SMS2); "Allows teachers to assess a broad range of skills and deepens pupil engagement…" (Tr. 8S2); "The pupil may need to consult in topics linked to culture and specialist areas thereby preventing copying…" (HODS3).

The preferred type of assessment that was selected by participants in different learning area platforms was CA. They indicated that, this type of assessment helped to identify strengths and weaknesses through self-evaluation with the assistance of the teacher while checking progress and making corrective measures since assessment takes place during teaching and learning. The participants also indicated that, it also gave early feedback and enough time to correct where there had been misrepresentation which needed to be corrected and where there was room for improvement before the final mark. This is consistent with the findings of [43], who discovered that teachers with a strong conviction in their superior personal and instructional effectiveness utilized CA more effectively

than their self-assured peers. According to [42], evaluation in the student-centred learning approach should be used to promote independent learning and critical thinking rather than just rating pupils' performance and upholding academic standards.

The different participants gave the following comments on CA as their preferred type of assessment. "CA gives a true reflection of the pupils' record rather than summative assessment where the pupil may be lucky to memorise information" (HODS3); "Pupils' history is recorded and these records can be used anytime" (DHS3); "It reduces examination stress for pupils" (Tr. 1S3); "There is allocation for more learning time as learning is extended to outside the school environment and also when they are hot seating. Pupils learn and are assisted during the time when they are off session" (SH, S1); "It avoids cramming by pupils and encourage knowledge of subject content helping pupils develop holistically" (FGDL5); "It gives pupils time to work on their CALAs and addresses issues of health for pupils who perform badly due to health issues " (HODS1).

The fact that CA is typically completed for a variety of reasons and that it provides insight into the amount of knowledge a student has attained also emerged from the participants. HODS3, noted that, "… pupils are assessed with a view of finding out the extent of their knowledge, understanding and skills they have learnt." He went further to include attitudes, attributes and values which among, others, take the form of profiling, portfolio, rubrics, performance- based, task or project-based assessment, pupil self-assessment, peer assessment, pupils response system, and combine it with the public examination driven system, that is summative based. ZIMSEC Assistant Regional Manager said the following reasons why he preferred CA as the better type of assessment:

To obtain a truer picture of the pupil's ability than would be obtained from a single assessment; To provide a continuous record of the pupil's physical, social and personal qualities; To serve as a monitoring device giving feedback to the pupils about the effectiveness of his or her learning; To encourage teachers to implement the designed instruction objectives; To diagnose the strength and weakness of the individual pupils and to apply corrective actions when lack of progress is observed; To help the teacher guidance counsellor to give academics and psychological guidance to pupils as necessary.

The basic aim of the introduction of immediate examination was to compensate for the shortcomings of the conventional examination system, which was centred on the final examination. Of the various definitions of continuous evaluation already considered, continuous evaluation is an evaluation approach that involves the use of various evaluations. In addition to thinking processes, many other factors of learning are also involved, such as behaviours, personality traits, and manual dexterity that provide an individual's big picture. This is consistent with [44] that one of the benefits of continuous evaluation is that it is guidance-oriented. This is because we need to collect data over a longer period of time and provide more accurate data to teachers earlier, enough to change classes. It plays an important role in diagnosing and addressing pupil's weaknesses. SHS3 stated: "…another benefit of CA is that it is central to all assessment activities and more teachers participate in the overall assessment or grading of pupils. Tr. 5S1 states, "…for teachers, HODS3 argues, "…through this approach, teachers integrate assessment and assessment results into classroom practice." According to DSI5, "…teachers need to incorporate assessment. During instruction, assess assessment and discuss standards of good learning with peers, parents, pupils and pupils." ZIMSEC Regional Manager (ZRM1) indicated that:

"CA is advantageous to the pupil because it reveals the ability of the pupil early enough to make necessary adjustment for improved performance on the part of the teacher. CA enables them to assess the pupils early and this will help them to integrate the feedback for improved instructional techniques for the benefit of the pupil"

Participants mentioned that, pupils become more serious about their school work when they continuously prepare for examinations and keep focused to improve performance. Their actual capacity for producing high-quality outcomes can be evaluated all year long. Focusing on the implementation of CA and the competency-based curriculum, there was a greater sense of inclusivity. If done correctly, it might raise educational standards. [6] support the findings of this study regarding the preferred type of assessment by stating that pupils must be exposed to inclusive and comprehensive assessment (CA) across a variety of learning domains, including the disciplines of science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM). They also contributed that, these should be informed by knowledge of history, culture and the geography of Zimbabwe and the world of at large. Content knowledge should be mastered at the same time be related to practice [6].

5.7 Reasons for selecting both Summative and CA

Considering the strengths and weaknesses from both types of assessment, the participants gave the reasons why they preferred to use both types during the teaching and learning process. According to the HOD5S2 "… there was need to use both types of assessment for effectiveness as this would allow close monitoring and evaluation." The other HOD4S1 said:

In practical learning areas where pupils develop and display skills and integrate learning with real life situations in practical terms, research and summative aspects, that is, theory and its application are necessary. Both teachers and pupils check continuous progress through working on given tasks throughout the whole process, then write examinations at the end. Everyone can have enough time for practice and to grasp concepts that they might have lost in time of illness. Course work marks, boost the pupil's final mark and this helps them focus during the learning process and make room for modification.

The foregoing contributions were echoed by DSI4 who said, "…skills acquired over a long time can contribute to positive attitude towards a particular learning area. The future of pupils is not determined in a day and pupils should be assessed both continuously in a relaxed environment and also in an examination set up." SMS1 added the following reasons:

"One type of assessment complements the weaknesses of the other in order to enforce knowledge retention. There is high level of inclusiveness and pupils are given a chance to specialise. This also helps in assessing pupils that may have psychological challenges or all pupils with special needs"

Participants viewed summative assessment, which gauges student performance at the conclusion of a course for the purposes of grading, placement, selection, and system performance, as equally important, despite the fact that it cannot be used in isolation without CA. Utilizing strategies that produce a comprehensive understanding of learning should improve the emphasis on knowledge assessment and fact-recitation. SHS1 stated:

"CA in my view enhances hands on approach in the learning process of all the pupils. It helps also to correct pupils early in the learning process. It ensures fair grading of pupils. Sometimes when the pupil comes to school sick and performs badly in a summative examination he/she is disadvantaged. In CA the pupil works at his/her healthy condition. This gives an accurate and honest assessment on all pupils"

The majority of the participants in the different learning area platforms selected both summative and CA for use by secondary schools in assessment during the implementation of the competency based curriculum. It was apparent from the responses that one type of assessment complemented the weaknesses of the other in order to enforce knowledge retention. There was high level of inclusiveness and pupils were given a chance to specialise. This also helped in assessing pupils that may have psychological challenges or all pupils including those with special needs. Snr. MS3 said, "Pupils become more serious about their school work when they continuously prepare for examinations and keep focused to improve performance. Their actual ability can be checked throughout the year towards production of good final results." He went on to say, "The teacher can determine the next step in teaching and improve teaching techniques and aids. It also helps in checking progress and making corrective measure."

CA helps to identify pupils' strengths and weaknesses since assessment takes place during teaching and learning. Tr. 2S1 added by mentioning that, "Different pupil activities are given continuously to pupils such that they work to improve specific criteria within a progressive time frame without relying on examinations only." Tr. 4S2 pointed out that, "Pupils are assessed in both skills and knowledge required and these can be used by pupils to generate income in the future. Pupils are evaluated in order to determine the level of their acquired knowledge, comprehension, and abilities. The participants all agreed that skills, which are defined as the capacity and aptitude earned through conscious, methodical, and prolonged effort to successfully carry out complex tasks or job functions, should also be regularly evaluated.

Ratings are referred to as discovery points that need to be repeatedly driven home. Following the exam, those who have mastered the requisite abilities advance, while those who made numerous mistakes are retaught. Each common mistake should be included in a separate test. Questions that did not work in the previous test should be repeated, but done differently. The results of this study justifying functional assessment are supported by [45] for the following reasons: To decide if you need to change your learning method; to find out if children have learning disabilities; To find out if teaching can help; To help children or be helped in their learning; prepare teachers for discussions with parents, other teachers and members of the community; To get to know the pupil better; Prepare teachers to determine if are ready to move on to other topics, skills and concepts and; To find out if the pupil is ready for the next grade.

The reasons for choosing both summative and continuous evaluation are identified by [34] who points out that CA is an integral part of the educational process and, when implemented properly, has more benefits than drawbacks. It puts the acquisition of Ubuntu/Unhu knowledge, skills, attitudes, attributes, abilities, characteristics and values at the centre of all performance evaluation activities. This encourages more teachers to participate in the overall assessment or grading of pupils. [42] points out that CA aims to examine how well a pupil has mastered a learning skill, but also takes into account the child's individual social development. A major benefit of CA is

that it provides a way to accommodate diverse pupils in large classes. This standardises the assessment process in schools and allows for ongoing in-service training to provide you with various educational and learning materials, maintain paper records, facilitate your transmission, and for other reasons.

Reference [46]'s paper describes a continuous evaluation study of European teacher practices and several common features emerge from these studies, suggesting that poor practices should be eliminated. It has been observed that the evaluation function is over-emphasised and the learning function is under-estimated [47]. There is growing criticism in the field of pedagogy that high risk examinations have a negative impact on pupils in schools and that examinations should be minimised if CA is well conducted in schools [33]. Historically, the focus of assessment has been holistic. In the 20th century, instructional pedagogy focused on what was assessed, often determined what and how to teach. Instead of viewing assessments as a means of measuring learning outcomes, they have been abused to shape curricula and their teaching [45]. [33,45] support the fact that, there should be a balance between summative and CA. They also confirm that the rationale of this shift to embrace CA in the education system, is to ensure that all pupil competences are examined.

6. Conclusion

In the current political climate, assessment is a crucial component of education reform. Each educational system's planning and implementation of an assessment policy must be specifically adapted to the needs of the local populace. In response to the demand for comprehensive assessment structures that enhance learning achievement, education policies have been forced to reiterate the significance of school-based CA in raising educational standards. With the goal of accommodating pupils' varied interests and aptitudes, a new trust was formed to expand the school curriculum and assessment. A thorough educational system that caters to the unique requirements of various nations, their citizens, and their aspirations was required. The research found out that assessment was pivotal in the teaching and learning process.

The curriculum reviews and assessment in Zimbabwe had been negatively impacted by a constrained fiscal environment caused by a global economic downturn. The 1999 Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training (CIET) had established the groundwork for institutionalizing the practice of routine curriculum review to direct educational provision, including assessment. The commission suggested a genuine paradigm shift away from exam-focused education and in the direction of one that places an emphasis on the development of exit competencies. Examinations have historically been used for accreditation and selection without formally including the school-based CA in the final examination. The results of the nationwide curriculum review consultation exercise were presented in [11]. The MoPSE observed that pupils do not have exit profiles packed with survival skills to merge with knowledge, attitudes, attributes, abilities, and traits, values that are based on the philosophy of (Ubuntu/Unhu), dispositions and national identity when they leave school at any level of schooling. The MoPSE policies and [8], which considered both formative and summative evaluation, were cited in the creation of the CA scheme. The misuse of the term "CA" may have an impact on the need for a variety of methods to assess pupils' progress [45]. The study examined the use of CA as an assessment technique that supports instruction and learning. Analysis was done on the degree of CA implementation success. CA has been confronted with challenges globally. The challenges faced by the competence-based curriculum implementers in this area of

assessment was ascertained. The lack of understanding of the various CAs and their detrimental effects on instruction and learning were covered. Additionally, various methods to lessen CA implementation difficulties were proposed.

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