

**THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT: A MODEL FOR
PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN WINDHOEK**

by

ISMAEL UISEB

Submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION: CURRICULUM STUDIES

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: DR. EC DU PLESSIS

MAY 2009

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents	Page
Declaration.....	5
Acknowledgements.....	6
Abstract.....	7
Glossary.....	9

CHAPTER 1

General introduction to the study

1. Introduction.....	11
2. Problem statement.....	12
2.1 Main problem.....	12
2.2 Sub-problems.....	12
3. Aims and significance of the study.....	13
4. The limitations.....	14
5. Research methods.....	15
6. Division of chapters.....	17
7. Summary.....	18

CHAPTER 2
Literature review

1. Introduction.....	19
2. Background to the study.....	19
3. Current Education System in Namibia.....	20
4. What is continuous assessment?.....	23
5. The significance of continuous assessment.....	26
6. The role of teachers in continuous assessment.....	28
7. Summary.....	31

CHAPTER 3
The research design

1. Introduction.....	33
2. Theoretical frameworks.....	33
3. Research design.....	34
4. Research methods.....	35
5. The population and sample.....	36
6. The research instruments.....	37
7. Data collection and analysis processes.....	38

8. Validity and reliability.....	40
9. Ethical aspects.....	42
10. Summary.....	44

CHAPTER 4

Presentation, analysis and interpretation of data

1. Introduction.....	46
2. The process of data collection.....	46
3. Presentation and analysis of data.....	47
4. Summary.....	60

CHAPTER 5

Findings, recommendations, and conclusion

1. Introduction.....	61
2. Findings.....	61
3. Recommendations.....	65
4. Limitations.....	74
5. Conclusion.....	75
Bibliography.....	77
Appendices.....	84

DECLARATION

The work contained in this study was completed by Ismael Uiseb at the University of South Africa from 2006 - 2009. This is the original work of the author, except where references are quoted and acknowledged. This work has not been, nor will be submitted for the award of a degree at any other university.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the principals of all ten schools and teachers for granting me permission to conduct research, and by assisting me with all the relevant information required in order to complete my study. Thank you all the teachers who opted to complete the questionnaires.

In particular, my sincere thanks go to my supervisor Dr. E.C du Plessis for excellent support, valued assistance and advice accorded to me during the course of this study. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Mr. Josaphat Shilongo for language editing this dissertation.

My greatest inspiration, my wife Roslyn, and my two daughters, #Khitago and Hatago, thank you for unwavering encouragement, understanding and love.

Thanks to God for granting me the serenity to accept things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.

I thank you all.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation could be viewed as being exploratory on the role that teachers play in continuous assessment in Windhoek primary schools.

The demand for new knowledge, skills and abilities necessitate the change in assessment of learning. The various literature that the researcher consulted indicate that not only Namibia, but many other countries worldwide have implemented continuous assessment methods in schools. The challenges and experiences with regard to continuous assessment in these countries are somehow different although there are also some commonalities. Thus, sharing and exchanging of views and ideas on continuous assessment among these countries is advisable. A deducible meaning of continuous assessment from the various literatures is that continuous assessment means any assessment event or activity in which there is a high level of interaction between the learner and the teacher who conducts the assessment. Thus, continuous assessment may be used solely for formative purposes but may also contribute in part or in whole to a summative decision. It became clear that all assessment practices reflect a number of assumptions relating to the nature of learning and teaching, and the purpose of assessment.

The researcher gained insight from the teachers themselves as participants through analysis of their textual responses. The research was primarily qualitative. Open-ended questions were used to gain a contextualised and comprehensive understanding of the teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding continuous assessment.

From this study, it transpires that an effective and transparent assessment policy is not only vital to the success of educational practice, but it can help to meet the aspirations contained in the prevailing

national education system of a country. The findings provide an alternative point of view from teacher-focussed research which is often conducted in Namibia.

The data analysis outlines the role teachers' play in continuous assessment in Windhoek primary schools. The researcher proposes concrete actions and programmes that could be embarked upon for the benefit of continuous assessment practice in schools.

GLOSSARY

Assessment of learners: is the process of gathering information about how learners are progressing in their learning. It gathers information about what learners know and can demonstrate as a result of their learning processes.

Assessment method: is the manner in which an assessment approach is to be done.

Basic competency: what a learner should know and be able to do as the outcome of teaching and learning.

Continuous assessment (CA): is assessment (both formal and informal) that is done on regular and continuous basis.

Evaluation of learners: is the process of making a judgement about the quality of a learner's performance using the information gathered during an assessment.

Examination: a formal assessment given at the end of the year which is comprehensive relative to the competencies covered in that year.

Formal continuous assessment: an assessment that is crafted with special thoughtfulness and care which is valid and reliable; which is made of all class learners; provides the learners with feedback on what they have learned; and enables the teacher to assign a letter grade to each learner.

Formative continuous assessment: any assessment made during the school year that is meant to improve learning and to help shape and direct the teaching-learning process.

Informal continuous assessment: informal continuous assessment consists of two types. The type which is used in the lower primary phase to assign letter grades and another type used in all Grades to provide the teacher and the learners with feedback on the effectiveness of the learning process.

Reliability: the degree of which assessment results are consistent.

Summative assessment: an assessment made at the end of the school year based on the cumulation of the progress and achievements of the learner through the year in given subject.

Test: a formal assessment that is limited to the competencies covered in one lesson.

Validity: the degree to which an assessment actually assesses what learners have learned in the course of their learning processes.

These definitions were paraphrased from: McTighe, J. and Ferrara, S. 1994. Performance-based assessment in the classroom. Pennsylvania Educational Leadership, 4-16.

CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1. Introduction

In this chapter the researcher provides a general introduction, problem formulation, aims, limitations, method of research, and lastly division of chapters.

This mini-dissertation focuses on the role of the teachers in continuous assessment in Windhoek primary schools. The researcher is not only interested in the quality and the value of curriculum, but also in the gathering of data to determine learner's success with the curriculum experience. The researcher's particular interest is vested in studying the prevailing assessment strategies and methods in schools.

This study was aimed at gathering data which would enable the educational planners to reason from evidence with regard to the role of teachers in continuous assessment process. Data gathering was done at schools, while various other relevant sources such as Ministerial Guidelines on continuous assessment and assessment forms were studied.

The researcher consulted various relevant literatures in order to broaden his horizon about the topic under discussion.

2. Problem statement

2.1 Main problem

How do teachers understand and use continuous assessment?

2.2 Sub-problems

a) What problems do teachers experience with continuous assessment method in the classrooms in Namibia? Problems that are experienced could be attributed to lack of necessary skills and competencies on the side of teachers to assess learning on a continuous basis.

b) What is the influence of the old traditional ways of assessment on the new assessment methods? After having informal discussion with few teachers, I realised that continuous assessment practice seems to hold obstacles for some teachers in Namibia. Especially for the older teachers who were used to old traditional ways of assessment for many years are struggling to adapt to continuous assessment strategies because they have to unlearn the old traditional ways of assessment and should get acquainted with continuous assessment methods.

There seems to be a strong influence of traditional assessment methods, which sometimes counteracts continuous assessment methods. It is a well known dictum that change always goes along with fear, resistance and insecurity. Hence, teachers' beliefs, knowledge, judgments and thoughts have profound effect on the decisions they make, which in turn determine to a large extent what learners learn in their classrooms.

3. Aims and significance of the study

As hinted earlier, this study aims to investigate the role of teachers in continuous assessment. Furthermore, the teachers' perception and understanding of continuous assessment practice is also being brought under spotlight. This study has the potential to identify strengths and weaknesses of continuous assessment practice, as well as paving the way to improve the guidelines and policies on continuous assessment practice in Namibian schools.

The Ministry of Education in Namibia promulgated guidelines for teachers aimed at improving continuous assessment in schools. Although critically important information is provided about continuous assessment, this information alone may be inadequate to have an impact on how effectively and efficiently the teachers implement continuous assessment practices in the classrooms. For example in South Africa, according to Vandeyar and Killen (2007), although the policy changes were aimed at redressing the past injustices in education provision some teachers still apply the same pedagogical practices they used a decade ago in the classrooms. This is unfortunately also the case in Namibia as well.

In the first instance, the information gathered would help to identify the possible shortcomings of the continuous assessment and how they could be overcome. Secondly, it might also help to identify strategies that might be embedded in teacher-training courses and teacher in-service training sessions aimed at empowering teachers to effectively implement continuous assessment methods.

Thirdly, the results of this study could also provide answers to the primary question of learning effectiveness: did the continuous assessment method assess the learning objectives?

Fourthly, the information yielded might help to identify choices and elements that might not be most effective with regard to continuous assessment, giving the educational planners the opportunity to revise assessment methods.

The educational planners could use the outcomes of this study to make policy decisions and use it to improve assessment strategies employed for learning assessment in Namibian schools. Thus, the findings and recommendations of this research might enable the educational planners to determine what the teachers are doing well and what they must improve with regard to continuous assessment practice.

The significance of this study is grounded in the hope that it might add to understanding of the role that teachers play in teaching and learning process with specific reference to continuous assessment practice. In the end, this could help to make informed decisions on critical areas of intervention that will most likely support the improvement of teaching and learning quality.

4. The limitations

The limitation of this research is that the findings might not be generalised in the whole country, because this study is conducted only at primary schools in Windhoek. However, there is a great potential for similar research to be conducted at full scale as it could provide answers to questions and concerns the researcher has alluded to earlier. There is

also a need to conduct this research nationwide provided necessary funding is made available.

5. Research methods

In order to answer the research questions, the researcher used a qualitative research method. This method is suitable for the education system in Namibia which is based on social constructivism. The social constructivist theory is trying to answer the question about how we come to know what we know (Bodner, 1986).

“Qualitative studies frequently allow a hypothesis to emerge after careful exploration, observation, or interaction” Stuter (2006:41). Taking into consideration the arguments of both Bodner and Stuter, the researcher believes that through discussions and interviews with others, in-depth and rich information and understanding on continuous assessment could be obtained.

The issues under investigation are both complex and sensitive because it involves teachers as human beings on one side, and the assessment method as an assessment tool on the other side. In such cases qualitative methods often provide the best opportunity for establishing the necessary rapport to allow for open and frank discussion. In support of aforesaid, Strauss and Corbin (1990) claim that qualitative methods can be used to understand better any phenomenon about which little is yet known.

Another view which supports the choice of a qualitative research is the following. According Borko et al (2007), it is affirmed that teacher educators have drawn on interpretive research to answer questions

about how teacher candidates make sense of learning to teach and manage the complexities of teaching and learning.

According to Sherman and Webb (1988:5) the aim of qualitative research is not verification of a predetermined idea, but discovery that might lead to new insights. This is precisely what the researcher intends to do as he undertook to explore the role of teachers in continuous assessment in Namibian schools. Ultimately, the researcher would like to find out how teachers perceive, conceptualise and understand continuous assessment.

The teachers in lower primary and upper primary school levels are the participants for this study. Ten primary schools in different suburbs of Windhoek are selected using the purposive random sampling method. The purposeful sampling method would allow choosing sample which is of interest to the study and which would illuminate the questions that require answers. According to Patton (2001:243), there are several different strategies for purposeful selection of information-rich cases. The logic of each strategy serves a particular purpose.

The data collection is done via questionnaires while analysing of the qualitative data obtained is done by means of descriptive or interpretive approaches. The basic purpose of data analysis is to examine the amount of data in various data sources for relationships, and to present the results in a clear and understandable manner. Various literature state that data analysis is a recursive process that begins during data collection; themes and patterns are developed inductively from the data and deductively from the conceptual framework. For John Seidel, one of the pioneers of Qualitative Data Analysis software, data analysis is composed of three parts: noticing things, collecting instances of these

things and thinking about these things
(http://www.quarc.de/ethnograph_e.html).

With the aim at making data analysis a systematic search for meaning, the researcher organised the data manually while the text responses are analysed, interpreted and presented in manageable data format.

6. Division of chapters

The chapters will be divided as follows:

Chapter 1: General introduction to the study

This chapter deals with general introduction, problem formulation, aims, limitations, research design and division of chapters.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter states theoretical background to the study.

Chapter 3: The research design

This chapter covers research design and gives brief explanation of the theory underpinning the methodology. Explanation of how the data are collected and analysed, and choice of participants are given. Issues of validity and reliability are also discussed.

Chapter 4: Presentation, analysis and interpretation of data

In this chapter the results of the research will be set out.

Chapter 5: Findings, recommendations and conclusion

This chapter provides summary, conclusions and recommendations.

7. Summary

This chapter indicates the roadmap for the envisaged study. It also cites general introduction to the topic under investigation, the problem statement, aims and significance of the study, limitations, and method of research. Lastly the division of the chapters are given.

With regard to the main problem of this study, it seems that some of the teachers experience problems with implementation of continuous assessment method. If rectifying measures are not put in place, the purpose and good intentions of continuous assessment method will be defeated. Eventually this will have far-reaching negative effects on the provision and attempts towards quality education in Namibia.

In the next chapter the researcher will do in-depth literature review on continuous assessment.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Introduction

This chapter provides the literature review of the relevant sources on assessment. In particular, reference to continuous assessment practices locally and internationally is made. Background information against which this study takes place is cited. Furthermore, a brief reflection is given on the current education system in Namibia and the resulting assessment practices. Explanation of continuous assessment and its significance are also discussed. In the last section, the role of teachers in continuous assessment practice is also alluded to.

2. Background to the study

Assessment has become a critical component of education in today's policy environment. According to Bryan and Clegg (2006) assessment is changing, driven by increased class size, changing curricula, and the need to support learners better. They further argue that the assessment regulations and external quality assurance demand constraining assessment options, driven by worries about standards, reliability, validity and plagiarism.

In the past decade, some clear trends have emerged in classroom assessment. According to McMillan (1997:10) there is a change from assessment that focuses on objective testing at the end of instruction to assessment during instruction to help teachers make moment-by-moment decisions. The "alternative assessment" which engages learners in learning and requires thinking skills, and thus conforms to the

cognitive theories of learning, is presented as the new trend in classroom assessment. In line with the above view, in Curriculum 2005, teachers are cautioned that they should not merely interpret continuous assessment as being the accumulation of a series of traditional test results. This implies that assessment should be aimed at knowledge, skills and attitudes.

This compels the teachers to ask themselves some questions before the assessment of learning. How many teachers really think about what they are trying to assess when they give learners a test? Don't they actually end up testing how well learners can memorise and uncritically return test papers to the learners?

The above given arguments could serve as a justifiable response to the question how and why we should change assessment strategies and methods. Is it perhaps not the prime time for us to be innovative and to change assessment techniques, methods, and instruments in order to conform to the current needs and demands?

3. Current Education System in Namibia and the resulting assessment practices

While we discuss the current education system in Namibia and the resulting assessment practices subsequently, it must always be kept in mind that teachers are the key players as the implementers of continuous assessment in the classrooms. They are the ones that would be able to know what it is and how one should go about assessing learners on a continuous basis.

Continuous assessment has been introduced in Namibian schools as part and parcel of the new education system in 1990 (Ministry of Education, 1999). It means that continuous assessment is being applied for the past 19 years in Namibian schools. Thus, when the Namibian teachers were initially exposed to this way of assessing learning, they had to unlearn the old traditional ways of assessing learning. The old traditional ways of assessment put much importance on the end-of-year examinations. End-of-year examinations were used to determine whether the learners have mastered the learning content of the entire year or not. End-of-year examinations were also used as a yardstick to decide whether learners have to proceed to the next grade or not. Teachers who were used to the old traditional ways of assessing learning seem to be reluctant to assume new roles and responsibilities that are required by the continuous assessment method.

The apparent reasons for this could be firstly, fear for the change, and secondly that the teachers are not ready and do not receive the necessary support that will help them to implement the continuous assessment methods effectively. Thirdly, teachers lack skills in test construction, administration and record-keeping of test marks. This might also be the reason why the teachers sometimes display apathy towards continuous assessment practice in schools.

Nitko (1995:321) states that any plan for continuous assessment is only as strong as the teacher's ability to use it appropriately. This illustrates that teachers are the key players as implementers of continuous assessment in the classrooms. They are entrusted with that delicate and indeed challenging task to ensure effective and efficient continuous assessment. This warrants an academic investigation into the role of teachers in continuous assessment.

In Namibia, the Ministry of Education, through the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED) in 1998, embarked upon a programme to reform and strengthen continuous assessment in schools. A policy and information guide is a result of this endeavour. The researcher is of opinion that continuous assessment is not detrimental to the Namibian education system, but the major problems of continuous assessment could be with the approaches and practical applications embedded into continuous assessment process.

In the Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP), the Ministry of Education and Culture in Namibia projected funding of N\$ 8.2 million for learner assessment. The challenge is that there are few mechanisms in place to identify areas of pedagogical difficulty, and current testing regimes are not well aligned with modern learning and pedagogical demands. The current testing regimes refer to the continuous assessment practice which is the most prevalent method applied in Namibian schools.

“The process for using continuous assessment as both a formative and summative assessment tool will be strengthen” (ETSIP 2007:23-24). The huge amount that is eye-marked for learner assessment as well as the suggestion made for improvement of assessment strategies obviously signals that there are pitfalls within the continuous assessment practice. However, investing in building teachers’ capacities is commendable and is more effective choice than investing in teacher-proof assessment tools or methods and increased testing that isolate skills from how they are used.

The guiding principle policies for Namibian Education, *Towards Education for All* of 1993 and *Broad Curriculum* of 1996, state that the main aim of assessment in basic education is to develop a reliable

picture of each individual learner's progress and level of achievement in relation to basic competencies as specified in the subject syllabuses (Ministry of Education, 1993 & 1996).

4. What is continuous assessment?

Before the deliberations on continuous assessment, it might be appropriate to provide explanation of the term "assessment". The term "assessment" is supposed to have originated in the medieval legal system where the "assessor" was the person who sat beside the judge and sifted evidence. Today the term is limited to the process of gathering data and fashioning it into interpretable form so that judgement can be made (<http://www.usc.edu/programs/cet/resources/assessment/>).

In many instances, the term assessment is sometimes used interchangeably with such concepts as evaluation, measurement, judging, testing and appraisal. Whatever the case, it is usually desirable that assessment be carried out through a variety of methods or procedures, mainly for purposes of cross-validation of outcomes.

Almost in all training and learning institutions, some kind of assessment is done. This accolades the importance and inevitability of assessment in the training and learning process. As teachers, trainers and educators, we are all involved in assessment at one or the other stage during the learning, teaching and training process. But are we all clear on how we assess, why we assess, when we assess, what we assess, and familiar with the various techniques we use? In response to some of these questions, Banta et al (1996:29) cite that successful assessment is an ongoing interactive process. In other words, assessment should be undertaken with the knowledge that this process will be constantly

updated and adapted to meet the changing needs of the institution, learners, teachers, and the public at large. A key question for assessment is not how to measure a learner's achievement, but what mechanisms are used to evaluate their learning.

As mentioned before, the continuous assessment practice is used and promoted in Namibian schools to direct and support educational practice and policy documents. Therefore the researcher would like to explain what continuous assessment entails.

The nature of continuous assessment is that it occurs at various times as part of instruction. It may occur following a lesson, usually following a topic and frequently occurs following a theme. The integration of continuous assessment with teaching is aimed at improving learning and to help shape and direct the teaching-learning process.

Continuous assessment means the assessment of learners over a period of time doing different tasks, and not just assessing them in a few hours or minutes on one day. Continuous assessment can be formal or informal. Formal continuous assessment consist of structured activities, for example, oral or written assignments, tests and examinations, projects, presentations, demonstration of skills, role-playing, and quizzes. Informal continuous assessment is less structured and normally done in a subjective way.

The researcher on the basis of the experience and knowledge gained in teacher training states that assessment of learning is a systematic, on-going, interactive process of monitoring learning in order to determine what teachers are doing well and what they must improve. Another way how the progress of learners can be gauged is by listening to a discussion group or observing the participation of individuals or groups. A record

book or file is needed to record progress by putting either a mark or a symbol next to the name of the learner.

Freiberg and Driscoll (1996) refer to assessment as a strategy for measuring knowledge, behaviour, performance or attitude while Jones (1996:12) regards assessment as a means that describes and classifies learner performance in tests, examinations, etc. In other words and as mentioned earlier, when applied to classroom situations, assessment may be regarded as all procedures of collecting and interpreting information, which the teacher may use to determine what is happening in the classroom such as learners' progress or achievement.

The above-mentioned argument essentially implies that an assessment method will be effective if it captures the knowledge and skills that learners possess. Furthermore, it also implies that the assessment instruments and activities should also be congruent with the learning goals and skills required of the learner throughout a program or course. The researcher agrees with the view that regardless of the method or type of an assessment mechanism applied, assessment is to inform both teaching and learning practices.

In addition to the aforementioned views, Gronlund (1998:23) regards validity and reliability as the important characteristics of a well-designed assessment procedure. The researcher shares the same opinion with Gronlund because assessment should be valid and reliable or otherwise it should be adapted to meet the desired goals.

After explaining what continuous assessment is, the researcher would like to ask the following question: what is not continuous assessment? A *Policy and Information Guide* of the Ministry of Education in Namibia (1999:10) provides the following answer: "End-of-year examinations are

not considered continuous assessments. An examination is a formal summative assessment given at the end of a school year. An end-of-year examination is primarily meant to provide information that can be used to judge whether a learner has learned the major objectives of a course after the course is completed. An examination is not primarily meant to give information to help shape and direct the teaching-learning process. It results in a grade to help determine promotion and is also used for certification at certain school leaving point.”

End-of-year examinations are not written off as useless, but notably, recognition is given that end-of-year examinations are useful for guiding following year’s teaching. The end-of-year examinations are also considered to be part of continuous assessment in the sense that its marks are used in calculation of final year marks.

5. The significance of continuous assessment

The main objective of continuous assessment is to obtain a reliable picture of the progress of the learner in terms of achieving the basic competencies as set out in the objectives of the syllabus as early as possible and to embark upon corrective measures if needed. By acting immediately when the learner is judged to be at a “point of divergence”, the teacher can pre-empt a conceptually costly meander. Thus, continuous assessment could become a valuable tool to reduce the failure rate among learners. Teachers would have a better follow-up of their learners’ work all year long. Teachers would also have time to undertake any revision of basic notions with learners.

Linchevski et al (1998:3) contend that assessment should aim at evaluating learners’ performance on core material or on topics or

concepts that are crucial for understanding subsequent topics in the curriculum, and should thus form an integral part of lesson planning.

Rayment (2006:52) states that in order for assessment to work effectively it must be a continuous process. According to Rayment there is little point awarding grades, scores, and praise if they don't mean anything to the learner. He further cites that assessment is an effective monitoring tool which helps learner to feel valued and that learning and achievement has a purpose.

While the researcher agrees with Rayment on the importance of continuous assessment, he begs to differ on the point that Rayment considered the usefulness of assessment only from the perspective of the learner. As alluded earlier, assessment serves valuable purposes for both teachers and learners because it provides information on learner progress, measures achievement of learning goals, provides learners with benchmarks of monitoring their progress and adjusting their learning strategies. In addition, it may be used as a process of improving the teaching, the curriculum, as well as the learning condition of learners. It is evident that assessment is not only of benefit to the learners, but it provides both the teacher and learner with ongoing feedback about teaching-learning process.

Assessment should be used to give feedback to learners and their parents of progress and achievements; to evaluate the teaching-learning process in order to inform teachers of problems that would ensue compensatory teaching; as well as for promotion purposes.

The advantage of continuous assessment is that it makes it possible to address qualities that are not assessed in examinations. Another positive

aspect of continuous assessment is that it could improve teacher-learner relationships because of individual monitoring and therefore teachers and learners could work closely. A variety of assessment methods are possible and thus wide range of abilities, skills and attitudes could be assessed through continuous assessment. As hinted earlier, increasingly assessment is being used not only to monitor learner achievement, but also to evaluate the competence of educators and the quality of educational systems.

Assessment has a special value and is a basic condition for effective learning, hence Cone and Foster (1991:653) state: 'good measurement resulting in accurate data is the foundation of sound decision-making'. In line with the aforementioned, Airasian (1997:17) maintains that whether assessment information helps teachers to make good decisions depends upon whether the assessment information collected is good. They further state that the collection of the right kind of evidence for decision making ensures validity of assessment.

6. The role of teachers in continuous assessment: nationally and internationally

The nature of continuous assessment put greater demands on the role of the teachers. He or she must have more initiative in clarifying teaching and learning objectives, greater objectivity in assessment, greater care and diligence in record keeping. Teachers are also required to give more tests, which mean more marking.

Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP) aims to promote quality in education and training outcomes by responding to key weaknesses in the education and training system in Namibia. It is stated

in ETSIP (2007:42), that there is criticism against the quality of teachers produced by the colleges of education and University of Namibia. It is alleged that there is lack of content, lack of appropriate methodologies, poor delivery of the programme and poor response to the needs of the schools. The danger is that the poor quality teachers might in turn result in poor assessment of learning in the classrooms.

Likewise, according to *Government Gazette no. 20844* of Department of Education (2000:11) in South Africa, teachers are expected to be assessors and learning area specialists. This justifies a paradigm shift among teachers regarding their roles as teachers in assessment and teaching methods, classroom management and learning content.

In line with the afore-stated, still in South Africa, studies show widespread lack of understanding among teachers of key issues such as learner-centred pedagogy and continuous assessment (CEPD, 2000:3). Lemmer (1999:117-119) contends that teaching for Curriculum 2005 should, among others, provide ongoing assessment of learners' skills in critical thinking, reasoning and action. This creates the impression that there are some challenges with the implementation of continuous method in South Africa as it is the case in Namibia as well.

From the above views of various researchers, it becomes increasingly clear that teachers both in Namibia and South Africa experience challenges with implementation of continuous assessment practice. However, the learning point from above-stated scenarios, both in Namibia and South Africa, is that attempts should not be made only to put appropriate assessment policies in place. However, the teachers' readiness and preparedness to implement these policies successfully in classrooms should also be taken into consideration. Hence, the role of

teachers in continuous assessment warrants to be put under magnifying glass.

It is fitting to consider the following study which has been conducted in an attempt to evaluate the knowledge that the teachers' possess about educational assessment by Plake and Impara (1997). This study involved 555 teachers from elementary, middle and high schools across the United States of America completed a 35 item multiple-choice test. The results of the national survey showed that, on average, the teachers scored 60%, which the researchers suggest, indicates the overall inadequacy of teachers assessment literacy. Given that there is a move for teachers to use more authentic assessment strategies in the classroom and that these strategies require even more knowledge of assessment, Plake and Impara recommend that much more attention be placed on developing teacher knowledge in this area.

Furthermore, the researcher discusses some of the positive aspects of continuous assessment practice. According to Puhl (1997), the concept of continuous assessment holds rich potential for teachers because it affirms high-order creative and critical thinking and it embraces cognitive, affective and behavioural outcomes. Puhl, from observation and own experiences, states that continuous assessment does not reduce the work of teachers but reduce instructional drudgery and increases professional satisfaction.

In contrast to the usefulness and positive projection of assessment in education and training as mentioned earlier, Dun et al (2004:12) reflect some of the drawbacks of assessment methods. Among others, they argue that the nature of specific assessment techniques is simply not suited to the kinds of assessment performance to which they are applied. For example, in South Africa, the emphasis on the outcomes could

narrow the continuous assessment process and would counteract the continuity and the attempts to make it part of every arena of educational development. This is so because outcomes-based education and training is a new phenomenon in South Africa. For outcomes-based education to succeed radically new forms of assessment are required in order to support the education system.

Another drawback of continuous assessment is its bureaucratic aspects. This is evident in situations where assessment is an instrument of policy, designed to preserve a predetermined standard elsewhere and so depersonalise the process of assessment.

In order to counteract some of abovementioned problems, the Department of Education in South Africa advocates in the “Green Paper” a criterion- referenced system of evaluation (Department of Education, 1998). This means that learners will be assessed in terms of learning outcomes and unit standards they have to achieve. This assessment dilemma reflects the tensions that arise in combining competency-led and performance-led pedagogic modes.

7. Summary

As a summary of this chapter, the researcher would like to comment on the assessment practices used in some of the countries. Namibia is not the only country where continuous assessment is used, but it is applied in many developing and developed countries. What is noticeable is that most countries are in the process of devising mechanisms to fine-tune assessing strategies and methods in order to suit their needs and circumstances. This is done to ensure quality educational outcomes.

With regard to assessment of learning, it is not the question of “what and why” that is the peculiar issue; the focus is on “how” the assessment methods should be streamlined in order to yield the desired outcomes. If a learner has not achieved a specified outcome after going through a learning process, the teaching strategy and/ or the learning activities need to be reconsidered. This in turn necessitates reconsideration of assessment strategies and methods that are being used. In Malawi, for example, the assessment strategies have been identified as impediment factors towards academic performance of the learners and when new assessing methods have been implemented the performance of the learners improved drastically.

A common element in the assessment practices of the countries which the researcher consulted is that assessing the progress and achievements of learners on a continuous basis is an integral part of the teaching and learning process.

In the following chapter the researcher embarks upon the research design of this study.

CHAPTER 3

THE RESEARCH DESIGN

1. Introduction

This chapter shed some light on the research design, which is a blueprint of the research activities that the researcher has carried out. It also provides an explanation and discussion of the research methods and techniques, sample size, sampling procedures, data collection and analysis processes.

The validity and reliability of the research activities as well the ethical aspects are also discussed. A sample of the letter that is used to secure permission to conduct the study at the schools as well as the questionnaire is included as appendices at the end of the entire study.

2. Theoretical framework

Cobb (1999) states that constructivist learning theory predicts that knowledge encoded from data by learners will be more flexible, transferable, and useful than knowledge encoded for them by experts and transmitted to them by a teacher or other delivery agent. Some constructivists regard assessment as authentic and interwoven with teaching. The teachers are also learners. In support of the afore-stated arguments, this study aims to solicit information and knowledge, in this case from the teachers themselves, which in turn will be useful and directly related to their own role as teachers in assessing learners. Hence, the data gathering, interpretation and analysing are based on constructivism.

Dana and Davis (1993) as quoted by Holloway (1999) share a concern about how teachers should assess this student-constructed knowledge. When learning occurs and learners give meaning to experiences in light of existing knowledge, assessment techniques must permit learners to express their personal understanding of concepts in ways that are uniquely theirs. Traditional classroom assessment is not sufficient. As a result, teachers must use other strategies to measure what learners know.

Constructivists advocate non-criterion forms of assessing learners. They also argue that traditional competitive assessment strategies may disable learning as the learner may be motivated to withhold knowledge that otherwise would be shared with other learners. Criterion-referenced tests are designed to evaluate the achievements of specifically stated lesson objectives while non-criterion forms don't single out specific criteria on which to base a judgement (Holloway, 1999).

Constructivist learning is the theoretical framework against which this study was done, because Namibian education policies are strongly based on social constructivism, critical theory, and democratic education. Dahlstrom (ed), 2000.

3. Research design

Research design is governed by the notion of "fitness for purpose" (Cohen and Manion, 2000:73). On the other hand, Trochim (2002:1) adds that research design also holds the research project together, as it shows how all the major parts of the research project, the samples or groups, measures, treatments or programmes, and methods of assignment work together to address the central research question.

The above-stated viewpoints emphasise that research design broadly conceived a clear focus on the research question, the purposes of the study, what information most appropriately will answer specific research questions, and which strategies are most effective for obtaining it.

4. Research methods

As mentioned already in chapter one, the qualitative research methods are used for this study. What makes this study suitable for qualitative research are the nature and the aim of the study, which calls for an inductive reasoning process to interpret the role of the teachers in a continuous assessment practice and to structure the meanings of the findings that can be derived from the data.

The term "qualitative research" encompasses a wide range of philosophical positions, methodological strategies, and analytical procedures. Morse (1994) has summarised the cognitive processes involved in qualitative research in a way that can help to better understand how the researcher's cognitive processes interact with qualitative data to bring about findings and generate new knowledge. Morse believes that all qualitative analysis, regardless of the specific approach, involves:

- *comprehending* the phenomenon under study,
- *synthesising* a portrait of the phenomenon that accounts for relations and linkages within its aspects,
- *theorising* about how and why these relations appear as they do,
- *recontextualising*, or putting the new knowledge about phenomena and relations back into the context of how others have articulated the evolving knowledge.

Although the form that each of these steps take may vary according to such factors as the research question, the researcher's orientation to the inquiry, or the setting and context of the study, this set of steps helps to depict a series of intellectual processes by which data in their raw form are considered, examined, and reformulated to become a research product.

5. The population and sample

There are more or less 25 primary schools in the City of Windhoek, the capital city of Namibia. The researcher selected randomly but also purposively 10 primary schools. Random sampling aims at providing equal chance to all schools of being selected, while purposive sampling allows the researcher to choose schools based on their locations and ability to provide required information for the study.

The teachers at these 10 schools are the participants who voluntarily completed the questionnaires which were used for this study. All these schools are situated in Windhoek region, but mostly in different suburbs. Efforts are made to select schools from all the different suburbs of Windhoek. These schools offer grades at lower primary levels from grades 1-4 and upper primary levels from grades 5-7. The schools represent approximately 40% of the primary schools in Windhoek; therefore the data collected would reflect a fairly adequate representation of primary schools in Windhoek. The participants are all teaching staff, including heads of departments, principals and deputy principals.

The exact size of the sample is determined by the number of the teachers who voluntarily committed themselves to complete the questionnaire.

The number of the teachers at these schools ranges between 25 and 35. The largest possible sample obtained from these schools is used.

The participating schools have been selected using the purposive random sampling method as mentioned earlier. Cognisance is taken of the critique that purposive sampling often coincides with convenience sampling, whereby the researcher chooses a sample that is easy to reach. Trochim (2002) argues that although purposive sampling is likely to yield the opinions of the target population, particular subgroups in the population may be overweighed, as they might be more readily accessible.

Although being used mostly in quantitative research paradigm, the researcher views purposive sampling as being suitable for this particular study because sampling is done bearing purpose of this study in mind. Not only the schools that are easy to reach are chosen, but those schools that would provide rich and adequate information required are chosen while choices of schools were from different suburbs of Windhoek in which schools are situated.

6. The research instruments

The main instrument for the data collection is a questionnaire. A questionnaire is a series of questions to be answered by the participants. This consists of a set of questions aimed at getting answers from different participants. Questionnaires can be made up of closed-ended and/or open-ended questions. On the one hand, a closed-ended questionnaire comprises questions where participants are required to select an answer from the list provided by the researcher. The responses for the closed-ended questions would be used to substantiate and cross-referencing on

the responses of the closed-ended questions. There is a uniform variety of answers to choose from. On the other hand, open-ended questionnaires are those questions where participants are required to generate their own answers.

A pilot study is carried out before the main study to test the clarity of items on the questionnaire. The information obtained is used to revise and review the items in the questionnaire. The school that is used for the pilot study is not part of the main study because the participants might develop preconceived ideas about the study.

7. Data collection and analysis processes

According to Swanepoel and Erasmus (2000:499), the choice of methods of data collection and the choice of data sources depend partly on the nature of the problem and the purpose of the investigation.

Qualitative data come in various forms. In many qualitative studies, the database consists of interview transcripts from open ended, focused, but exploratory interviews. However, there is no limit to what might possibly constitute a qualitative database, and increasingly there are more and more creative use of such sources as recorded observations (both video and participatory), focus groups, texts and documents, multi-media or public domain sources, policy manuals, photographs, and lay autobiographical accounts.

As mentioned earlier, the questionnaires will be used as primary data gathering instruments. Policy manual on continuous assessment and continuous assessment forms are used as secondary sources in order to substantiate the findings and interpretations.

Following are the two main strategic ways of analysing the qualitative data that are applied:

a) Constant comparative analysis

Many qualitative analytic strategies rely on a general approach called "constant comparative analysis". Originally developed for use in the grounded theory methodology of Glaser and Strauss (1967), which itself evolved out of the sociological theory of symbolic interactionism, this strategy involves taking one piece of data and comparing it with all others that may be similar or different in order to develop conceptualisations of the possible relations between various pieces of data. For example, by comparing the accounts of two different people who had a similar experience, a researcher might pose analytical questions like: why is this different from that and how are these two related? In many qualitative studies whose purpose it is to generate knowledge about common patterns and themes within human experience, this process continues with the comparison of each new interview or account until all have been compared with each other.

Constant comparative analysis permits the researcher to use some pre-existing or emergent theory against which to test all new pieces of data that are collected with regard to continuous assessment in schools.

b) Phenomenological approaches

A phenomenological approach is a qualitative method that is not oriented toward finding patterns and commonalities within human experience, but instead seeks to discover some of the underlying structure or essence of that experience through the intensive study of individual cases.

Phenomenological approaches would lead the researcher toward the depth and detail of continuous assessment practices locally and internationally that can be improved only through an exhaustive, systematic, and reflective study thereof.

The information that is obtained from questionnaires is interpreted described, discussed, and presented in the logical and manageable format. The data analysis is mainly of interpretive and descriptive nature.

8. Validity and reliability

This research design takes cognisance of the reliability and validity of the research and findings. It is of utmost importance to embed mechanisms in order to ensure validity and reliability in this research activity. If the validity and reliability is not ensured throughout a research activity, then it is just as good as not having started such an activity. All the efforts and time spent on invalid and unreliable research outcomes would then be in vain. Struwig and Stead (2001:143) argue in line with the researcher's views when they states that validity implies trustworthiness or credibility. In other words, if research lacks validity it is worthless.

According to Silverman (2000:175) in qualitative research, validity is another word for "truth" – there is no "golden key" to it, as all analysis is based on interpretation, all data have to be analysed, including contrary or deviant cases, and the whole analytical procedure has to be documented.

On the one hand, internal validity demonstrates that the explanation of a particular event, issue or set of data can be sustained by the data. In other words the findings must accurately describe the phenomena being researched. External validity, on the other hand, refers to the degree to which results can be generalised to the wider population, cases or situations (Cohen and Manion 2000:104-109).

Reliability can be differentiated from validity as the former measures the extent to which the research is really measuring what it says it is. A key question in research is the reliability of results. After all, to a large extent, a client is looking for independent, objective results and analysis that reflects reality. Most reputable agencies will provide raw data of all research findings, plus a clear precise description of the research methodology from sample selection, screening, questionnaires and other research aids used. The principle is that another market research agency should be able to reproduce the methodology exactly. If the research was reliable (and given that attitudes have not changed in the meantime!) the results should be substantively similar (<http://www.asiamarketresearch.com/glossary/reliability.htm>).

Joppe (2000:1) defines reliability as the extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable.

Besides what is mentioned above, the researcher also ensured reliability in questionnaire construction process in order to be clear to all the respondents and to avoid ambiguous questions. That is one of the reasons why pre-testing of the questionnaire was done.

In an attempt to ensure validity and reliability, the researcher abide by the following six rules of qualitative research given by Silverman (2000):

- Don't mistake a critique for a reasoned alternative.
- Avoid treating the actor's point of view as an explanation.
- Recognise that the phenomenon always escapes.
- Avoid choosing between all polar oppositions.
- Never appeal to a single element as an explanation.
- Understand the cultural forms through which truths are accomplished.

The researcher regards these rules as fundamental for this research activity because, if strictly adhered to, these rules would counteract concerns of spurious correlations in the first instance. Secondly, it would ensure that the claims made in relation to the data set are rendered credible and believable.

9. Ethical aspects

Throughout this study, the researcher made a deliberate effort to free himself from the prejudices, biases and sentiments that might impede objectivity and neutrality. The researcher remained cautious to advocate for certain values or ideas.

Although there is a great concern about whether there can be objective social research, the researcher is ethically bound to reflect information/data obtained in this research accurately. Thus, the findings are presented honestly and without distortion. The researcher attempted not to omit data that will affect the interpretation of findings.

Neither are the views twisted nor the experiences of participants changed.

This research adhered to the highest possible ethical and professional research code of conduct. The researcher would like to cite some ethical issues, which are taken into consideration for this study. The following are the ethical codes which the researcher compiled from various sources for the Research Methodology course at the University of South Africa (Uiseb I, 2005).

a) The right to privacy or non-participation: A person has the full right not to participate in the study at all. The right to privacy refers to the right of a participant in a study to keep from the public certain information for themselves.

b) The right to remain anonymous: All participants will have the right to remain anonymous. That is why they don't need to write their names on the questionnaires.

c) The right to confidentiality: The participants have the right to insist that data collected from them be treated with confidentiality. There is a built-in mechanism to protect the participants' confidentiality.

d) The right to expect researcher's responsibility: The participants have the right to insist that the researcher explain the findings of study to them after it is completed. The researcher would be at liberty to do this only on request of the participants.

e) Harm and risk: The researcher is considerate of what might this study do to hurt the people involved and how likely it is that such harm will

occur? If any, preventative mechanisms will be put in place prior the study.

f) Honesty and trust: What relationship does the researcher have with the people or participants used in the study? Does the researcher tell the truth? Attempts should be made to garner mutual trust between the researcher and the participants.

g) Ownership of data and analysis: There should be a clarity on ownership of the field notes and analyses; and issues of right to ownership of the dissertation and copyright. Does the ownership belong to the researcher, organisation/institution or sponsors? As an example in this regard, on the registration form, the attention of learners is drawn to the fact that by signing the form they cede to the University of South Africa the entire copyright, including the electronic rights, subsisting in any thesis they may complete for the degree concerned at the University unless, in exceptional circumstances, they apply for exemption from the cession of copyright.

10. Summary

This chapter dealt with the research design which clarifies the process of design in all its many fields. The general or particular issues of the research project covered in this chapter include research methods, the population and sample, research instruments, data collection and analysis processes, validity and reliability. The last section states how the ethical issues are addressed in the study. The questionnaire design and development process is also part of this chapter. However, the questionnaire forms part of the appendices at the end of the entire study and not part of this chapter.

In the next chapter, after administering questionnaires, the researcher presents, analyses and interprets the data.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

1. Introduction

This chapter deals with the presentation, analysis and interpretation of the data. The basic purpose of data analysis of this study was to examine the amount of data in the questionnaires for relationships and to present the results in a clear and understandable manner. The questionnaire data is interpreted and summarised in a manageable form by means of text analysis. In some instances brief discussions on the findings are given.

2. The process of data collection

First of all, the researcher forwarded the letter to the principals of participating schools requesting permission to administer the questionnaires at their schools. Before the actual administration of the questionnaire was done at the schools, the questionnaire was piloted at one school. Pre-testing of the questionnaires through a small pilot study enabled the researcher to discover unforeseen problems in the administration, coding and analysis of the questionnaire. As a result of pre-testing, the researcher revisited the questionnaire and rephrased some of the questions, brought some changes to the sequences of the questions, and corrected some grammatical errors. It also enabled the researcher to draw up a schedule of visits to the schools and to devise mechanisms for collecting the questionnaires from schools.

Part A of the questionnaire includes close-ended questions. However, the responses to close-ended questions are mainly used for the purpose of cross-referencing or cross-validation of the text responses of questions in

part B, which deals with the open-ended questions. The data analysis and interpretation are in the same order and sequence as the questionnaire.

At some schools, the principals handed out the questionnaires to the teachers for completion, but at other schools the researcher was asked to explain, administer the handing out and completion of the questionnaires himself. The collection of the questionnaires after completion was done by the researcher.

The process of data analysis was done, firstly, by categorising data on the questionnaire from 1-3. The first category of the data highlights the bibliographical information of the participants in this study. The second category represents data of the close-ended questions and the third category deals with the responses to open-ended questions.

3. Presentation and analysis of data

CATEGORY 1

As mentioned above, this category deals with the bibliographical information of the participants.

A combined total of 120 teachers from 10 primary schools in Windhoek Education Region participated voluntarily in this study. The teachers (participants) were all qualified to teach various subjects that are being offered at schools. This is evident from their teacher qualifications which included diplomas, higher teacher diplomas, and various degrees. They teach different subjects as prescribed for lower and upper primary levels by the Ministry of Education. The teaching experience of the teachers ranged between one and 20 years of continuous service.

There were 42 male teachers and 78 female teachers, thus gender balance was taken care of in this study. Notably, female teachers were the majority. The teaching staff from 10 different schools that participated in this exercise includes principals, deputy principals, heads of departments, resource teachers/subject teachers and teachers.

A total of 200 questions were given to the teachers. However, only 120 questionnaires were given back, which represents 60% of the questionnaires that were returned.

CATEGORY 2

This category deals with the responses to pre-set questions in part B of the questionnaire.

1. With this question the researcher wanted to find out when learners are being assessed.

As a popular response, 78 from 120 participants indicated that they assess learners during and after each lesson or topic as well at the end of the terms.

2. The participants were asked to indicate which assessment tasks they view as continuous assessment.

Ninety three participants have mentioned test items, end of the year examinations, learners' homework and projects as tools or instruments used for continuous assessment. Other ways of continuous assessment that some participants mentioned are classwork, worksheets, topic tasks, practical investigations,

presentations, quizzes and oral presentations. This indicates that assessment is a process involving multiple performances. The researcher is of the view that the more information teachers gather through variety of assessment tools the more clearer the picture teachers have about achievement or where gaps occur.

3. The participants were expected to indicate whether continuous assessment is useful in assessing competencies, abilities, learning, skills or all of them.

Eighty seven of the participants indicated that continuous assessment is useful in assessing competencies, abilities, learning and skills. In Curriculum 2005 it is stated that teachers should not merely interpret continuous assessment as being the accumulation of a series of traditional test results. It is suggested that assessment should, however, be aimed at knowledge, skills, attitudes and values (Curriculum 2005). Obviously, the teachers do conform to the above stated view in Curriculum 2005. It emerged that continuous assessment method can be a viable accountability and instructional tool that captures a range of learners' abilities.

4. The participants were asked to indicate whether continuous assessment fulfils a formative, summative or both purpose(s).

Thirteen participants were of the view that continuous assessment fulfils formative purpose while sixteen indicated summative purpose. The majority of the participants indicated that continuous assessment serves both purposes. The overall impression is that continuous assessment servers both formative and summative purposes.

5. The participants were asked to indicate whether it is desirable to design own test instruments for assessment or not.

Participants were divided almost equally on this question as 70 said yes while 50 indicated no. The researcher's wish is for them to substantiate their choices, as it is, the researcher is left in suspense. However, it is deducible that this calls for a debate whether it is right or wrong for teachers to devise own instruments for assessment. It also brings in question the need for standardised assessment sheets, and raises also concerns such as whether standardised assessment instruments be applied at school, regional or national levels or not.

The quality of assessments depends not only on the instrument itself but also on how it is applied. Therefore, the use of standardised instruments in assessing an individual situation might require a multidimensional approach of interpretation.

6. The researcher wanted to find out whether the participants agree or disagree with the statement that the test constructed by two teachers on the same topic might differ in terms of complexity.

There was a distinctive confirmation that test constructed by two teachers might differ in terms of complexity by 106 participants.

Tests and assessments are essential parts of the teaching and learning process. If a test is constructed well, it will effectively assess and enhance learners' learning and teachers' instruction. When poorly done, it can confuse and discourage learners, distort the curriculum, and hinder good instruction. In order to minimise differences in complexity of test constructed by two or more

teachers, standards for teacher competence in test construction and assessment might be adopted.

7. The researcher wanted to know from the participants whether the forms that are used for continuous assessment is standardised.

The overwhelming response was that the forms that are used for continuous assessment in primary schools are standardised as all the participants indicated in affirmation. Various researchers cited objections for standardised test for numerous reasons, but not for the use of standardised forms for assessment. Presumably, the use of standardised forms serves good purposes of uniformity, transparency and consistency, especially in cases where same subject is taught by two or more teachers. The researcher is of the view that standardised assessment tasks, tools and instruments should be implemented in Namibian schools in order to maintain consistency and authenticity. However, contrary to this view, Shepard et al (1996) caution that while authentic assessment techniques might be an element in creating more effective learning environments, they are not an answer in themselves and that the role of teachers in implementing change should not be underestimated.

8. Following was the response to the question whether participants need assistance from colleagues when assessing learners.

Eighteen participants responded that they need assistance, while 26 indicated that they need assistance only sometimes. Consultations among teachers have the potential for teachers to become more cohesive, to influence one another positively and to function effectively as a team. Thus, if teachers consult each other

because of collective and participatory decision-making processes on continuous assessment, then it is a very welcome gesture. However, if the teachers consult each other because of the problems encountered or lack of clear guidelines, then it obviously sketches a worrisome scenario.

9. The researcher wanted to know whether participants received training to conduct and implement continuous assessment in schools.

Thirty participants indicated that they did not receive training to conduct and implement continuous assessment in schools. It is not clear whether this was not even part of their teacher training programme. Notably the majority of the participants did receive training to conduct and implement continuous assessment in schools. However, the 25% of the participants who indicated that they did not receive training is quite a substantial number and could defeat the successful implementation of continuous assessment in schools.

10. The participants were asked whether they regard continuous assessment as the best strategy to assess learning and teaching.

Only 19 participants do not regard continuous assessment as the best strategy to assess learning and teaching. The reasons that are given for dislike of continuous assessment resemble mostly what has been stated as the disadvantages of the continuous assessment in chapter 2. One of the assertions was that it lacks transparency and is open for misuse from the side of teachers. The majority favour continuous assessment and deem it fit to assess learning and teaching.

CATEGORY 3

This category deals with the responses to pre-set questions in part C of the questionnaire.

1. On the question of what they think is “continuous assessment”, following was stated by some of the participants.

“Ongoing process of evaluation”; assessment on day-to-day basis”; “method used to measure learning and teaching on daily basis”. These were among others what transpired from the responses by the participants. The general impression is that the teachers know what continuous assessment is.

2. Following were given by the participants as reasons why they assess learners.

The core reasons for assessing learners are to: identify areas that require improvement; ascertain strong and weak areas in teaching and learning; check understanding and mastering of competencies; monitor progress; decide on promotion to next grade. Remarkably, very few participants mentioned that they assess learners in order to improve teaching. They seemed to think assessment is to test learning only. This is contrary to the views in some literature that the assessment is to assess both teaching and learning practices.

3. On the question of how learners are assessed, following came to fore.

It emerged that participants assess learners formally and informally; summatively and formatively. Participants also indicated various ways and tools for assessing learners such as exercises, quizzes, worksheets,

observation, activities, homework, oral work, investigations, projects, asking questions, tests, end of the term exams, etc. This coincides with the researcher's view, stated in chapter two, that is usually desirable that assessment be carried out through variety of methods or procedures, mainly for purposes of cross-validation of outcomes. Both summative and formative assessments are an integral part of information gathering.

The researcher is convinced that participants do apply variety of assessment instruments and tools when they assess learners. If assessment is done both formally and informally, then it is an indication that assessment is made integral part of every lesson and that it takes place even if the marks are not recorded on the marksheets. This is in line with the recommendation in ETSIP (2007) which states that the process for using continuous assessment both as a formative and summative assessment tool be strengthen. It is clear that continuous assessment techniques which allow flexibility in teaching and learning, yet could provide reliable information about learners' academic progress.

4. Participants were asked what they think is appropriate time to give feedback to learners.

The majority of 68 participants indicated that they give feedback to learners between 1-3 days after assessment. However, the researcher is of the opinion that feedback to learners be given as immediately as possible, if possible during the lesson. It is recommendable that, since feedback itself is a continuous process, it be given immediately to learners. In fact feedback should be given as frequently as possible and not only at end of the rotation. Feedback ought to support good assessment practice, therefore should be timely, direct, and confined to the quality of assessment decision-making.

5. On the question of how much continuous assessment weigh towards final promotional marks of a learner, the following information was gathered.

As per Ministerial regulations lower primary levels (Grade 1-4) are being assessed only continuously, meaning that continuous assessment weighs 100%. For the upper primary levels (Grade 5-7) the continuous assessment weighs 50%, while final exam constitute other 50%. The implication is that for Grades 1- 4 there are only informal assessment and no examinations. This situation might encourage learners to do their class work and homework throughout the year instead of concentrating their efforts on the days prior to mandatory final exams. In the case of Grades 5 – 7, the final mark consists of two parts, namely continuous assessment and final exam. The researcher could not determine whether participants have got counterproposals for alternative weighting scale for these promotional marks. None of the participants did indicate alternative weighting criteria or grading system. However, this does not rule out a debate on appropriateness of the regulations on weighting and grading system of the continuous assessment practice.

6. Griffith (2005:3) argues that teachers, no matter what it takes should note that fairness is a central aspect of assessment and any inherent unfairness in any assessment would be contradictory to the concept. It is against this background that the researchers wanted to know whether continuous assessment ensures the fairness of the assessment marks.

Forty five participants gave no answer. The motivation for no answer is: the learners copy from each other and from the textbooks. “Some teachers might give learners marks they don’t deserve”.

Sixty eight participants said yes. The motivation for yes answer is: all learners get same assessment tasks, variety of assessment instruments are used, it helps learners to pass the grade, and learners are assessed according to their abilities. Motivation for sometimes: “Depends on the honesty of the teacher”. Evidently there are loopholes or loose ends that needed to be tightened up in order to ensure fairness in allocation of continuous assessment mark to learners.

7. The participants were asked how many times they have attended in-service training to enable them to understand the continuous assessment policy.

The majority of the participants have attended in-service training on continuous assessment. However, what is eye-catching is that 27 participants indicated that they receive no training on continuous assessment. Some participants indicated that they received training on continuous assessment during their teacher training period, which indicates that continuous assessment is part of the teacher training curriculum.

8. As a follow-up on the previous question, the participants were asked whether the training sessions were sufficient in equipping them with skills to conduct continuous assessment successfully.

Fifty six of the participants indicated that training is sufficient. The researcher firstly focussed on the participants who indicated that the training sessions were insufficient and those who were not sure about the impact of the training sessions. Secondly, attention was paid to what participants suggested to make training sessions more meaningful. It becomes clear that the participants find training sessions as not being explicit and clear on the incorporation of end-of-the year trimester test.

One of the assertions was “teachers made up their own mark allocations”. Participants recommended more practical demonstrations during training sessions on how to allocate marks as well as regular follow-up training workshops.

9. The researcher wanted to know who is responsible to check the correctness and validity of continuous assessment marks.

According to the participants, the subject teachers, subject heads, grade heads, heads of departments and principals are tasked to ensure correctness and validity of continuous assessment marks. The question is whether they sometimes detect that fake and incorrect marks are allocated to learners and whether there are procedures stipulating how to deal with dishonest teachers.

10. On the question of how the Ministry of Education make sure teachers apply continuous assessment as per Ministerial Guidelines, following was mentioned by the participants.

It was pointed out that Ministerial Guidelines on Continuous Assessment is the only way how the Ministry is involved. Nine participants mentioned that subject advisors don't pay visits to schools. One participant mentioned that no subject advisor paid any visit to him for the past 12 years.

11. Following were indicated as shortcomings or problems experienced by the participants with the current continuous assessment practice.

Although there might be several beneficial spin-offs of the continuous assessment practice as evidenced by yes responses, there seems to be some shortcomings which the participants mentioned. Reportedly, there

are no clear guidelines on continuous assessment for Arts and Physical Education and the guidelines differs from school to school as each school uses its own discretion in applying Ministerial guidelines. In some instances, changes in Ministerial guidelines of continuous assessment as a result of curriculum review, do not reach all teachers. Some participants aired the view that the mark sheets of continuous assessment make provision only for one task and test, meaning it is up to the teachers to decide which of the many tests and tasks to be recorded on the mark sheets. Recording of continuous assessment marks takes time because all marks are recorded on the informal sheets and then re-entered on the formal mark sheet. Some participants reported that continuous assessment involves a lot of calculations and conversions of marks.

12. Following section deals with the participants' suggestions for the improvement of the continuous assessment practice.

The participants claim that there is a room for improvement on the continuous assessment practice as evidenced by the suggestions they gave. Follow-up visits to schools and conducting of impact assessments would help to ascertain whether teachers apply what has been taught at training workshops and whether they experience problems with the implementation of continuous assessment in classrooms.

“More columns are required on the continuous assessment forms for English”. It is not clear whether more columns are needed for more assessment activities or for some other purposes. It is also advised that continuous assessment could yield more positive results if there are fewer learners in the classes. “Teaching load is too much and leaves less time for assessment”, said one participant.

13. Following are few comments given by the participants.

“The weighting of continuous assessment should be lowered”.

“Inputs from the teachers should be assembled before changes on the guidelines for continuous assessment”

“Learners’ other talents (singing, debating, dancing, behaviour and participation) should be made part of continuous assessment”

“Only promotional subjects must be included in continuous assessment and not Religious and Moral Education, Arts and Physical Education”.

“Fail should be fail and not fail equals to transfer and then transfer equals to promotion to next grade”.

“Regular consultations are needed among teachers to exchange views on continuous assessment”

“More platforms are needed were policy guidelines and issues pertaining to continuous assessment are addressed by the teachers”.

These comments are more useful and suitable as suggestions to improve continuous assessment and also be used as recommendations.

The findings concur with the statement of Phul (2002) which states that continuous assessment does not reduce the work of teachers but reduce instructional drudgery and increases professional satisfaction. The findings reveal also that there might be inadequacy of teachers assessment literacy among some teachers, which coincides with the findings of Plake and Impara (1997) on the study conducted in the United States of America.

4. Summary

The research findings did not reveal common grounds in support of apathy of teachers towards a continuous assessment practice. However, the results highlight the significant role that teachers play in continuous assessment. The strengths and weaknesses of the continuous assessment practice emanated from the results of this study. Useful suggestions aimed at the improvement of CA practice for the benefit of educational practice are given in the next chapter. The researcher gained insight and understanding on the continuous assessment practice in Namibian primary schools. The data analysis, interpretation and presentation of the data put the researcher in a mandatory position to make recommendations that could be studied by scholars, teachers and education planners.

In this chapter five the researcher concludes the study by stating the findings and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

1. Introduction

In this last chapter, the researcher would like to state some concluding remarks on the findings and recommendations of the study conducted on the role of teachers in a continuous assessment practice in Windhoek primary schools. The recommendations are useful for Namibia and other countries where the continuous assessment practice is applied. The researcher also highlights some limitations and shares some experiences encountered during this study.

2. Findings

In chapter 2, the researcher has done literature review on continuous assessment. Some of the findings concur with cases stated in the literature review process. One such concurrence is the call to update and adapt assessment practices constantly to meet the changing needs of the societies.

As stated in chapter 3 the data in raw form have been considered and reformulated to become the research product. A questionnaire was used as the main instrument to collect data. Issues such as validity, reliability and ethics have been addressed throughout this study.

Data analysis revealed that continuous assessment has a great potential in contributing to the teaching and learning process. It gives relief to fear and anxiety attached to examinations. Continuous assessment is utilised for diagnostic and remedial purposes as well as for classification and

certification purposes. Thus, it makes assessment more comprehensive. Since it is continuous, it motivates the learners to study regularly as mentioned by one participant.

A continuous assessment practice evidently changes the role of teacher as an assessor to one who enters into dialogue with the learner being assessed to find out their current level of performance on any task and sharing with them possible ways in which that performance might be improved on a subsequent occasion. Thus, assessment and learning are seen as inextricably linked and not separate processes. Teachers should see assessment as a continuous and interactive process that measures the achievement of the learner, the quality of the learning and teaching experience and subject matter.

Undoubtedly the success of continuous assessment depends on teachers' will, abilities and skills. Continuous assessment calls for a mind shift for many teachers who were used to old traditional way of assessment. In this highly competitive knowledge-based era, teachers must nurture a continuous quest to learn, re-learn, and shift focus as frequently as necessary in order do their tasks more efficiently and effective with regard to classroom assessment.

In support of the afore-stated argument, Schoenfeld (1999:19) argues that if teacher is going to test for learners' understanding of something, then teachers need to have adequate characterisation of what it is they are assessing. Furthermore, teachers need to have a good idea of how performance on the assessment corresponds to their abilities which enables to them conduct assessments. The researcher concurs with this argument because it reflects the enormous task that teachers have to play in continuous assessment. First and foremost teachers have to

understand what the continuous assessment method is. Only then, teachers will be able to implement it correctly in their classrooms.

The researcher is not sure whether the assessment marks or assessment data collected are of value to all the teachers. The doubt still remains that some teachers assess learners just for the sake of assessment and don't use it towards improving teaching-learning process. The essence is that the measurement results must provide information to guide daily classroom practice if learners' performance is to improve. The teachers should use assessment data to measure and monitor individual and class group performance year to year as the learner progress from one grade to another.

The findings revealed that some teachers did not attend any training to conduct and implement in their classroom. It would be appreciated if teachers endeavour to pursue refresher courses and re-training on their own for their personal growth. However, the school authorities and governments should not overlook the importance of lifelong learning; they should spearhead the capacity building process by means of tailor-made in-service training programmes for the teachers. In addition, within constructivist theory, context is accorded significance, as it renders situations and events meaningful and relevant, and provides teachers as learners with the opportunity to construct new knowledge from authentic experience. Taking into consideration that continuous assessment is a new way of assessment for many teachers, the construction of new knowledge could be viewed as a combination of prior learning matched against new information, and readiness to learn. Constructivist theory opens up new perspectives, leading teachers to informed choices about what to accept and how to fit it into their existing knowledge, as well as what to reject.

In relation to the concern that teachers lack necessary skills and competencies to assess learning on a continuous basis, the results of this study could not confirm this. However, there seems to be a prevalent concern that teachers experience problems with continuous assessment method in the classrooms in Windhoek primary schools. The researcher inferred from the participants responses that the core challenges are mostly overcrowded classrooms that counteract proper assessment, lack of on-going training and support services from the Ministry of Education, lack of proper control of assessment marks, and the complications with the continuous assessment mark allocation, weighting and calculation.

There seems to be too much reliance on the teachers' honesty and thus validity and reliability of continuous assessment marks come into question. The above-stated conclusions tie closely with the concerns raised by Bryan and Clegg (2006) that the assessment regulations and external quality assurance demand constrain assessment options, driven by worries about standards, reliability, validity and plagiarism.

The researcher came to the conclusion that continuous assessment calls for depth of technique that most teachers' initial training and ensuing experiences have not provided for. The success of learning largely depend on the assessment systems that are employed on a continuous basis and for the final assessment of learners at the end of courses of study, at the end of completion of stages of learning and for certification purposes. The researcher is of the opinion that if the assessment and examination system does not reflect the paradigm shift as per "alternative assessment" or as strategies there will be no paradigm shift.

3. Recommendations

Following are some of the recommendations which the researcher would like to provide. These recommendations emerged as a result of this study and most of them emanated directly from the teachers' responses in the questionnaires. Deriving recommendations from the participants is supported by the following statement: "social enquiry is not assumed to result in the researcher's positivist statements based on right or wrong answers to the research question, but in solutions based the views and interpretation of the people involved in the enquiry" (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992:13).

According to Flowers (2002:1), at the centre of any successful school improvement plan or reform initiative are the people who translate goals into reality. In schools, teachers are the key implementers of new programmes and practice that impact on learning. Although a well-crafted mission statement, specific improvement goals, milestones and a timeline are important, a school improvement plan must include a strategy to address teacher development. Teachers will not naturally acclimatise to a new set of goals and expectations. Nor should they be left to "speed up" on their own.

This infers that teachers should be fully equipped to ensure effective and efficient continuous assessment in Namibian schools. Continuous assessment won't be effective if the teachers are lacking skills in test construction, administration and record keeping, and if they display apathy towards continuous assessment.

Henceforth, a proactive approach to teacher development is required that involves a careful examination of current skills and interests as well as an assessment of what development and training is needed. If learners

are to become effective in the workplace and a democratic society, we need teachers with relevant skills and knowledge to assist learners to meet the demands emanating from these spheres of life. Hence, a good teacher is regarded as a self-motivated learner whose professional development goes beyond traditional development to include reading, curriculum development, research, and conference involvement. In line with this recommendation, Hofmeyer and Hall (1994:35-37) state that the challenge is to provide effective practice and demand related training that meets the requirements of new assessment methods and teaching in the classroom.

Christie and Nordlund (2002) argue that teachers who are fascinated with their subject and are interested in promoting learning for learning's sake tend to favour formative, criteria referenced assessment. The more varied and more continuous it is, the better it fits their purpose. Of course this takes more time, breaks with tradition and is not always popular with other teachers who may have an unwritten agreement with their learners that traditional exams are the simplest way of gaining accreditation.

Educators and assessment experts continue to debate whether it is possible for large-scale assessment to serve reporting purposes, as well as to provide instructionally useful information to further student-learning. According to Falk, et al (2007:71), the *Early Literacy Profile* was designed to contribute to the conversation about how to meet both of these very important functions. Findings from this study suggest that one possible way of meeting these needs is to embed assessment into classroom life and involve teachers in scoring processes.

In support and complimentarily to the above suggestions from several other researchers, the researcher recommends that the feedback created

by the continuous assessment process should serve as a direct foundation for further development. The information gathered about the learners' progress and achievements should be used to give feedback not only to learners, but to the parents and other stakeholders about their strong and weak points, where they are doing well, and why, and where they need to try more, how and why. Assessment should be used as a tool to enhance both the student's learning and the teacher's understanding of the student's current understanding. It should not be used as an accountability tool that makes some learners feel good about themselves and causes others to give up.

Teachers should always bear in mind that assessing the progress and achievements of each learner continuously is an integral part of the teaching and learning process. In consonance to this view, Gagnon and Collay (2008) also cite that it is the view of constructivists that assessment becomes an integral part of every step in this learning design. Therefore, teachers should design the learning situations based on their assessment of learners' learning approaches, interests, and needs. However, it is true that only those teachers who view assessment as a useful means of gathering data upon which to base decisions about learning and their own teaching will attempt to make assessment an integral part of teaching.

As McMillan has been quoted in chapter two, there are changes and new trends in the way we assess learners. To this end, teachers must be aware of the emerging global trends of transformation in assessment methods so as to determine how well the learners can handle knowledge and information, perform skills they have learned, think about feelings and attitudes, understand issues, work with other learners in a group, solve problems and think critically and creatively. In alignment with the constructivism theory, continuous assessments should be oriented

towards higher ordered thinking skills, requiring application and creativity, evaluation, and synthesis rather than mere recall. There should be variety of assessment tasks which should be modified continuously in order to rule out routine tests and projects that are same year after year.

Continuous assessment as indicated already has been implemented as a supplement to traditional end of year examinations. Likewise, the teaching techniques fashioned to prepare learners for an end examination should change and new techniques capable of larger number of learner involvement in learning should be adopted.

Application of effective and efficient assessment practices at the primary level is of utmost importance, because it is the stage where learners make first contact with formal education. Thus, learners ought to receive firm foundation in the basic didactical competencies. The challenge for the primary teachers lie in the challenge that assessment strategies should be aimed at sound development of self concept and meaningful learning-teaching experiences, otherwise the learners would be derailed academically at the early stages.

The teachers are prime-movers in educational assessment as implementers of assessment policies, and indeed they are essential players in promoting quality education, whether in schools or in more flexible community-based programmes. Teachers are advocates for, and catalysts of, change. Their attitudes, inclinations, and competencies will, to a great measure, determine the quality and operation of educational enterprise. Therefore, priority should be given to teacher training and the management of teacher training service. There is an urgent need to develop in-service training programmes to help improve their professional competencies. Teachers at all levels of the education system

should have access to training and ongoing professional development and support particularly on the prevalent assessment practice.

Teachers must accept their professional responsibilities and become accountable for their actions with regard to assessment of the learning-teaching process. They should always strive for excellence and quality educational outcomes. Education is not a static but flexible process and thus implies a willingness to change as new situations arise and old issues are resolved. Teachers should become active participants and not just passive subjects and implementers of continuous assessment practices. That could be achieved by being proactive and finding ways to counteract the challenges in assessment strategies.

Teachers should be sensitised to make comments and to engage into dialogue on how learning and teaching is assessed in schools; analyse the stipulations on curriculum or syllabi or subject objectives and study guidelines for continuous assessment in the Ministerial policy documents. By so doing teachers take stock of the wishes, comprehension, abilities, attitudes and experiences of the learners and henceforth could propose alternatives or changes in assessment methods and strategies if needed.

The focus of learner-centred education is the learner, not the teacher. This has implications for both the teachers and learners with regard to assessment methods. Learners should be asked to solve problems, instead of being asked to memorise and regurgitate information. Learners must be able to make use of life experiences and relate them to what is being tested. For these reasons, the use of traditional standardised tests is commonly criticised, as these tests do not necessarily reveal what the learners have achieved. This is a challenge for teachers to embed these requirements in the continuous assessment practice.

Furthermore, it should be noted that continuous assessment demands on the part of practising teachers, the development of several professional skills and abilities. To ensure that teachers could and would use the standardised assessments, the Government or Ministry of Education could develop and pilot test the assessment instruments/forms before they are implemented in classrooms or on a nationwide basis. Training on scoring procedures for teachers at on-going basis would ensure scoring reliability, consistency and transparency with regard to marking and allocating of marks used in continuous assessment.

In general, there is a need for additional professional development for teachers on items linked to continuous assessment and teacher training institutions must intensify training strategies of continuous assessment and its implementation in schools. While teacher training programmes cannot address variables such as class size and learner-teacher ratios, they can address content knowledge and various modalities of continuous assessment. Institutional constraints on teachers in developing specific standards of assessments should be eliminated, and suggestions and dialogue aimed at improving continuous assessment must be encouraged. One suggestion that was made by the participants is that the Ministry of Education must ensure that the teachers receive ongoing support and training on continuous assessment and not only once-off when curriculum is reviewed.

Issues such as validity, reliability, objectivity of continuous assessment must be addressed by the Ministry and school management. This will close possible gaps whereby teachers could award fake or erroneous marks to learners when assessing learners.

Although not conclusive, the results of this study demonstrate that continuous assessment remains a source of concern for many teacher educators and teachers. This is could also be substantiated by the fact that few participants don't regard it as the best way to assess learning. There seems to be lack of consistent input by some teachers to ensure success of the continuous assessment practice in Windhoek primary schools. Teachers need thorough familiarisation with this mode of assessment in Namibian schools in order to allay fears and that the continuous assessment practice would be understood, accepted and implemented by the teachers with minimal drawbacks. This system will, however, have to be implemented with a dose of tact and ingenuity by teachers. The researcher cautions that although continuous assessment came as a replacement of old traditional ways of assessment in Namibian Education System, this could not remain obstacle or excuse for its successful implementation in schools.

Educational planners will have to make sure that the stress of one single examination does not become the stress of several examinations during the year. The notion of assessing knowledge will have to go along with the reform of the education system in place. It won't be wise to have an assessment practice in place which does not serve as a pillar of prevalent education system. In consonance of the aforesaid Vandeyar and Killen (2007) argue that teachers' conceptions of assessment are unlikely to be immune from the influences of the system within which they work.

Continuous assessment should be planned and programmed at the beginning of the year and kept as simple as possible. Marks given for class activities, assignments, homework, or short tests on completion of a topic can be recorded for continuous assessment. Assessment should be done in line with the syllabus requirements. It is advised that the informal assessment done in class (e.g. tests, exercises, worksheets, etc.)

be in line with the standards required in the final examinations. Teachers should carefully study the requirements of the continuous assessment practice as spelled out in the policy document “Towards improving continuous assessment in schools: A policy and information guide”.

The school managements and subject heads should scrutinise internal test and examination question papers to ensure that it is in line with policy document on continuous assessment.

A Policy and Information Guide on continuous assessment states that the learners will be assessed on all the tasks done in the class. However, it is the opinion of the researcher that learners’ attendance and participation should not be included as items for continuous assessment. It is very much subjective and could create room for biasness. Policies on continuous assessment should not be static but should rather serve dynamics of change for the betterment of education.

Guidelines for teachers on the setting and marking of assessment tasks and activities should be reviewed and disseminated on yearly basis. The date of the tests, projects or examination, the total mark and the required pass mark should be indicated on the mark sheets. Not only the mark sheets, but the assessment tasks and activities should be moderated by heads of departments, subject heads or resource teachers.

Reporting and record keeping are essential elements of continuous assessment, because these two elements could ensure that the implementation of continuous assessment is successful. In Towards Improving Continuous Assessment in Schools, it is stated that teachers should keep a record book for continuous assessments, both in the cognitive and affective domains. It is also stated that the progress of

learners should be reported on the official forms of the school. In fact this should be kept in the personal files of teachers so as to be available any time on request by parents or any authoritative body. Some participants recommended that sufficient space be provided on the mark sheets for writing name and surnames.

Schoenfeld (1999) states that in the United States, the widespread use of external, standardised assessments at almost every grade level, for a wide range of purposes, has had seriously deleterious effects. Since “teaching to the test” these days typically means teaching to a set of skills that have little to do with deep competence, the current incarnations of most assessments serve disruptive rather than productive functions. Schoenfeld also cautions that widespread and frequent testing is not necessary to achieve many of the sorting and accountability purposes for which tests are typically used. This questions the degree to which we rely on frequent standardised tests. However, the learning point is that teachers should construct assessments that are actually meaningful, informative and encourage critical thinking.

A teacher should not rely on the results of testing only, nor on continuous assessment only but a good mix of different types of assessment is fair to the learner, and gives the teacher a more realistic picture of the learner’s progress. In fact, teachers should use various methods to determine what and how their learners have learnt. A meaningful assessment of learners’ progress requires information from various sources and should not be limited to written tests. Sound rating should encompass the entire range of learning targets of the curriculum, and not merely assess factual knowledge. Teachers should examine whether the learners have learnt to analyse complex facts and solve problems.

4. Limitations

The first limitation of this study is its confinement to the primary schools and does not include the secondary schools. Secondly, it is done only at the primary schools in Windhoek Education Region and 12 other educational regions are not included. Thus, the findings could not be generalised. However, nationwide study of this kind is needed to get a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the role that teachers play in continuous assessment. The researcher recommends that not only teachers but also views and opinions of educational planners, subject advisors, inspectors, education officers and other stakeholders in education be obtained in the future research.

The researcher experienced apathy from the teachers in completion of questionnaires. Although the researcher handed out 20 questionnaires to each school, between 10 and 15 questionnaires were recollected from the teachers. One principal explained to the researcher that although ethical issues such as anonymity are taken care of, teachers are afraid and not keen to reveal information that are related directly to them. “Secondly, teachers are always full of excuses and are in fact lazy to complete forms”. However, it is ethically acceptable that some of the teachers predictably exercised their right not to partake in the study.

The researcher was aware that issues under investigation are both complex and sensitive because it involves teachers as human beings on one side, and the assessment method as an assessment tool on the other side. However, the researcher foresees practical problems in getting teachers together at suitable venues for discussions or interviews. That is the reason for the use of questionnaires as instrument of data collection. In any further research, open and frank discussions might provide the

best opportunity for establishing the necessary rapport and not merely text responses from the participants as it was the case in this study.

5. Conclusion

This study was aimed at soliciting information about the role that teachers play in continuous assessment at Windhoek primary schools. To that extent, this study was successful as it yielded some findings and valuable recommendations.

The literature review indicates that rapid technological changes, innovations and knowledge explosion necessitate redefinition of the role of learning and teaching, which in turn necessitates a revisit of assessment strategies and methods. The teacher, through teaching, has to make learners aware of the fallibility of knowledge. Both the teacher and learner have to find out how the knowledge is constructed. One way this could be achieved, as mentioned earlier, is by assessing of learning and examining of alternatives assessment practices. Continuous assessment is used to test the learner's knowledge although cognisance is taken of the fact that a particular method of assessment may serve more than one purposes. It should be stressed that all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment are interwoven and cannot be divorced from each other. Assessment in schools is an issue of quality assurance and thus it is a tool used as a way to ensure quality educational outcomes. Therefore, negligence and or lack of planning for assessment in schools will compromise and counteract the quality educational outcomes.

The important role that teachers play or ought to play in the continuous assessment process cannot be overemphasised because it is vital for the

success of continuous assessment practice in schools. Strengthening of the technical aspects of continuous assessment would help to meet the rigorous standards of reliability and validity. The underlying guiding principle of continuous assessment should be to ensure that it promotes and rewards desired learning activities and outcomes.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Airasian, P.W. 1997. *Assessment in the classroom: A concise approach* 2nd Ed. USA: McGraw-Hill.
- Banta, T., Lund, J.P., Black, K. E., & Oblander, F.W. 1996. *Assessment in practice: Putting Principles to Work on College Campuses*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Bodner, G.M. 1986. *Constructivism: A Theory of Knowledge*. Vol. 63(10). Purdue University: West Lafayette.
- Borko, B., Liston, D., & Whitcomb, J. 2007. Editorial: Genres of Empirical Research in Teacher Education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, Vol. 58(1): 3-8.
- Boyle, J.S. 1994. *Styles of ethnography. Critical issues in qualitative research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bryan, C. & Clegg, K. 2006. *Innovative assessment in higher education*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- CEPD, 2000. *Transformation of the South African Schooling System*. Johannesburg: Centre for Educational Policy Development, Evaluation and Management. <http://www.cepd.org.za/22May2007>.
- Christie, M. & Nordlund, L. 2002. *The quality of assessment*. Paper appeared in C-SELT project series. Chalmers Technical University, Göteborg.

- Cobb, T. 1999. "Applying Constructivism: A Test for the Learner-as-Scientist." *Educational Technology Research and Development* 47 (3), 15-31.
- Cohen, L. & Manion, L. 2000. *Research Methods in Education* 5th Edition. London and New York: Routledge Falmer.
- Cone, J.D. & Foster, S.L. 1991. Training in measurement: always the bribes maid. *American Psychologist*, 46(6): 653-654.
- Dahlstrom, L.O, (ed).2000. *Perspectives on Teacher Education and Transformation in Namibia*. Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan.
- Dana, T., & Davis, T. 1993. *On considering constructivism for improving mathematics and science teaching and learning*. Washington DC: AAAS Press.
- Department of Education of South Africa. 1998. 'Green Paper on Further Education and Training'. Pretoria: Government Printers.
- Department of Education of South Africa. 2000. *Government Gazette no. 20844. Norms and Standards for Educators*. Government Printers: Pretoria
- Department of Education of South Africa. 2000. *Government Gazette, no. 17579. South African Schools Act (Act no. 84 of 1996)*. Government Printers: Pretoria
- Dun, L. Morgan, C. O'Reilly & M. Parry, S. 2004. *The learner assessment handbook: New directions in traditional & online assessment*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

- Falk, B., Ort, W. S., & Moirs, K. 2007. Keeping the Focus on the Child: Supporting and Reporting on Teaching and Learning with a Classroom-Based Performance Assessment System. *Educational Assessment*, Vol. 12(1): 47-75.
- Flowers, Nancy. 2002. Four Important Lessons about Teacher Professional Development. National Middle School Association: University of Illinois. http://www.nmsa.org/research/articles/res_articles_may2002c.htm retrieved 15/07/2007.
- Freiberg, H.J. & Driscoll, A. 1996. *Universal Teaching Strategies*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Gagnon, G.W., & Collay, M. 2008. *Constructivist Learning Design*. <http://www.prainbow.com/cld/cldp.html> retrieved 14/05/2008.
- Glaser, B.G., & Strauss, A.L. 1967. *The discovery of grounded theory*. Hawthorne, New York: Aldine.
- Griffith, S. A. 2005. *Assuring Fairness in School Based-Assessment: Mapping the Boundaries of Teachers Involvement. A Paper Presented at the 31st Annual Conference of the International Association for Educational*. Abuja, Nigeria.
- Gronlund, N.E. 1998. *Assessment of learner achievement* 6th Ed. Boston: Allan and Bacon.
- Hofmeyer, J. & Hall, G. 1994. *National Audit for Teacher Education, Synthesis Report*. Government Printers: Pretoria

- Holloway, J. H. 1999. The Constructivist Classroom. Vol. 57(3): 85-86.
- <http://www.asiamarketresearch.com/glossary/reliability.htm> retrieved 5/09/2007.
- <http://www.usc.edu/programs/cet/resources/assessment/retrieved> 16/10/2008.
- http://www.quarc.de/ethnograph_e.html retrieved 11/06/2006.
- Joppe, M. 2000. The Research Process. <http://www.ryerson.ca/mjoppe/rp.htm> retrieved 30/08/2007.
- Lemmer, Eleanor. 1999. Contemporary Education: Global Issues and Trends. Sandton: Heinemann.
- Linchevski, L., Liebenberg, R. & Sasman, M. 1998. Assessment in support of planning teaching to improve learning. Paper presented at the 4th Annual Congress of the Association for Mathematics Education of South Africa. <<http://www.sun.ac.za/mathed.malati> retrieved 07/07/2007.
- McMillan, J.H. 1997. Classroom Assessment: Principles and Practice for effective instruction. Boston: Allan and Bacon.
- McTighe, J. & Ferrara, S. 1994. Performance-based assessment in the classroom. Pennsylvania Educational Leadership: 4-16.
- Ministry of Education, Namibia. 1996. Broad Curriculum Guide. Windhoek: NIED.

- Ministry of Education, Namibia. 2007. Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP). Windhoek: Government Printers.
- Ministry of Education, Namibia. 1993. Towards Education for All: A Development Brief for Education, Culture and Training. Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan.
- Ministry of Education, Namibia. 1999. Towards Improving Continuous Assessment In Schools: Policy and Information Guide. Windhoek: NIED.
- Morse, J.M. 1994. "Emerging from the data": the cognitive processes of analysis in qualitative inquiry. Critical issues in qualitative research methods: 23-43. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Nitko, A.J. 1995. Curriculum-based continuous assessment: A framework for concepts, policies and procedures. Assessment in Education, Vol. 2: 321.
- Patton, M.Q. 2001. Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods. U.S.A: Sage Publications.
- Plake, B. S., & Impara, J.C. 1997. Teacher assessment literacy: What do teachers know about assessment? Handbook of classroom assessment: 53-68. California: Academic Press.
- Puhl, C. A. 1997. Develop, Not Judge: Continuous Assessment in the ESL Classroom. Forum, Vol. 35 (2):2.

- Rayment, T. 2006. 101 Essential lists on assessment. Gosport, Hampshire: Ashford Colour Press Ltd.
- Schoenfeld, A.H. 1999. Looking toward the 21st century: Challenges of education theory and practice. *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 28(7).
- Shepard, L.A., Flexer, R.J., Hiebert, E.H., Marion, S.F., Mayfield, V., & Weston, T.J. 1996. Effects of introducing classroom performance assessment on student learning. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, No. 15: 7-18.
- Sherman, R.R & Webb, R.B. 1988. *Qualitative research in education: Focus and methods*. London: The Palmer Press.
- Silverman, D. 2000. *Doing qualitative research. A practical handbook*. London: Sage.
- Straus, A. & Corbin, J. 1990. *Basics of qualitative research: grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newburg Park, CA: Sage Publications Inc.
- Struwig, F. W, & Stead, G.B. 2001. *Planning, designing and reporting research*. Cape Town: Hanli Venter.
- Stuart, J. 1997. *Improving our Practice: Collaborative Classroom Action Research in Lesotho*. *Qualitative Education Research in Developing Countries: Current Perspectives*. New York: Garland Publishing.

- Stuter, W.N. 2006. Introduction to Educational Research. California: Sage Publications Inc.
- Swanepoel, B & Erasmus, B. 2000. South African Human Resource Management: Theory and Practice. Cape Town: Juta & Co Ltd.
- Torrance, H. 1995. Evaluating authentic assessment. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Trochim, W.M. 2002. Social Research Methods Knowledge Base. Cornell Universtiy. <http://trochim.human.cornell.edu/kb/> retrieved 03/09/2007.
- Uiseb, I. 2005. Assignment of the Research Methodology. University of South Africa.
- Vandeyar, R., & Killen, Roy. 2007. Educators' conceptions and practice of classroom assessment in post-apartheid South Africa. South African Journal, Vol. 27(1):101-115.
- Zuber-Skerritt, O. 1992. Professional Development in Higher Education: A Theoretical Framework for Action Research. London: Kogan Page.

Appendix 1

P.O Box 70195
KHOMASDAL
Windhoek
9000
18 May 2008

The Principal

Re: Permission to conduct research

This letter serves to inform you that the researcher, Ismael Uiseb, is currently studying for a Med-degree (Curriculum Studies) at the University of South Africa. The title of the thesis is: The role of teachers in continuous assessment: A practice for primary schools in Windhoek.

Part of my research activity is to administer the questionnaires in order to gather information that will assist me in deriving at findings, recommendations and conclusions at the end of the research project. Against this background I am kindly seeking permission conduct this study at your school

Concerning ethical issues, please be assured that the data collected from the participants will be used for research purposes only. No name of individual teacher will be mentioned as a source of information.

I thank you in advance.

Ismael Uiseb (Med. student at UNISA)
(Student no: 6704913)

Appendix 2
QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear respondents,

This study aims to solicit information about the role that teachers play in continuous assessment practice at Windhoek primary schools.

Please answer all the questions in this questionnaire. Your honest responses will help to understand the role of teachers in conducting continuous assessment. It will also assist the researcher to determine any shortcomings and areas which might require improvement in the current continuous assessment practice.

All responses will be treated confidentially and individual anonymity will be safeguarded. Please do not write your name on any part of this questionnaire.

Please provide all the information below. Circle the appropriate answer and give comments or opinions when asked.

I thank you in advance for your help and cooperation.

PART 1: BIBLIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

a) Name of the school:.....

b) Position: Teacher HOD Deputy Headmaster
Headmaster Resource teacher

c) Gender: Male Female

d) Teaching experience (number of years).....

e) Highest teacher qualification:.....

- f) Grade(s) which you are currently teaching:.....
- g) Subject(s) which you are teaching:.....

PART 2: CLOSE-ENDED QUESTIONS (PLEASE CIRCLE YOUR CHOICES)

1. When do you assess your learners?
 - a) After each lesson
 - b) During each lesson
 - c) At the end of the term
 - d) After each topic
 - e) Any other time
(specify).....

2. Which of the following options would you view as continuous assessment? (You may choose more than one)
 - a) Test items
 - b) End of the year examinations
 - c) Learners' homework
 - d) Projects
 - e) Any other (please indicate).....

3. Is continuous assessment useful in assessing:
(You may choose more than one)
 - a) Competencies
 - b) Abilities
 - c) Learning
 - d) Skills
 - e) All

4. Which of the following purpose does continuous assessment fulfil?
- a) Formative
 - b) Summative
 - c) Both
 - d) None
5. Do you think each teacher should design his/her own test instruments for assessment?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
6. Do you agree that the test constructed by two teachers on the same topic might differ in terms of complexity?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
7. Are the forms used for continuous assessment standardised?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
8. Do you need assistance from your colleagues when assessing learners?
- a) Yes
 - c) No
 - d) Sometimes
9. Did you receive any training to conduct and implement CA in schools?
- a) Yes
 - b) No

10. Do you regard continuous assessment method as the best strategy to assess learning and teaching?

- a) Yes
- b) No

PART 3: OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS (PLEASE GIVE YOUR HONEST RESPONSES)

1. What do you think is “continuous assessment”?.....
.....
.....
.....

2. Why do you assess your learners?.....
.....
.....

3. How do you assess learners?
.....
.....
.....

4. When do you give feedback to learners after assessment?
.....
.....

5. How much does CA weigh towards final promotional marks of a learner?
.....
.....

6. Does continuous assessment ensure the fairness of the assessment marks?.....
If yes, how?.....

7. How many times have you attended in-service training to enable you to understand the continuous assessment policy?
(Circle and indicate the year)

- a) Once
- b) Twice
- c) Thrice.....
- d) None.....
- e) Other(specify).....

8. Would you consider the training sessions as being sufficient in equipping you with skills to conduct continuous assessment successfully? (Circle your choice)

- i) a) Sufficient b) Insufficient c) Not sure
- ii) If you consider the training session(s) were insufficient, indicate what would have been done to make it meaningful.
.....
.....

9. Who check the correctness and validity of CA marks?
.....
.....

10. How does the Ministry make sure teachers apply continuous assessment as per Ministerial Guidelines?
.....
.....

11. Are there any shortcomings or problems you are experiencing with the current continuous assessment practice?
a) Yes
b) No
If yes, explain.....
.....
.....

12. Explain ways how you want the continuous assessment practice to be improved?.....

.....
.....

13. Any other comments:.....

.....
.....
.....
.....

Thank you very much!