

Administrators' and Teachers' Perceptions on the Role of Continuous Assessment Scores on Students' Basic Education Certificate Examination Performance in Some Schools in Freetown.

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Abstract - This study examined the perceptions of administrators (principals, vice principals), and teachers on the role of continuous assessment on students' performance at the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) in some secondary schools in Freetown, Sierra Leone. 324 administrators and teachers formed the population of the study, 170 of them were selected through a purposive sampling technique for this study. The study observed that continuous assessment scores play a very big role on students BECE performance. It concludes that students BECE performance can be predicted using continuous assessment scores. It is suggested that school authorities should stop fabricating continuous assessment scores if they want them to improve BECE performance.

KEY WORDS: *Administrators, Continuous assessment, Teacher Perception, scores, Students performance.*

I. Introduction

The change of Sierra Leone's education system from the 7 – 5 – 4 system of education which was seven years of primary school education, five years of secondary school education and four years of university education to the 6 – 3 – 3 – 4 system of education which is six years of primary education, three years of junior secondary school (J.S.S) education and four years of university education ushered in the use of continuous assessment as a major and important determinant of a student's progress in learning and promotion to the next level of schooling. The old system stated that at age 5 children start schooling in class 1 through seven and writes an examination in class 7 called the common entrance, later renamed selective entrance examination. Successful graduates proceed to the next phase of schooling called secondary school, the secondary school phase lasted for five years, that is from form 1 through five, at form 5 the student writes another external examination called the General Certificate of Education (G.C.E ordinary level) examination which determines who should enter into sixth form and later into university.

This system was changed in 1993 because the old system was thought to have very little benefits to its people and to the economy of the state. The new system emphasized technical and vocational education which was considered a step in the right direction for Sierra Leoneans as it brings with it the acquisition of skills to bolster the middle level man power which was lacking in the old system. In the new system however, primary education lasts for six years, secondary education is divided into Junior and Senior schools with each lasting a period of three years. At JSS 3 the pupils write an examination called the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) conducted by the regional examining body the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) which will lead them to a transition into Senior Secondary School (SSS).

In all three categories of schooling continuous assessment is said to be the mode of assessment because of its benefits over the single terminal examination which is conducted at the end of the term or academic year. Continuous assessment is viewed as one that reduces failure as no single examination or test determines the fate of a student. It is said to be comprehensive in nature which takes care of inadequacies that students might have because of the use of teaching method that might have not been too clear and caused the poor performance of the student in a test. For example, a student who performs poorly in a test because of fear of test taking can consummate his score in other activities like assignments, projects, and class exercises. Dorcas Oluremi Fareo^[1].

Therefore, continuous assessment identifies four basic characteristics, namely, comprehensive, cumulative, systematic and guidance oriented. Its comprehensiveness is based on the premise that it uses many instruments such as tests, take home assignments, class work, presentations, and seminars and in some cases attendance to classes to determine success.

Systematic because it is planned with specified periods within the school year in which it is conducted and rules guiding its conduct. Skul Tech^[2].

Continuous assessment is cumulative because it keeps records of all assessments and does not depend on one single final assessment instead it is a conglomeration of many different assessments. In other words, a student will not fail an exam because he or she did not pass on the first time he or she writes the test but can still make up for the failed test in subsequent tests. Zarina Akhtar, Sajjad Hussain^[3].

It is guidance oriented because the feedback provided by the teacher on a student's progress can be used to advise the student on areas of strengths and weakness in career choices and remediation. Dorcas Oluremi Fareo^[4].

Continuous assessment is increasingly popular in West African education, it is an integral component of our educational system in Sierra Leone. It constitutes 30% of a student's final BECE grade. It confirms what a student has acquired given the bulk of materials he/she has been exposed to. Different continuous assessment strategies exist; the most common ones in schools are oral tests, written tests, take – home assignments, examinations and class exercises.

Continuous assessment is a means of assessing aspects of learners' knowledge and understanding throughout a course of study other than a final single examination. O'Connor^[5]. This means that continuous assessment is a formative evaluation in which the learner's progress is determined throughout the learning process with the aim of checking the extent to which the learner has understood what he/she was taught.

Continuous assessment's popularity stems from the belief that it builds up the learner's cognitive, psychomotor' and affective prowess if done as enshrined. Thereby making the learner prolific and enterprising in cognitive and skills development.

Continuous assessment is relevant in allowing students to demonstrate their abilities and developments on periodic basis, so that "students who have studied hard but are not very good at sitting to examinations are not placed at a disadvantage compared with lazy students who engage in minimum amount of work needed to pass such examinations" (Adegbeye, as cited in Hammed Popoola Aminu^[6]. As Adegbeye stated, continuous

assessment is meant to stabilize performance of students who for some reason cannot make it through structured examinations like end of term or year examinations or standardized examinations like BECE and WASSCE.

Continuous assessment is designed to cut the rate of school dropouts because a student that is not capable in one domain can be capable in the other thereby transforming the 'would – be' dropouts to useful citizens.

However, continuous assessment shouldn't be misunderstood. What is happening in schools is that teachers give series of tests within a period of time claiming to be doing continuous assessment; rather it should be a situation in which the learner is made to take ownership of his learning by providing him/her with the necessary feedback. (Bande and Ayodele^[7]).

Really, a lot has been said about continuous assessment by different researchers; most of them good. However, it can't be totally relied on because certain conditions affects its credibility, such as school traditions, teachers' assessment and rating styles (Aremu, as cited in Adebawale Lawrence and Oba Rasak Bolanta^[8]). Continuous assessment may also be affected by students' behavior because their behaviour may be unstable varying unpredictably from moment to moment or from occasion to occasion.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Since the introduction of the 6 – 3 – 3 – 4 system of education, continuous assessment has become an effective tool for evaluating students learning outcomes in the various levels of educational systems Juanah Josephine Elizabeth^[9]. Every year WAEC request for schools to submit continuous assessment scores which will be used in conjunction with the students BECE examination scores to produce a composite grade that will lead students into SSS. They have however, reported that schools turn in scores that do not match the students' final examination performances. Dorcas Oluremi Fareo^[10], this means that these scores cannot predict student's performance reliably.

Nearly half the number of students that writes the BECE every year could not make the minimum grades for SSS education, this poses a serious problem to education stake holders and a serious concern to parents. The implication of this poor performance is students dropping out of school at an early stage of education leading them to commercial sex workers, rogues, drug addicts and criminals. This undermines the objectives of the 6 – 3 – 3 – 4 education system and the future of these students in the schools. Therefore, there is an urgent need to improve performance and promote learning. It is believed that continuous assessment administered in schools play an important role in improving performance at BECE. Therefore, this study is set to find out the perceptions of administrators and teachers on the role of continuous assessment scores on students BECE performance.

1.2 Research question

The following question formed the basis for which this research is done.

1. What are the perceptions of Administrators and Teachers on the role of continuous assessment scores on students BECE performance?

1.3 Research Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant difference between the perception of administrators and teachers on the role of continuous assessment scores on students' BECE performance.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to investigate:

- The perception of administrators and teachers on the role of continuous assessment on students BECE performance.

1.5 Significance of the study

- This study will intimate the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education and its partners in a way that it would give an insight on the feeling of teachers (implementers of continuous assessment) on the role of continuous assessment scores on BECE performance.
- It will also educate parents and the general public on the role of continuous assessment scores on the BECE performance.
- The study will benefit other researchers that may want to undertake similar study.

1.6 Scope of the study

- This study is limited to secondary schools in the Goderich community in Freetown, Sierra Leone which includes Lady Patricia Kabba secondary school, Agape Experimental High school, Bishop Jane Middleton High school and Delkon High school.
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II. Materials and Methods

The study adopted a survey type research design in which the views of participants (Principals, Vice Principals, and Teachers) on students' performance in continuous assessment and BECE were collated and tested statistically to see their relationship based on the variables measured.

2.1 Population of the study

There is a total of 18 schools in the Goderich community. The total number of teachers is 306 and 18 administrators which would form the population of this study.

A Likert scale of Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Undecided, Agree, and Strongly Agree was used to seek response on continuous assessment and BECE performances and records of students' continuous assessment performance were also used.

2.2 Sample and population

170 teachers and administrators of the four secondary schools were selected for the study through a purposive sampling technique, which is equivalent to 50% of the total population.

A test – retest reliability method was used to test the reliability of the instrument.

Forty teachers were used on the first and second administration of the instrument within an interval of one week. The reliability coefficients obtained ranges between .85- .88 with an overall Cronbach alpha of .88.

The results were analyzed using descriptive statistics and t – test of independence samples.

Table 1: **Distribution of sample respondents**

Category	Population	Sample
Principals	4	4 (2.3%)
Vice Principals	4	4 (2.3%)
Subject Teachers	316	158 (92.9%)
CA teachers	4	4 (2.3%)
Total	324	170 (100%)

Table 1 shows the population and sample of the research; it shows that 324 respondents were identified for the research. From this number 158 subject teachers were selected. It further showed that no sampling was done for the principals, vice principals and CA teachers.

III. Results

The results were presented using descriptive statistics and independent t – test. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance. Any value less than 0.05 level of significance we will reject the null hypothesis, while in a case where the value is greater than 0.05, we will fail to reject the null hypothesis

Table 1: Descriptive statistics on the perceptions of Administrators and Teachers on the role of CA on BECE

Item	SD (%)	D (%)	UD (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	δ	Decision
Regular conduct of continuous assessment improves students learning	159 (93.5)	10 (5.9)		1 (0.6)		1.08	0.326	High Perception
continuous assessment makes learning easier for students		47 (27.6)	49 (48.8)	54 (31.8)	20 (11.8)	3.28	0.997	High Perception
Continuous assessment facilitates students' academic performance		30 (17.6)	77 (45.3)	36 (21.2)	27 (15.9)	3.35	0.951	High Perception
Feedback of continuous assessment to students strengthen their weak areas of learning				146 (85.9)	24 (14.1)	4.14	0.349	High Perception
Continuous Assessment motivates students to study	159 (93.5)	10 (5.9)		1 (0.6)		1.08	0.326	High Perception
Schools inflate continuous assessment scores submitted to WAEC		30 (17.6)	77 (45.3)	36 (21.2)	27 (15.9)	3.35	0.951	High Perception
Students BECE performance depends on continuous assessment scores				146 (85.9)	24 (14.1)	4.14	0.349	High Perception
Students can score high in continuous assessment and still obtain poor units if they perform poorly in BECE		47 (27.6)	49 (28.8)	54 (31.8)	20 (11.8)	3.28	0.997	High Perception
Continuous assessment performance is a good	159 (93.5)	10 (5.9)	1 (0.6)			1.08	0.326	High Perception

predictor of BECE performance								
Students score at BECE is solely drawn from performance in the BECE	47 (27.6)	49 (28.8)	54 (31.8)	20 (11.8)	3.28	0.997	High Perception	
BECE mock final tests performance is a snapshot of BECE performance	30 (17.6)	77 (45.3)	36 (21.2)	27 (15.9)	3.35	0.951	High Perception	
Students BECE grades are a combination of both final BECE performance and continuous assessment performance			146 (85.9)	24 (14.1)	4.14	0.349	High Perception	

Note: N = 170. SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, UD = Undecided, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

Decision – Weighted Average: 8.866 = 0.684.

Table 2: Ho: There is no significant difference between Administrators and Teachers perceptions on the role of continuous assessment scores on students' BECE performance

Item	Category	Respondents	Mean	δ	t	df	Lavene's Test	Sig	Mean Diff.
Students BECE performance depends on	Administrators	8	4.12	.354	.134	168		.898	.017
CA scores	Teachers	162	4.14	.350	.133	7.694	.785	.894	.017

SPSS output result

Table 2 above shows that all of the respondents feel that regular conduct of continuous assessment improves students learning, makes learning easier, facilitates academic performance and strengthen weak areas of learning. Similarly, they felt that students BECE performance depends on continuous assessment scores, they also feel that students can score high in continuous assessment and still obtain poor units if they perform poorly in the BECE. However, they stated that schools inflate continuous assessment scores submitted to WAEC which supports the statement of Dorcas Oluremi Fareo (2020)^[10] that WAEC has reported of schools sending in grades that did not match students final scores.

Table 3, is an independent samples t – test that was performed to know whether there was a difference between Administrators' and Teachers' perceptions on the role of continuous assessment on the Basic Education Certificate Examination. Administrators (M = 4.12, SD = .354) Teachers (M = 4.14, SD = .350) demonstrated no statistically significant difference between Administrators t (7.694) = .133, p < .898 and Teachers t (168) = .134, p < .894) this means that the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is 95% confidence that there is no difference in the means of the two groups (95% CI, .017 - .017).

3.1 Discussion

This study aims to investigate school administrators' and teachers' perceptions on the role of continuous assessment in some schools in Freetown. The researcher seeks to establish the significance of continuous assessment scores in students' final BECE scores using descriptive statistics and t – test of independent samples. The findings of the descriptive statistics show that there is a high level of agreement between the administrators and teachers in their perceptions on the role of continuous assessment scores on BECE performance in all the variables measured (Table 3).

The test of hypothesis like the descriptive statistics also revealed that, there is no significant difference between the perceptions of administrators and teachers on the role of continuous assessment scores on students' performance in the Basic Education Certificate Examination. This means that continuous assessment positively impacts BECE performance. Therefore, the education stakeholders' and schools knowing this fact should lay emphasis on the procedures that will produce consistency in internal and external performance of students.

IV. Conclusion and Recommendations

It was concluded that continuous assessment scores play a significant role in improving Junior Secondary School students BECE performance. It was also revealed that knowledge of performance through feedback develops students' efficiency and confidence about their ability to work hard. When students believe in their abilities to improve it makes them more interested and involving in their academic tasks.

Keeping in mind the findings and results of this study the following recommendations are suggested.

- The study suggests that school authorities desist from forging students' continuous assessment grades if WAEC is to use them in concoction with BECE grades to improve performance.
- Continuous assessment is cumulative, therefore, both teachers and students should ensure that they cover the course content which makes it easier for students to improve performance in both continuous assessment and BECE which will bring about a proportionate improvement in overall performance.
- Since continuous assessment uses a lot of the teachers' time and energy; starting from its administration, scoring, and collation of grades, teachers should be adequately remunerated to get them interested and do credible work.
- Since continuous assessment does not mean continuous testing, teachers should be careful not to over assess students as this does not only impact the process negatively but also, cause students to be disinterested in it.
- Regular in – service training should be done in schools in Sierra Leone to keep teachers abreast of new methods of assessments for better students output in public examinations.
- Workshops should be conducted to train new teachers coming into the field and to refresh serving teachers in assessment procedures.

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