

Integration of Continuous Assessment Tests in Teaching and Learning of English Language in Awendo Sub-County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The ministry of education in Kenya adopted continuous assessment in curriculum implementation to help in gauging learners' performance in various subjects with a view of making necessary adjustments to help improve teaching and learning process. However, there is no information on whether continuous assessment has been integrated in teaching and learning English language in primary schools, with reference to class seven in Awendo Sub-County, Kenya. The purpose of this study was to examine the methods teachers used in teaching and learning of English language in class seven in public primary schools in Awendo sub-county. The objective of the study was to examine the methods teachers used to integrate CATs in teaching and learning English language. The data on performance in the subject available in Awendo Sub-County indicate dismal performance in the subject in schools between the years 2015 to 2017. Descriptive survey research was used in conducting this study. The study was conducted in Awendo sub-county, Migori County. The study targeted 71 head teachers, 71 class seven teachers of English, 5 Curriculum Support Officers and 2354 pupils, giving a total population of 2501. Saturated sampling was used to sample head teachers, teachers of English and Curriculum Support Officers. However, on the side of the pupils, the researcher used simple random sampling to get the sample size of 235 which is 10% of pupils' population, giving a total population of 382. The instruments for data collection included questionnaires for class seven teachers of English and class seven pupils, interview schedules for CSOs and head teachers. To test the validity and reliability of the research instruments, piloting was done in two schools that were not included in the study. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data and results presented in tables, graphs and percentages. The research findings indicated that CATs were being integrated in teaching and learning, most teachers were using formative assessment and other teachers used feedback method. Understaffing was also found to be a major challenge. The study recommended that teachers should use a variety of teaching methods and different types of assessment. The study also recommended further research to be done in other counties.

Keywords: Integration, assessment, teaching, learning, English

INTRODUCTION

Taking cognizance of the significance of Continuous Assessment in improving learning, many countries are now realigning their assessment policies to include the use of Continuous Assessment (Lewin, 2001). In the USA, there has been a strong movement in recent years to use Continuous Assessment tests in improving curriculum standards as a basis for assessing learners' performance, (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). Tyler, (2003) indicated that one of the strategies for effecting good classroom practices is to integrate assessment in teaching and learning. Following the World Conference on Education For All held at Jomtien, Thailand in 1999, countries have expanded access to education. A decade later, the Dakar Conference noted that the expansion in access to education compromised the quality of education as measured by achievement scores in reading, writing and arithmetic and that this phenomenon was more prevalent in Sub Saharan Africa (Dembele & Miaro, 2003). Therefore, for many Sub Saharan countries, the focus is currently shifting from access to quality (UNESCO, 2004; World Bank, 2001). One activity that has been widely viewed by scholars and international agencies as the magic bullet to improving the quality of education is assessment (Browne, 2016; Kellagan & Greaney, 2003; Toohig, 2014; USAID, 2011 & World Bank, 2011). Therefore, many countries and agencies are currently developing assessment policies and initiatives in their bid to improve the quality of education (Clarke, 2012; Kapambwe, 2010; UNESCO, 2000). One of the strategies for effecting good classroom practices is to integrate assessment and instruction so that classroom assessment should be embedded in the

routine activities of teaching (Kellagan & Greaney, 2003). This makes it important to understand assessment practices as a way of improving the quality of education.

Assessment has been conceptualized differently by different scholars. According to Browne (2004), assessment is any act of interpreting information about students' performance collected through any of multitude means or practice. Clarke (2012) on the other hand conceptualizes assessment as the process of gathering and evaluating information on what students know, understand and can do in order to make an informed decision about next steps in the educational process. On the other hand, Stiggins (2008) reports that assessment can increase pupils' motivation to learn as it play a vital role in improving learning and raising standards. Decisions based on the results may vary from World Bank (2011) report on designing system wide programs to improve teaching and learning in schools, to identifying next steps in classroom instruction. Lastly, Webb and Briars (2010) see assessment as an interaction between the teacher and the learners, with the teacher continually seeking to understand what a learner can do and how a learner is able to do it. These various definitions underscore the fact that assessment as applied in education is about finding out whether learning outcomes intended at the end of a classroom activity have been achieved.

There are two forms of assessment commonly used in measuring learning outcomes, namely summative and formative assessments. Kothari (2013) looks at summative assessment as an evaluation of learning progress and achievement at the conclusion of specific instructional period,

usually at the end of the year, while summative assessments are examinations and formal tests which determine whether a student has passed or failed and typically, no formal learning takes place when it is done. Summative assessment has also been referred to as assessment of learning (Mbwiri, 2017). Formative assessment refers to frequent, interactive assessments to measure learners' progress. It is conducted to identify learning needs so as to adjust teaching. It is also referred to as assessment for learning as it happens during learning because it involves learners understanding exactly what they are required to learn, what is expected of them and are given feedback and advice on how to improve their work (Mbwiri, 2017). It also involves gathering and interpreting information to be used as feedback so as to modify teaching and learning activities in order to reduce the gap between desired learner performance and observed learner performance (Bell and Cowie, 2001; Kothari, 2013). This distinction suggests that summative assessment is product oriented while formative assessment is process oriented. However, as a process, formative assessment has rarely been practiced by schools and even schools that practice it do not use the results to aid in summative assessment (Rosset & Sheldon, 2001). It is on this basis that this study was designed to focus on formative assessment practices with emphasis on continuous assessment tests administered to class seven pupils' learning English language.

Historically, assessment of learner's progress has been based on tests and examinations which only focused on cognitive aspect of a learner while other facets were ignored (Jacobs and Gawe, 2017). However, Fraser, (2016) noted that

traditional methods of learner assessment was not advantageous in that promotion of learners was based on a single assessment test. This did not favour pupils who might have missed exam probably due to some circumstances like sickness or absenteeism. Secondly, teaching was teacher centred thus the teacher was the major source of information. Pupils were mere listeners in the teaching and learning process. This was characterized with chalk and talk kind of teaching which lecture method. It made learning theoretical and boring. At the same time, progress was difficult to determine because the only yard stick to measure acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes was by testing on what has been learned, which was rarely done. For example, there were no midterm tests for learners. The learners were only subjected to end term tests thus, did not get a chance to realize strengths and weaknesses so as to improve on them. This made Web and Briars, (2010) to argue that assessment must be an interaction between the teacher and the learners with the teacher continually seeking to understand what the learner can do and he or she is able to do it. At the same time, Yoloeye (2008) further pointed out that continuous assessment was only a part of the field of educational evaluation. He further argued that concerns have been raised with such types of assessment due to their apparent limitations. These forms of assessment tend to focus only on the cognitive aspects of a learner while ignoring other facets of learning (Jacobs and Gawe, 2017). Frequent tests also do not provide guidance needed by students for their daily learning and are teacher- centered thus reducing learners to passive participants in the teaching learning process (Black and William, 2003). Some experts also hold the view that CATs have harmful influence on

learners' learning hence should be reduced to the minimum, Harlem and Klerk, (2003). On many occasions, learners are pushed to dread the 'failure' side of summative assessment and end up indulging in acts such as examination malpractices that promote success in examination scores but subvert learning (Atibuni and Olema, 2017). Furthermore, comparison of results to be aware of learner's progress is difficult due to longer periods between one test and another (Fraser, 2016).

Toohig (2014) argues that assessment is inextricably linked to the teaching and learning process. In this regard, the highlighted shortcomings of examinations-based assessments can be ameliorated if assessment is embedded in a seamless fabric of teaching, learning and assessment so that it is employed on a continuous basis (Agonafer and Tadesse, 2015). There is, therefore, a strong case for teachers to modify their classroom practices to integrate classroom assessment in their day to day teaching and learning process in schools. Classroom assessment has become a universal practice in education (Ojerinde, 2011 cited in Olatomide and Oluwatosin, 2014).

Teaching/Learning Methods for assessment

Teachers use a variety of methods to integrate CATs in teaching and learning of English language. According to Victoria State Government, Education and Training (2009), methods of assessment are grouped under the following headings: graphic organizers, review and reflection, feedback, and rubrics.

Graphic Organizers

According to Bromley & Irwin, (1999), a graphic organizer is a visual representation of knowledge on a concept or topic. This is

a method where by thoughts, ideas, knowledge and concepts are visually represented by the use of charts, maps and real objects during teaching/learning process. They promote understanding as it is normally done at the beginning of the lesson, hence reveal students' prior knowledge. Kirylo and Millet (2000), state that graphic organizers reveal students' prior knowledge and promote active participation of students to facilitate comprehension, thus boosts teaching and learning there by resulting in better level of acquisition.

Review and Reflection Method of Assessment

Combs (2015), states that teachers need self-assessment and reflection to help them assess fundamental beliefs and assumptions about learning, learners and teaching as well as differences between their perceptions of practice and those held by students in their classroom. The process of reflection will help to identify the personal characteristics and practices that must change to improve motivation and achievement for each student. These enable students to reflect on their knowledge, progress, and what they have learnt and achieved during a unit, topic or project. Hammond and Bransford (2005), contend that in order to prepare teachers for an ever-changing world, the most important goal is to help them become adaptive experts, to be able to help the learners to improve in their learning. Therefore, it is important to link teaching to outcomes on achievement of an objective.

Feedback method of Assessment

Wolters (2016), state that this method helps a teacher to find out why a learner does what he/she does. Feedback also helps a teacher to learn from the learner's experience. Learner feedback is vital if you want to gain insight into how learners

experience the teaching. With the right feedback you can improve teaching and learning.

Clarke, (2003), maintain that feedback is most effective when; initiated by the student, teachers carefully gauge when the feedback is needed to promote learning, teachers use the kind of feedback prompts that best meets the needs of the students, teachers provide strategies to help the student to improve, teachers allow time for students to independently act on feedback to improve their learning, feedback takes place as a conversation, teachers check the adequacy of the feedback with the students. Feedback enables students to provide information on their work and suitability of the instructional methodology. It also includes strategies for teachers to increase the wait time when asking questions in class. The intended study found out that there is a link between feedback from CATs and the instructional methodologies adopted in Awendo Sub-County.

Rubrics

The word rubric comes from a Latin word for red, Wolf, (2017). The online Merriam Webster dictionary lists the fourth meaning of rubric as a guide listing specific criteria for grading or scoring academic papers. A rubric for assessment, usually in the form of a matrix or grid, is a tool used to interpret and grade students' work against criteria and standards

In this method of assessment, teachers use scoring grades like, exceeds expectation, meets expectation, approaches expectation and below expectation. This grading system replaces excellent, very good, better, good and poor. Bushell (2012), believes that a rubric for assessment is a method used to interpret and grade students' work against criteria and standards. They are sometimes

called "grading schemes", or "scoring grades". He asserts that criteria are listed and a range of performance standards between the lowest and the highest are included. Descriptors describe each level of instruction. Thus, they are printed sets of criteria for assessing knowledge, performance or product for giving feedback on the success of teaching and learning.

A rubric assessment has four components which include:

- i). criterion – exceeds expectation (4)
- ii). score - meeting expectation (3)
- iii). descriptor- approaches expectation (2)
- iv). performance level (1)

Under level (4) exceeds expectation, the learner correctly and consistently perform a given task. In level (3) meets expectation, the learner correctly identifies and performs a task. In level (2) approaches expectation, the learner sometimes identifies and performs a task while in level (1) below expectation, the learner hardly identifies and performs a task at his or her level (Bushell, 2012).

Importance of a rubric assessment

- A rubric assessment helps a teacher:
- when he/she finds him/her self-writing the same comments on several different students' assignments.
- when the marking load is high and writing comments takes up a lot of time.
- Students repeatedly question about

assignment requirements, even after

handing back the marked

assignment.

METHODOLOGY

Study Area

The study was conducted in public primary schools in Awendo Sub-County in Migori County. It borders Uriri Sub-County to the East, Rongo Sub-County to the North and Homa Bay County to the West. It covers an area of 26190 square kilometres, (www.mudavadi2013.com) with a population of 108913, (National Census 2009). The Sub-County has 73 public primary schools.

Research Design

The study used a descriptive research design utilizing qualitative and quantitative research methods. The main purpose of the study was to establish the integration of CATs in teaching and learning English language in public primary schools in Awendo Sub-County.

Descriptive survey research design was appropriate in collecting data, because according to Orodho (2003), a descriptive survey is a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals. It was important in this study because it described the situation as it was (Integration of CATs in teaching and learning English language in class seven in public primary schools in Awendo Sub-County. It also facilitated adequate data collection through questionnaires, interview schedules and analysis of the data. Moreover, Orodho and Kombo (2002) stated that a descriptive survey can be used when collecting information about people's attitudes, opinion, habits or any of the variety of education or social issues.

Study Population

The study focused on 71 public primary schools, 71 head teachers, 71 teachers of English, 5 curriculum officers and 2354 pupils.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

Simple random sampling technique was used to select 2354 pupils drawn from the whole county. However, saturated sampling was used on 71 head teachers, 71 teachers of English and 5 curriculum support officers as displayed in the table below

Distribution of Sample Size		Gender
Respondents		M
F	Total	
Teachers of English	49	
22	71	
Class 7 pupils	113	
122	235	
CSOs	5	
0	5	
Head teachers	66	
5	71	
Total	168	
127	382	

TSC Office Rongo, 2018

Instruments for data collection

Questionnaires, interview schedules and document analysis were used as data collection instruments.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection is gathering information aimed at providing facts about the subject under investigation Kothari (2015).

The researcher sought permission from Rongo University, school of graduate studies to be allowed to collect data in primary schools in Awendo sub-county. Permission was then sought from National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation, (NACOSTI). The researcher then got permission to carry out the research in Awendo sub-county. The researcher then proceeded to distribute the questionnaire. The respondents were given one week to fill the questionnaire. The researcher collected the questionnaire after one week and organized for interview schedules for head teachers and CSOs and then analysis was done.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data. Data was qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed. Descriptive statistics was appropriate because it involved description, analysis and interpretation of the data collected (Orodho, 2003).

The responses from questionnaires and interviews were tabulated and tallied to get frequencies to be converted to percentages. Aspects of the observation checklist were used to give a background to the data collected.

Findings

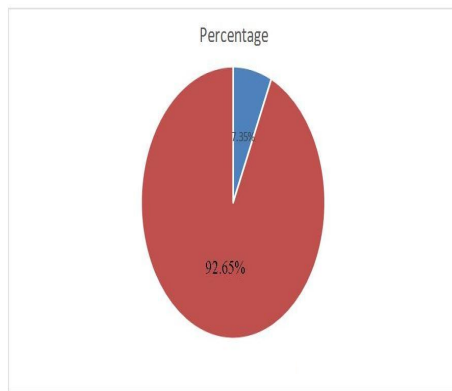
The findings are shown in figures and tables below according to the objectives

Figure 1: Teachers' responses on methods used to integrate CATs in teaching and learning English Language in Class Seven



According to the responses, 39 (53.42%) teachers used feedback as a means of summarizing their lessons. This was done by the use of oral and written questions as the lesson progressed and at the conclusion of the lessons. However, the study established that 34 (46.58%) teachers used both review, reflection and feedback methods to begin and to end their lessons respectively. This variety of methods helped in reinforcing teaching and learning of English language in class seven. The study found out that feedback method was the most commonly used by teachers of English in teaching and learning of English language in class seven in Awendo Sub-County as teaching method.

Figure 2: Head teachers' responses on methods used in integrating CATs in teaching/learning English language in class seven.



The study revealed that 63 (92.65%) head teachers were unaware of the methods their teachers used to assess the teaching and learning of English language in class seven in their schools. They knew that English was being taught and assessed, but were not aware of the teaching methods the teachers used. The other finding indicated that 5 (7.35%) head teachers said that the teachers were using feedback method as it enabled the teachers to learn from the learner's

experience. With feedback, the teacher is able to find out why a learner does what he/she does, (Wolters, 2016).

Curriculum Support Officers' views on methods of assessment

Curriculum Support Officers were asked their views on methods of assessment and they had this to say.

One CSO said;

“Workshops are missing but are very essential to familiarize the teachers with the instructional methods that would benefit their learners.”

Three CSOs had this to say;

“Assessment is an integral component of teaching and should be administered using appropriate method at a particular time.”

The fifth CSO argued;

“Workshops would not help much in improving teaching and learning, as it consumes a lot of time that would otherwise be used to cover the syllabus in time.”

Conclusion

Teachers were using a variety of methods to integrate CATs in teaching/learning of

English language in public primary schools in Awendo Sub-County, Kenya.

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