



# Teachers' Level of Use of Continuous Assessment Practice in Kwekwe District Secondary Schools, Zimbabwe

Paul Chanda

Department of Policy Studies and Leadership

Midlands State University, Zimbabwe

Email: [chandapaulos@gmail.com](mailto:chandapaulos@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** *Recent curriculum reforms in the new global economy have emphasised the importance of continuous assessment as a theoretical basis for measuring the progress and achievement of learners in a holistic manner. The aim of this study was to try to establish the teachers' Level of Use of the continuous assessment model at secondary school level in Zimbabwe. In adopting a small scale investigation, the researcher was limited by financial constraints, time limitation and the Covid-19 restrictions on movement. The researcher explored the teachers' level of use of the CA model through branching and focused interview protocols involving 15 secondary school teachers purposively selected from three secondary schools. The findings were categorised according to themes predetermined by the literature review and then analysed. The findings revealed that nearly all teachers that participated in the study were clearly users of CA, though mostly operating at LoU III. The study further established that collaboration among most teachers was not embedded within the culture of their schools. The most important finding was that CA was brought in without consultation and sufficient guidelines, a scenario which might have brought in confusion and pushback by teachers to implement the new practice. Recommendations for promoting higher LoU included organising intensive ongoing training on CA and that the Zimbabwe Examination Council (ZIMSEC), for the meantime to take charge of designing CALAs and get them marked in the same way as the public examinations are done until such a time when teachers have attained higher levels of using CA.*

**Keywords:** Teachers, Level, Assessment, Secondary, Zimbabwe

How to cite this work (APA): Chanda, P. (2022). Teachers' level of use of continuous assessment practice in Kwekwe District Secondary Schools, Zimbabwe. *Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education*, 6(2), 326 – 335.

## 1. Introduction

Recent curriculum reforms in the new global economy have emphasised on the importance of continuous assessment (CA) as a theoretical basis for measuring the progress and achievement of learners in a holistic manner on regular basis (Gemachu & Teklu, 2020). Ultimately, CA is a typical classroom based strategy which provides regular information about the teaching-learning process (MoPSE, 2021). For Shute & Rahimi (2017), Continuous assessment of the learners' alludes to a mechanism whereby the final grading of learners in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning systematically takes account of all their performances during a given period of schooling. The impetus of CA, Obioma (2005) considers is to improve the overall performances of learners and of the teaching/learning process informed by a general rule in testing which states that 'no important decision should be made on the basis of one limited sample of behaviour

demonstrated in a summative assessment. MoPSE (2021) provides three key assessment instruments for CA, each with a specific purpose, viz: Learner Profiles, Continuous Assessment Learning Activities (CALA) and Examinations. CALA is a student assessment regime that was introduced in 2021 into the national examination system and requires the learners to perform, demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and proficiency (*Secretary's Circular No 2 of 2022*). Learner Profiles assess key competences and attitudes, CALA measures Learning Area competences and Examinations provide summative assessment. Muskin (2017), probably the best known critic of the traditional high stakes examinations argues that summative assessments do not adequately assess all learner competences since they are largely pen and paper and often administered at the end of a course or learning period. Muskin (2017) also presents the following arguments in favour of CA, that is:

1. It is a better off form of assessment primarily linked with the classroom teacher as it covers a full set of subjects;
2. Permits teachers to understand a range of aspects of student learning and change since learning occurs overtime,
3. Provides an opportunity for feedback to the teaching process at an individual level and
4. Involves the use of a variety of assessment instruments, assessing various components of learning, not only limited to the thinking processes but also behaviours, personality traits and manual dexterity.

The current study establishes that a considerable amount of literature has been since published on the CA approach in many countries across the African continent and the world over. For instance, Browne (2016) reviewed the CA practices in South Africa, Ghana, Malawi, Nigeria, and Zambia and discovered that teachers were not fully using CA in their classrooms largely due to the absence of institutional support framework, lack of understanding of the purpose of CA and the top-down manner in which it was introduced to schools. Nevertheless, the top-down approach to the introduction of CA has not escaped criticism from several relevant bodies for limiting involvement by teachers when they are the ones who directly execute curriculum packages (Alsubaie, 2016). For Clark (2006), the teacher is an often forgotten gatekeeper in educational change an issue that is puzzling and frustrating. Many analysts claim that CA has failed to be fully institutionalised in the secondary school system due to a number of limiting factors which among others include contextual barriers and several other elements of its design. Contextual barriers such as administrative bureaucracy of the school impacts significantly on how extensively and successfully CA is being embraced. In some instances, administrators expect implementation of change to be put into practice without adequate orientation of teachers. But however experience has it that, often, when teachers find difficulties in using an innovation, they pretend things are moving well and only plan for the innovation to make supervisors think progress is being made when they are being supervised. This recognition has been expressed by Clark (2006) who says the following:

The educational literature contains many articles that recognise the difficulty of producing enduring change in classrooms yet the obvious fact is that classrooms have doors, and that teachers act as they choose once those doors are closed.

More recent evidence also reveals that teachers continued to use summative high stakes examinations leaving all pedagogical practices being heavily skewed towards “teaching to the test” (Alausa, 2004; Browne, 2016). Teaching to the test, according to MoPSE (2021) has a backwash effect which is negative given that teachers often teach ignoring fundamental skills and competences that learners need.

More often than not, when an innovation is not properly introduced into the system, confusion arises. Gondo, Maturure, Mutopa, Tokwe, Chirefu, and Nyevedzanayi (2019) mention the confusion that arose at the inception of CA in Zimbabwe which they attributed to lack of clarification on who among the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) and the Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council (ZIMSEC) was supposed to take charge of the CA. The authors point out that ZIMSEC had initially taken the lead when MoPSE claimed it had the overall responsibility and that ZIMSEC should only come in to standardise examinations albeit being in charge of producing syllabi for the new curriculum. Of late, MoPSE (2021) was more specific on its roles and responsibilities and those of ZIMSEC. For instance, it stated that its major role was to:

1. Develop and review policies, syllabi and other materials for the implementation of CA
2. help forge links between industry and education
3. Coordinate on the administration of CA activities at school, district, provincial and national level
4. Monitor , supervise , evaluate and support implementation of CA activities in schools
5. Carry out CA related researches
6. Capacity building of all teachers on the delivery of the syllabi, CA for formative assessment and profiling

While ZIMSEC’s responsibility was that of:

1. Research and evaluation of CA
2. Assessment, supervision, monitoring and support of centres with respect to CA and examinations
3. Capacity building of all teachers on the development and implementation of CA instruments in all learning areas
4. Coordinating and facilitating the national moderation of CA for certification
5. Processing and keeping CA records of marks for examinable levels
6. Provide and administer examinations at exit levels.

Despite the effort to clear the dust, the teachers’ progress in using the new assessment practice remained at a snail’s pace hence this investigation. Naturally, failure to interpret the behaviour and actions of individuals attempting to implement an innovation often sends wrong signals about their levels of use (Shepherd & Van der Berg, 2015).

To contextualize the situation for readers, it is also important to highlight briefly about CA in Zimbabwe. The Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education (CFPSE) 2015-2022 is anchored on a long term policy direction to guide teachers through change process of implementing CA and to give support and resources teachers need to increase comfort and familiarity with the CA innovation (MoPSE, 2021). It is possible that the low level of use of

CA could have overwhelmed the need for rolling out the Teacher Professional Development Standards (TPS) and the Teacher Development Information Systems (TDIS) in order to raise the level of its use. Despite this focus, the TPS's major goal was to allow teachers to gain an understanding of the standards expected of them in teaching and in supporting learners as well as in involving different other stakeholders in the communities with respect to the use of CA as a new assessment practice. Apart from the teacher capacity development initiatives, the CFPSE (2015-2022) arranged for an inception and preparation programme for the implementation plan of the new curriculum which ended in December 2016. MoPSE (2017) then took the charge and drew up a list of the activities of the operation plan as follows:

1. Providing new syllabuses to all teachers/schools and review and adjust these in the light of experience.
2. Developing teachers involving introduction to the new curriculum, pre-training to develop lessons and materials, follow up support through the clusters and from the districts, provinces and national staff were to be undertaken.
3. Preparing, printing and delivering new learning materials including provision of new textbooks to the poorest schools and then
4. Introduction of a continuous assessment system and finally
5. Monitoring and feedback of the programme.

However despite the efforts that could have gone into teacher capacity development in trying to raise the LoU of the new assessment practice, it seems this has not helped much owing to the teachers' reluctance to embrace the initiative (Gondo et al, 2019). The central question of this research article asks what progress secondary school teachers have made towards the use of CA. For MoPSE (2018), schools were ready to implement CA with effect from January 2017 at which time the new curriculum was rolled out despite concerns from different sections of the society arguing that schools were not really prepared. In particular, some teachers' unions such as the Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ) alleged that the reform was put in operation without substantial capacitation of teachers (*News Day Zimbabwe*, 9 January 2017). In April 2022, parents and guardians under the "Our Zimbabwe Campaign" partitioned the Parliament to have the new curriculum suspended, saying it is expensive and its implementation was rushed (chat.whatsapp.com, 25 May 2022). From the look of things, it appears that both policy-makers and curriculum developers did not realise the importance of full capacitation of teachers prior to the onset of the implementation phase hence their LoU of the new practice is questionable. Consequently, the pressure to adopt the CA abruptly meant there was no time to learn about it and come to understand the concerns and realities that confront teachers regarding the adoption and subsequent implementation. However, the teachers' current LoU of CA cannot be just be ignored hence the purpose of this research study.

## 1.1 Statement of the Problem

In this age of educational accountability and comprehensive reforms that focus on the learners' achievement and academic growth, the idea is to have a top-notch assessment model whose measurement and outcomes truly represent their competences, knowledge, skills beliefs and attitudes. Recent evidence suggest that CA has been adopted as that kind of assessment model which focuses on the whole learner and the promotion of 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills and competences that are a pre-requisite for survival in any environment through completion of real-world activities (MoPSE, 2021). Despite CA seemingly being a visionary and laudable initiative, however, the realities confronting this new assessment paradigm is that it has for some time remained paper-based rather than being practical. This justifies the need to investigate the progress that secondary school teachers in Zimbabwe have made in using CA in their classrooms so that the exact nature of the deficiency that is to be addressed by this study may be identified and rectified.

## 2. Literature Review

This section presents the review of related literature which is critical for understanding the conceptual and theoretical basis for establishing the progress that secondary school teachers in Zimbabwe have made in using CA in their classrooms.

### 2.1 Conceptual Framework

In trying to explore the teachers' level of use of CA, the conceptual position adopted by the researcher was that:

1. Teachers' Level of Use of CA may be promoted only if extensive on-going training is proffered
2. Teachers who are first users of CA are at the LoU III Mechanical Use and therefore, need support for them to advance to higher LoU
3. First time users of an innovation (CA) require more time to become good users although positive increases in practices will shorten the term.

The current research article used this conceptual position as the basis for judging the progress that teachers have made so far with respect to the use of CA in the secondary school system in Zimbabwe.

### 2.2 Theoretical Underpinnings

The CBAM forms the analytical lens for the current research article given the emphasis it places on explaining the teachers' LoU of innovations and suggesting reasons for why teachers do not always adopt innovations and use them extensively as intended by curriculum planners (Barrow and Delisle, 2010). For instance, it is possible to assess how teachers are actually using the CA strategy in their classrooms with learners basing on CBAM's eight LoU behavioural profiles namely: non-use, orientation, preparation, mechanical,

routine, refinement, integration and renewal. These behavioural patterns of innovation users are usually established through observations or conversations and interviews with innovation users (Barrow & Delisle,

2010). What follows is meant to highlight briefly about the LoU behavioural Profile with respect to the use of CA.

**Table 1: LoU of innovations with Decision Points (Adopted from Hall & Hord, 2006).**

<b>LoU 0 Non-use:</b> State in which the user has little or no knowledge of the innovation, has no involvement with the innovation, and is doing nothing toward becoming involved.
<b>Decision Point A:</b> Takes action to learn more detailed information about the innovation.
<b>LoU I Orientation:</b> State in which the user has acquired or is acquiring information about the innovation and/or has explored or is exploring its value orientation and its demands upon the user and the user system.
<b>Decision Point B:</b> Makes a decision to use the innovation by establishing a time to begin
<b>LoU II Preparation:</b> State in which the user is preparing for first use of the innovation.
<b>Decision Point C:</b> Makes user-oriented changes.
<b>LoU III Mechanical Use:</b> State in which the user focuses most effort on the short-term, day-to-day use of the innovation with little time for reflection. Changes in use are made more to meet user needs than client needs. The user is primarily engaged in a stepwise attempt to master the tasks required to use the innovation, often resulting in disjointed and superficial use.
<b>Decision Point D-1:</b> Establishes a routine pattern of use.
<b>LoU IVA Routine:</b> Use of the innovation is stabilized. Few if any changes are being made in ongoing use. Little preparation or thought is being given to improving innovation use or its consequences.
<b>Decision Point D-2:</b> Changes use of the innovation in order to increase client outcomes, based on formal or informal evaluation.
<b>LoU IVB Refinement:</b> State in which the user varies the use of the innovation to increase the impact on clients within immediate sphere of influence. Variations are based on knowledge of both short- and long-term consequences for clients.
<b>Decision Point E:</b> Initiates changes in use of the innovation for the benefit of clients, based on input from and in coordination with colleagues
<b>LoU V Integration:</b> State in which the user is combining own efforts to use the innovation with the related activities of colleagues to achieve a collective effect on clients within their common sphere of influence.
<b>Decision Point F:</b> Begins exploring alternatives or major modifications to the innovation presently in use.
<b>LoU VI Renewal:</b> This is the state in which the user re-evaluates the quality of use of the innovation, seeks major modifications or alternatives to present innovation to achieve increased impact on clients, examines new developments in the field, and explores new goals for self and the system.

The eight LoU behavioural profiles presented in Table 1 provide a direct way for describing and determining how each innovation user is acting with respect to a new practice (Hall & Hord, 2006). For instance, when the eight LoU behavioural profiles are used in conjunction with Decision Points, make it possible for the researcher to determine how teachers are engaging the CA practice in their classrooms. The ensuing paragraphs try to highlight the LoU behavioural profiles as presented in Table 1.

### 2.3 Levels of Use (LoU)

The LoU behavioural profiles presented in Table 1 were used in conjunction with related Decision Points that helped to determine how teachers were acting with respect to the CA use. The use of LoU behavioural profiles provided the researcher with a systematic measurement of how well, fast, and far the use of CA has gone and achieved (Hall & Hord, 2006). In the investigation evidence from previous research has it that first users were at the LoU III Mechanical Use and that their movement to higher LoU require time, resources

and training (Barrow & Delisle, 2010). The researcher also took cognisance of Dirksen (2002)'s argument that most users need 2–3 years' experience with an innovation to become good users and progressing beyond LoU III Mechanical Use as the basis of the investigation. Dirksen (2002) and other writers such as Graber (2005) strongly feel that the attitude of individual teachers must not be overlooked if they should move progressively beyond the Mechanical use given that their attitude is largely impacted by the prevailing educational climate. In addition, Hall & Hord (2006) allude that the LoU diagnostic tools typically allow for school administrators to understand and predict what is likely to occur as the change initiative unfolds. The current study therefore uses the LoU diagnostic tool to help determine the extent to which secondary school teachers have made towards the use CA in their classrooms. To make understanding of the stages in the LoU behavioural profile, a synopsis of the concept has been provided in the following paragraphs.

**Non-Use Stage 0:** Hall & Hord (2006) discovered that an individual at LoU 0 has limited knowledge or no

knowledge about the innovation to be adopted. He or she may not even know the correct name of the innovation. Such teachers have little or no knowledge of the new practice and are doing nothing towards becoming involved in it and yet they are expected to implement it (Rogers 2003). For instance, they neither make effort nor intention to integrate the CA into their teaching on the thinking that innovation is not the answer to accomplishing the goal of learning. Given that teachers who participated in this study are clear users of CA, this stage will not be tenable.

**Orientation Stage I:** The individual at LoU I has general knowledge about the innovation, its purpose, and its applications (Hall & Hord, 2006). Teachers at this level are in the process of acquiring knowledge of the innovation and are exploring its values and its demands upon them and their classrooms (Hall & Hord, 2006). As Rogers (2003) reminds us, teachers at the Orientation Stage I are actually not implementing the innovation systematically and are not very much interested in doing so. Writers concede that at this level these teachers have acquired or are in the process of acquiring information on how to relate the subject matter they teach with the goals of the education system. Though they are aware that the new approach (CA) should give the perspective of the subject matter, the users do not know how to implement it in their classrooms (Hall & Hord, 2001). Included in this level are teachers who are thinking of planning to introduce the practice systematically in future but think that integration of the practices cannot be applied to all levels of education. For certain, these teachers are experiencing problems as they hardly get any assistance and therefore often tend to slide back to their original ways of doing things or to the methods that their teachers taught them (Sweeney, 2003). This stage may in part be applicable to the current study, as certain characteristics reflected match some of the behavioural patterns of the participants in the current study.

**Preparation Stage II:** Like in the previous stage, this stage is relevant to the problem under investigation which seeks to establish the level of use of using CA in secondary schools. The individuals at LoU II have been found to be knowledgeable of the logistical requirements, necessary resources and timing for initial use of the innovation (Hall & Hord, 2006). The assumption is that the teachers are at this point able to describe the innovation in more detail compared to those at Level I though implementation has not yet started. Given that teachers in the current study have for some time been introduced to CA practice, Stage II may not apply to the rest of the concerned secondary school teachers but perhaps only to those teachers attending introductory workshops and preparing materials for initial use of the innovation (Barrow & Delisle, 2010). Research has it that there is often danger when such teachers have to implement innovations with limited preparation for they may return to the classroom and implement it in the manner that is not in line with what the developers of the change originally envisioned (Barrow & Delisle, 2010). A typical response by a teacher in that category may be, "I know what I will need

in the way of materials and have a good idea how to begin to use the innovation" (Hall & Hord, 2006).

**Mechanical Use Stage III:** Barrow & Delisle (2010) point out that according to Decision Point C, changes (if any) and use of an innovation are dominated by user needs. Individuals at LoU III include the teacher who is using survival tactics and is almost overwhelmed by the task of actively implementing the innovation. This teacher rarely plans for more than a day or week at a time. LoU III also includes the person who is more efficient and less uncertain while using the innovation, but is still making changes to make his or her role easier. Challenges evident at LoU III are most often logistical or managerial and are for the primary purpose of easing the pressures and requirements of use of the innovation on the user (Hall & Hord, 2006). Notably, most LoU III users are not always very articulate about their use of the innovation. Typical responses of an individual at LoU III may be similar to those listed below as suggested by Hall & Hord (2006), these are:

1. Most of my time is spent organizing materials and keeping things going as smoothly as possible every day.
2. I am not really sure what I will be doing later this year or what the effects of the innovation will be. There still seem to be a lot of problems to work out. I'm planning every night for what I will do the next day. I know in general what I will do next month but have not made detailed arrangements.
3. I spend most of my time with colleagues trying to get things organized so the innovation can be more effective with the students.

These responses have been seen to characterise most of the participants who took part in the current research study hence this stage justifies its relevance with respect to the secondary school teachers' LoU of CA in Zimbabwe.

**Routine Stage IVA:** Previous studies have mentioned that users at LoU IVA know both short-term and long-term requirements for use of an innovation and are conversant with how the innovation could be used with minimal effort or stress. The assumption is that teachers who have advanced to this level are finding the use of the innovation stabilizing as few changes are being made on an ongoing basis (Hall & Hord, 2006). Although users at this stage can recognise that some things can be improved they are comfortable with the way they teach and therefore have no plans for adopting any change. Fuller in Hall & Hord (2016) came up with three reasons for such behaviour: firstly, the educators may be uncertain about the demands of the innovation. Secondly, educators often doubt their ability to succeed in the implementation of the new ways. Thirdly, the educators may be grieving the loss of their old ways of doing things, often referred to as perennial attitudes. The writers say that level IVA users may accept, reject or modify some parts of the innovation to make them suit their own context (Hall & Hord, 2016). A typical level

IVA user response according to Hall & Hord (2006) might be, “I know how to use the innovation without difficulty. I can anticipate how the learners will react as well as what they are likely to gain in the long run when I use the innovation.”

**Refinement Stage IVB:** The users at LoU IVB are assumed to have acquired an understanding of the cognitive and affective effects of the innovation on learners and have alternative ways available to use the innovation for increasing learner outcomes (Hall & Hord, 2006). The recognition is that, change facilitators are typically welcomed warmly by the LoU IV B user who is looking for new ways to make the programme as successful as possible for learners. Since the LoU IV B user is wondering how well the programme is working, a typical response from such a user might be, “I have learned how to use the innovation, to go over the concepts with the learners, to excite them about learning. I know several different ways to approach using the innovation depending on the needs of my learners” (Hall & Hord, 2006). Such users are small in numbers and could be among those that received training in CA as trainers of trainers.

**Stage of Integration V:** (Hall & Hord, 2006) considers LoU V as a significant phase for the evolution of a change process and for the professional culture of the school. It is therefore essential for change facilitators to do all they can to nurture and facilitate change development and continuation. Thus, the facilitator’s role is to make the LoU V users put in place logistical arrangements in order to support as well as nurture in them the spirit of working together (Hall & Hord, 2006). A typical response by the LoU V user cited by Hall & Hord (2006) is, “I know what my colleagues are doing with the innovation and how we work best together to increase student learning.”

**Stage of Renewal VI:** Basing on Hall & Hord’s (2006) analysis, the user at LoU VI is aware of alternatives that could be used to change or replace the present innovation that would improve the quality of outcomes of its use. Elsewhere, Hall & Hord (2006) maintain that at this stage teachers are conversant with the innovation and are keen to re-evaluate the quality of their use of the new practice through examining its modifications, new aspects or themes in the taught subject and exploring new goals for themselves as well as that of the system. The users are actually prepared and have need for access to additional materials or resources that will translate their adaptations into reality (Hall & Hord, 2006). Thus, because of their proficiency, such users might also provide professional development activities to others and share possible new direction. Hall & Hord (2006) suggested a typical response that a user at the stage of renewal might make, that is, “I now know of several other interventions that might enhance the use of the innovation that we are now using. By changing the way we are using the current innovation, we could improve student learning.”

## 2.4 Implication for Practice

The literature that has been presented in this research article portrays the LoU diagnostic tool as an essential vector the current research can use to judge the teachers’ level of use of the CA in secondary schools in Zimbabwe. Nevertheless, the CBAM recognises eight LoU behavioural profiles that are critical for describing how teachers may act or respond when they have an innovation to implement. Although the eight levels of use are fundamentally hierarchical, that is, going from the lowest level of “non use” through the “mechanical use” median to the optimal use of “renewal”, the adaptation to levels is not necessarily linear and a person’s level of use may vary by context (Hall & Hord, 2006). Of practical significance, the LoU typically allows for school administrators to understand and predict what is likely to occur as the change initiative unfolds (Hall & Hord (2006). Using the model, the study therefore attempted to find out the extent to which teachers were making a difference in the manner they were engaging the CA.

## 3. Methodology

The researcher only needed a small scale investigation requiring limited resources instead of a full research team requiring a huge budget that was beyond means. A more economical method was needed and so the researcher turned to literature reviews, the Levels of Use Branching Interview and the Levels of Use Focused Interview involving 15 teachers from 3 different secondary schools that were used as research sites. For both protocols, an individual’s placement at a level of use was determined by Decision Points (Hall & Hord, 2006). For the branching interview the interviewer conducts a short, informal interview to gain a broad view of an individual’s level of use. The focused interview is a longer, more formal process and was selected for this study because it affords deeper probing into the implementation of the innovation. This interview takes 30 to 40 minutes and involves asking questions based on a set of seven categories that constitute each level of use: knowledge, acquiring information, sharing, assessing, planning, status reporting and performing. These emerged as sub-themes upon which analysis of results was based. In addition, literature reviews were specifically used to provide a conceptual and theoretical support as well as to demonstrate to the readers how this particular research fits into the larger field of enquiry. Above all, even if there were other suitable methods for this research study, the researcher could not adopt them due to the limitation of time and the Covid-19 restrictions on movement.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The current research explored the teachers’ behaviours and actions which reflect their level of use of the CA practice. The researcher adopted a thematic analysis approach involving six sub-themes that were predetermined by the literature review. It was found making sense to use themes to ascertain that no aspects of the research problem were left out for analysis at the same time ensuring credibility of results. In adopting the

thematic approach, the researcher took cognisance of McMillan & Schumacher's (2010:367) position that it is prudent for the researcher to interpret the collected data that is organised according to themes and categories. Thus, going by each theme derived from categories viz: knowledge, acquiring information, sharing, assessing, planning, and performing, the researcher analysed episodes of the respective interviews with the 15 key informants who had been purposively selected from the three secondary schools that were used as research sites. The idea allowed the researcher to determine the teachers' behaviours and actions as they engaged the CA practice in their classrooms with learners. In soliciting for participation in this study, an undertaking to informants that the researcher was not going to use actual names in the research thesis was made. Instead, pseudonyms were used to conceal their identity. The informants were identified by the letters: A B C D E while schools by numbers 1, 2 and 3. What follows are the findings drawn from branching and focused interviews with secondary school teachers who participated in the study.

#### 4.1 Results Based on the Knowledge Category

Since the major focus of the study was to judge the teachers' level of use of CA, It was found making sense to find out what the users knew about the CA and its use. This was made possible by interrogating teachers about how they conceptualised the CA practice from which the research problem was framed. For instance, the study found that most of the participants' knowledge of the CA was peripheral hence more information and clarification in this subject was needed. During focused interviews, Informant E of School 2 gave the following responses:

*CA is a continuous assessment which formalises the formative assessment and engages students to discovery learning, thus through CA learners observe and learn by experience.*

Informant E further went on and said, "CA is a very useful instrument. It is wholesome as learners put into practice or apply the theory learnt, but it needs a lot of planning from all stakeholders". Well, it is apparent from the above responses that the 15 teachers who participated in the focused interviews were not conversant with the practice though they genuinely showed they were operating within the LoU III (Mechanical) and needed help to advance to higher levels of use intended. Consistently, this observation approximates Fullan's (2001) view that, help is needed for change to be successful and that change efforts fail because appropriate assistance is not provided to the teachers. It is common knowledge that new experiences are always reacted to in the context of some familiar construction of reality in which people attach personal meaning to the experiences regardless of how meaningful they might be to others (Hall & Hord, 2006).

#### 4.2 Results Based on Acquiring Information

The study sought to solicit information about teachers' perception of CA together with the information about the progress that they have made in as far as the use of CA reform initiative was concerned. It emerged from the focused interviews that most of the teachers had a basic knowledge of CA and so needed to be provided with more information and clarification in some areas of the CA practice. Extant literature supports the thinking that, refocusing the CA requires all teachers to obtain a conceptual understanding of all aspects of this assessment practice without which successful of its implementation is often impeded. It is noteworthy mentioning that the need for consistent and ongoing training is critical for allowing for deeper understanding of CA. The study also found that teachers obtained inadequate support from the Ministry of Education something which compromised their capacity to fully engage CA.

#### 4.3 Sharing Related Results

It was one of the purposes of this study to confirm how teachers were collaborating to promote the use of CA. It a common observation that teachers are able to advance to high levels of use of an innovation if the culture of sharing in the schools is embedded and appreciated. In this survey, it was discovered that all teachers needed support and motivation to fully use CA. Based on key informants in Secondary School 3; support from school administration was minimal yet it was vital for the smooth transition of CA. For instance, the informants at School 3 complained that there was not much support from the administration that just gave directives without monitoring to see how well teachers were doing. This was a serious omission but then the administrators seemed were not at fault since they themselves were operating at Mechanical Level as the teachers they were supposed to supervise.

The most obvious finding to emerge from interviews at both secondary schools was that CA brought more pain, agony and friction between teachers, school administrators, learners and parents and the curriculum planners. It is like, teachers in most schools resisted CA because they had not been provided with ample opportunities to learn to use it and because collaboration was not embedded within the culture of the 3 secondary schools that were used as research sites.

#### 4.4 Results Based on the Assessment Category

It was found pertinent to examine what secondary school teachers were doing or not doing, the information that was used to judge their level of engagement with the CA initiative. More precisely, there was need to examined what could help to identify the teachers' potential or actual use of CA or some aspect of its design. It thus, was discovered that the majority of the teachers who

participated in this research did not fully understand how to deal with aspect of CALA. It was perhaps the reason why there was some pushback from both the teachers, parents and even the learners themselves from embracing CA. Personal observation seemed to approximate with that made by Gondo, et al (2019) who say that the introduction of CA involved a lot of noise from different social circles something that led the government to suspend some of the aspects of the innovation. Informants A at school 1 did not speak positively about CA and described it as seeking to add more work and stress, a thinking that contradicts contemporary literature which regards CA as relevant to the skills agenda and life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. From the reviewed literature, it emerged that CA attracted much debate and controversy since the inception of the new curriculum. This is supported by recent evidence from research that CA was brought in without consultation and sufficient guidelines which led to confusion among the implementers that may perhaps have led to the disjunction of its use (Gondo et al, 2019).

## 4.5 Results Based on Planning

The study found that there was lack of understanding of how to use CA following an observation that teachers were unable to efficiently plan for CA. For instance, what informants reflected if projected on to the wider system? It is clear that CA is being implemented at the LoU III (Mechanical level) in most of the schools in Zimbabwe. In view of what was gathered from the participants, the teachers' low mechanical levels of use of CA is directly linked to ineffective way teachers are executing planning, hence this investigation. Informants from both secondary schools seemed to consent with this observation and unanimously agreed that poor planning impeded implementation of CA. Informant E of School 3 complained that even after using CA for quite a while, he was still finding it difficult to develop CALAs in accordance to acceptable assessment standards. Thus he said; *“I started using CA since the inception of the new curriculum but up to now I actually have difficulties identifying the learning outcomes to be measured by the assessment activities against the syllabus topic content and assessment objectives. In addition, I do not even understand how CALA relate to summative assessment.*

Besides, the study further established that, as a consequence of low level of use, the full implementation of CA is being compromised by several factors in many secondary schools. Typical examples that emerged from the study include insufficient training to plan the details of this kind of formative assessment and predicting what exactly learners will be doing. Participant E of School 2 alluded that CALAs are good but the problem is that teachers don't have sufficient knowledge on them as those who facilitated workshops did not satisfactorily address their needs. Participant B of school 1 shared similar sentiments by pointing out that teachers were provided with limited preparation for executing their roles with respect to CALA hence they were finding difficulties engaging the practice.

Above all, the study discovered counter forces that prevented teachers from advancing to higher levels with respect to using the CA practice. Informant C of School 2 revealed that he had the feeling that the current socio-economic condition has compelled teachers to show little concern for advancing their level of using CA citing complains from fellow teachers that they were lowly paid and therefore were not motivated to engage in the demanding tasks of CA that are more than stressing. To express frustration and displeasure on the low levels of use of CA, a key informant D of School 2 indicated that the former minister rushed to introduce the CA without having conducted adequate consultation with stakeholders.

## 4.6 Performance Based Results

On close analysis of the general behaviour and actions of the informants it was possible to conclude that, of the eight levels of use, the one that seems to best characterize the participants' level of use of CA was Level III (Mechanical). Of late, the recognition of Level III was confirmed by an Education Minister who in a Parliamentary Question and Answer session avowed that CALA was difficult and that some of the work involved was beyond the comprehension of parents and guardians many of whom have no basic computer skills (WhatsApp chat, retrieved 25 May 2022). The quote from informant E of School 1 was typical of how the teachers categorized their level of use of CA, that is:

*I am having problems daily with organising CALA with my learners in the classroom. I don't see my way clearly when it comes to preparing CALA for my learners. I have also noticed that some teachers have similar problems and therefore there is no one to help the other. Those that are supposed to offer assistance are advising wrongly because they are also not knowledgeable.*

In a similar Parliamentary Question and Answer session, an Honourable Member of Parliament asked the Education Minister to explain how CALA relate to summative assessment at Grade 7 level and the following response was given:

*Then I do not understand how CALA relate to Grade 7 examinations. This is because it struck me looking at the Grade 7 questions for primary school in Bulawayo, that even for a child in urban environment frankly, they were very advanced questions; questions that, yes, if the child has access to the internet and research methods, it is possible that they could answer but even then, it will be difficult (WhatsApp chat, retrieved 25 May 2022).*

An implication of this is that opportunities should be made available for induction of all stakeholders including those at the highest levels. The rationale being that if these people were empowered, they will be in a position to lead the curriculum preparedness crusades in



their administrative regions. The present findings seem to be consistent with other previous researches, for instance, one of the more significant findings to emerge from the current research is that pen and paper tests, midyear and final examinations often done at the end of each unit were highly used by teachers as instruments for CA in the schools that were used as research sites. In their major study, Gemachu & Teklu (2020) found that teachers did not use various assessment methods to check the pupil's mastery of the desired knowledge, skills and attitudes, but rather focused mostly on written tests and homework.

However, the general consensus of the informants at the three secondary schools who participated in the study was that the major factors affecting the level of use of CA were those involving class size, shortage of time, teachers' work load and lack of commitment among teachers. For instance, Abera (2012) also found that teachers teaching large classes had difficulties assessing students' class work and homework as successful implementation of CA demands more work time and responsibility on their part.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

Literature has been used to show the new global economy's emphasis on the importance of CA as a theoretical basis for measuring the progress and achievement of learners in a holistic manner. On the basis of the findings generated in the study, it emerged that at least nearly all teachers that participated in the study were clearly users of CA, albeit their level of use was being mechanical. The study attributed this scenario to lack of ample opportunities to learn to use this kind of formative assessment practice on the part of teachers.

### Reference

Abera A. (2012), Continuous Assessment (Ca) Vis-À-Vis the Attainment of Major Educational Domains of Physical Education in Ethiopia // *International Journal of Social Science & Interdisciplinary Research*. Vol. 1, Issue 11. P. 14–27.

Alsubaie, M. A. (2016). Curriculum development: Teacher involvement in curriculum development. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(9), 106-107. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1095725.pdf>

Alausa, Y.A. (2004). *Continuous Assessment in our schools: advantages and problems*. Kolin Foundation Arandis, Namibia.

Barrow, D. & Delisle, J. (2010). A qualitative evaluation of some teacher's .Concerns, and levels of use of the lower secondary SEMP Science curriculum of Trinidad and Tobago. *Caribbean Educational Research Journal*, Vol.2. no 1, 3-16

The study also established that the teachers' knowledge of CA was peripheral and therefore justified the need for MoPSE to make provision for more information and clarification in the new practice. The study further established that collaboration among members of staff is not embedded within the culture of the schools where they teach even though they are aware of its importance. The study found that CA was brought in without consultation and sufficient guidelines which perhaps might have brought in confusion and pushback among teachers to implement the new assessment practice.

### 5.2 Recommendations

In light of the findings of the study, the following recommendations were forwarded to improve the LoU of CA in secondary schools. These were:

1. That there be intensive ongoing training on CA and other aspects of its design starting with the school leadership so that it is able to lead the staff capacity development crusades in secondary schools.
2. That intensive ongoing training for teachers in the form of workshops, seminars and in-service programmes be instituted to raise the level of use of the new assessment scheme at secondary school level
3. That that the Zimbabwe Examination Council (ZIMSEC), for the meantime take charge of designing CALA and get them marked in the same way as the public examinations are done until such a time when teachers have advanced to higher levels of using CA, to avoid giving inflated marks to learners, this in turn will sustain the credibility of the assessment system.

Browne, E. (2017). Evidence on Formative Classroom Assessment for Learning. K4D Helpdesk Report. Brighton UK: Institute Development Studies.

WhatsApp chat. Com. 25 May 2022. Government Reviewing New Curriculum. <https://chat.whatsapp.com//CD90sDoKifj1bbPaRkeS57>.

Clark A (2006) Changing classroom practice to include the project approach, early childhood research and practice, 8 (2). <http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v8n2/clark.html>.

Dirksen, D. J. (2002). *An evaluation of the laptop initiative for Albertson College*. Caldwell, ID: Albertson College.

Gemachu, O. & Teklu T. O. (2020). Practices and challenges of Continuous Assessment in Colleges of Teachers' Education in the West Oroma Region, Ethiopia. *Journal of Science Rise and Pedagogical Education* 3(36) Doi: 10.15587/2519-4984.2020.196346

- Fullan, M. G. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change*. London: Teachers College Press.
- Graber, N. M. (2005). *Evaluation report: Transforming classroom practices through coaching, a Pikes Peak Regional Sliver Grant*. Colorado Springs, CO: Academy School District 20.
- Gondo R., Maturure K J., Mutopa S., Tokwe T., Chirefu H. and Nyevedzanayi M. (2019). Issues Surrounding the Updated Secondary School Curriculum in Zimbabwe: *European Journal of Social Sciences Studies* - Volume 4 | Issue 2.
- Hall, G. E., & Hord, S. M. (2006). *Implementing change: Patterns, principles and potholes* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon
- McMillan, J. H and Schumacher, S (2001) *Research in Education; Conceptual Introduction*, New York, Longman
- Ministry of Primary & Secondary Education (2021). *Competence-Based Curriculum Assessment Framework*.
- Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) (2014). *Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education 2015-2022*. Harare: Curriculum Development Unit. <http://www.mopse.gov.zw/index.php/updated-curriculum/curriculum-framework/>
- Muskin, J.A. (2017). *Continuous Assessment for Improved Teaching and Learning: A Critical Review to Inform Policy Practice*. <Http://unesdoc.org/ark:/48223/pf0000255511>.
- The Newsday, 9 January, 2017. <http://www.newsday.co.zw>
- The Secretary for Primary and Secondary Education Circular No. 2 of 2022
- Obioma G. (2005). *Educational Assessment in the Culture of Reform Context* // Paper Presented at the 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Conference of the International Association for Educational Assessment (IAEA) held at the Nicon Hilton Hotel. Abuja.
- Ramalepe, M.L. (2015). A Model for Successful Implementation of Continuous Assessment in Limpopo Secondary Schools. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 6(1), 578.
- Rogers, E. (2003). *The Diffusion of Innovations*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Ur. New York: The Free Press.
- Shepherd, D. & Van der Berg, S (2015). Continuous Assessment and Matriculation Examination Marks- An Empirical Examination. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 5(2), 78-94
- Shute, V.J. & Rahimi, S. (2017). Review of Computer-Based Assessment for Learning in Elementary and Secondary Education. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 33(1), 1-19.
- Sweeny, B.H. (2003). Concerns Based Adoption Model (Online) Available: <http://www.mentoring-association.org> .
- WhatsApp chat, retrieved, 25 May 2022.
- Zimbabwe Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education (2015-2022). Harare: Government Printers
- Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (2021). *Continuous Assessment Training Manual*. Harare
- Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, (2017). *Secretary of education's report*. Harare: Government Printers