

Full Length Research Paper

High school English teachers' and Students' perceptions, attitudes and actual practices of continuous assessment

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This study examined high school teachers' and students' perceptions, attitudes and actual practices of continuous assessment. The participants of the study were 41 teachers and 808 students in Injabara General and Preparatory, Tilili General Secondary, Mengesha Jembere General Secondary, and Dangila Preparatory schools in West Gojjam, Ethiopia. Multiple instruments that included questionnaires, interviews and content analyses were used to gather data. The findings indicated that 'continuous assessment' was exclusively used for developing students' intellectual skills. Teachers gave students assignments to evaluate their achievement of the learning objectives. Based on the findings, it was concluded that the participant English teachers did not properly practice continuous assessment in their schools. Finally, it was recommended that teachers be given on-job training on continuous assessment for its effective utilization in schools.

Key words: Continuous assessment, social desirability, summative tests.

INTRODUCTION

Ethiopian high schools have experienced heavy use of traditional summative and more judgmental approaches to assessments. The assessments (tests, examinations) have been considered as the culmination or bottom line of a unit of work that was covered. This system of assessment is criticized in its negligible role of ascertaining student development (Puhl, 1997). Currently, there is a move away from using assessment to gauge performance to a more dynamic alternative of determining "what learners know and can do" (Puhl, 1997: 2). The shift is influenced by the underlying assumption that assessment processes change instructional processes, and as a result of learning. Gravaso (2002) study confirmed this correlation of assessment and instruction at a university context.

In outcome-based education, continuous assessment plays a pivotal role. As stated in the Ethiopian Education Policy (ETP, 1994), the teaching/learning process targets an outcome-based education that will invest on problem-solving, evaluation, creativity, and deeper learning. To achieve these critical thinking skills, the Policy has also stated that a concerted effort should be made to marry instruction and assessment; that is, continuous assessment. Continuous assessment enables teachers to develop students' psychological, intellectual, physical and social interaction skills.

Continuous assessment in academic and practical subjects including aptitude test will be conducted to ascertain the formation of all-rounded profile of students

at all levels (ETP, 1994:18).

Schools in Ethiopia now practice continuous assessment. But the question is, as fledgling practitioners, do teachers actually continuously assess with the intended confluence of instruction and its burgeoning objectives? Since teachers' actions are highly influenced by their beliefs (Abiy, 2000, 2002; Cain, 2012; Fang, 1996; Vibulphol, 2004; Wittrock, 1986), this study wants to explore high school English teachers' and students' perceptions of continuous assessment and their classroom application. Put clearly, this study attempts to respond to the following research questions.

1. How do high school English language teachers and students perceive continuous assessment?
2. What do English language teachers' and students' attitudes and perceived practices of continuous assessment look like?
3. How do high school English language teachers perceive the functions of continuous assessment?
4. How do high school English language teachers and students perceive the roles of continuous assessment in the development of students' intellectual, physical, social and interactive skills?

Rationale of the study

Teachers' implementation of continuous assessment as part of their instruction may help students achieve quality education, develop innovativeness and a sense of competence, and get opportunities for independent as well as life-long learning. If teachers, however, move astray from the right avenue of continuous assessment, a deleterious effect, at least a depletion of golden study time, will be in order; thus, an urgent response about what teachers think and how they act regarding continuous assessment seems more than desirable. The response may help take appropriate measures before teachers stride further in the road not to be taken.

So far, a study of the sort has not been done much in Ethiopia for the practice began in schools only recently. In this study, preliminary backdrop information was obtained from very few teachers in Fasilto Secondary School at Bahir Dar in an informal talk held with them about continuous assessment. It is reported that these teachers express their resentment about 'testing' their students every week. This study attempted to know what, how and why they test their students, but the responses obtained were entirely different from the objectives, type, and approaches of the literature concerning continuous assessment. As a result, this study will help authorities to take timely and appropriate corrective measures before practitioners delve deep into a wrong path. So, this study focused on teachers' and students' thoughts and attitudes about continuous assessment in English language classrooms and their practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is continuous assessment?

Different writers define continuous assessment differently, which can be categorized as narrow and broad definitions. The narrow definition confines Continuous Assessment only to classroom instruction. Asabe (2007), for example, defines it as a classroom process that is integrated with instruction. Similarly, Falayalo (1986) and Juliet (2007), viewing it as an integral part of instruction, considers it as a mechanism whereby the final grading of learners on the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of learning is made. The cognitive domain refers to the development of students' content knowledge and intellectual skills, while the affective domain includes students' confidence, feelings, values, motivations and attitudes. The psychomotor domain refers to the physical movement, coordination and use of motor skills; and in this study, it is particularly related to students' speaking and writing skills. Continuous assessment is a classroom strategy implemented by teachers to ascertain the knowledge, understanding, and skills attained by pupils (USAID, 2003). Nitko (2004), as cited in Adebowale and Alao (2008), described it as an information gathering tool that helps teachers select content and method of instruction.

Continuous Assessment is an ongoing process of gathering and interpreting information about student learning that is used in making decisions about what to teach and how well students have learned (p.4).

To the contrary, the broad definition sees continuous assessment as related to and beyond classroom instruction. For example, Asabe (2007) envisaged it as a decision-making tool that teachers utilize about students, curriculum, programs, and educational policy. Many, however, agree that it is a process of collecting, interpreting and synthesizing information to aid decision-making. Continuous assessment occurs recurrently during the school year, and serves as a part of teacher-student interaction. It serves as a means of increasing students' achievement, and is used as an alternative or supplemental to high stake testing (USAID, 2003). As divergent from summative tests, continuous assessment is formative in that it enables both teachers and students to be aware of the knowledge base and level of students, and indicates both teachers and students the gaps to be filled and the higher level to deal with.

Terminal versus continuous assessment

Terminal and continuous assessments are different paradigms. The former is carried out at the mid or end of a semester, whereas the latter is performed recurrently during the course of students' learning. Both types of

assessments are used to accomplish a gamut of decision-making, but for different purposes (Afemikhe, 2007). Terminal assessments are high stake examinations (Tsheko, n.d.) and are used to decide students' promotion or retention; and form an overall picture of students' achievement (Ellington and Earl, 1997). However, they may be disadvantageous to students who may encounter unexpected circumstances like illness during the day of examinations. Terminal assessment lacks accountability to improve instruction and student learning (Tsheko, n.d.); focusing on student promotions and permitting higher level education, such as university admissions. As criticized by Tsheko, terminal assessment may force teachers to *teach to the test... leaving out important facets* such as *providing learners with lifelong education* (p.3). The alternative paradigm to terminal assessment is continuous assessment which advocates repeated assessment of students (Afemikhe, 2007; Ellington and Earl, 1997; Puhl, 1997; Tsheko, n.d.).

Continuous assessment is considered as panacea (Afemikhe, 2007; Ellington and Earl, 1997; Puhl, 1997) to change the instructional process. As Puhl (1997) said, continuous assessment acknowledges that a change in assessment process results in a change in instructional process, since it enables teachers to assess students' performance at each stage of instruction to provide them on-going feedback so that they can become self-critical (See also Ellington and Earl, 1997). As Ellington and Earl argued, continuous assessment advocates *assessment for learning* principle emphasizing assessment of process rather than assessment of product. Nevertheless, continuous assessment is not absolute, and its drawbacks compared with its virtues are discussed as follows.

Virtues and shortcomings of continuous assessment

Continuous assessment has benefits and limitations. First, it is advantageous because it regularly illuminates about the quality of teaching and learning and informs about the level of students' achievement of learning objectives and expected competencies. Continuous assessment allows teachers to better employ the *teaching-assessment-feedback-correction (re-teaching)* learning cycle that summative, time-limited evaluations lack (National Institute for Educational Development (NIED), 1999:8). In this paradigm, instruction and assessment are seamless in the teaching process: one leading to the other (ibid). Similarly, Alausa (2006) regards continuous assessment as *guidance-oriented* because it gathers data about the teaching/learning over a period of time and helps modify instruction. According to Alausa (2006:2), "this could play a vital role in diagnosing and mediating areas of learners' weakness if properly anchored in what occurs in classrooms."

In addition, it is a way to genuinely gauge learners'

capabilities by utilizing varied methods of assessment. Harnessed to promote learner-centered education, continuous assessment helps students demonstrate their actual and potential capacities in the mastery of learning objectives. On the other hand, teachers will also have high engagement in performance activities, which at last leads them to integrate assessment results into instructional practice (Alausa, 2006).

In general, continuous assessment has virtues in diagnosing potentials, deficiencies and achievements of learners vis-à-vis the objectives of learning, and in encouraging teachers' commitment in varied assessment activities so that assessment informs instruction for remediation and improvement. Besides, it motivates pupils, allows teachers to give beneficial feedback, acquaints pupils about self- and peer-assessment, helps them to set achievable goals and targets and to monitor progress on regular basis and raises teachers' self-esteem in utilizing effective assessment techniques.

Continuous assessment also exhibits certain drawbacks which are linked with teachers' skill and management. Alausa (2006), for example, contended that the problems of continuous assessment chiefly concentrate on teachers' skills in test construction and administration, their attitudes and record keeping. Teachers need to construct valid and reliable assessments which can be comparable across classes, schools, regions and nations; and this can be a reality only when they are equipped with the skills of test construction and administration. As indicated in NIED (1999), however, there is lack of comparability among different school environments. What continuous assessments lack, because of school and teacher differences, is comparability across classes, schools, regions and nations. This comparability is provided by examinations because all learners take the same examinations.

The other problem is associated with the multi-dimensional skills teachers should be equipped with.

Teachers need to have the capacity to measure students' cognitive, psychomotor and affective attributes: attitudes, motives, interests, values and other personality characteristics. This indicates that continuous assessment demands high quality training of teachers who are capable of assessing their students in various angles.

The third problem associated with continuous assessment is that it is highly demanding, so teachers need to become committed to give recurrent assessments, do frequent marking and record keeping. Therefore, to attain hard-working and responsible teachers, awareness about its value and method of implementation must be created among teachers. Since record keeping in continuous assessment takes place over a period of time and collates students' performance from varied methods, it demands teachers' time, devotion and to some extent arithmetical operations.

To put it in a nutshell, the problem of continuous

assessment is connected with teachers' assessment and record keeping skills, their devotion to recurrently correct and mark students' work, and their wide-ranging perspectives to assess the cognitive, psychomotor and affective changes as well as social interaction skills development of their students. However, the problems are not without solution: training and creating awareness about the assessment modality may bring change to implement continuous assessment successfully.

Previous researches

Various studies both in Ethiopia and abroad were conducted on different issues about continuous assessment. For instance, Kapambwe (2010) studied teachers' implementation of continuous assessment in Zambian schools at length. His findings indicated that teachers emphasized continuous testing instead of continuous assessment. Kapambwe assumed that this happened because of the past influences of *traditional objective-based assessment* (p. 105). Owolabi and Onuka (n.d.), on the other hand, found the challenges of using continuous assessment in Nigerian high schools to be students' inadequate preparation for assessments, teachers' poor test administration procedures, poor handling of scores and feedback, poor coverage of instructional contents by test contents, large classes, and lack of knowledge and skills of the appropriate evaluation techniques. Obioma (n.d.) divulged that primary and junior secondary school teachers in Nigeria lacked knowledge of continuous assessment, and instead gave continuous testing.

In Ethiopia, Tebeje (2009), reported that instructors and students at Dilla University had inadequate knowledge of continuous assessment. Instructors consider it as an extra work load, which might be interpreted as a negative attitude towards it. Dagne (2009) found that 70% of the English language teachers in Jimma University did not use continuous assessment. The teachers attributed the failure to practice continuous assessment to the inadequate training they were given. Meba (2008), on the other hand, discovered that teacher educators and student-teachers in Debrebirhan Teacher Education and Vocational Training College had positive attitudes towards continuous assessment; however, they did not apply it in oral assessment. The causes for this were assumed to be students' low level of English, the influence of the old tradition of assessment and lack of assessment policy in the College.

In these studies, the perceptions of teachers and students, their attitudes and practices were studied separately. Especially, the studies in Ethiopia focused on higher education teachers and students. This study, however, focuses on high school English language teachers' and students' perceptions, attitudes and practices of continuous assessment. This makes it

unique from the studies reviewed. The study focuses only on English language teachers and students similar to Dagne's (2009) study.

METHODOLOGY

Participants of the study

The participants of the study were English language teachers and students at Injabara General and Preparatory (8 teachers and 200 students), Tiliili General Secondary (12 teachers and 202 students), Mengesha Jembere General Secondary (14 teachers and 206 students) and Dangila Preparatory Schools (7 teachers and 200 students) in West Gojjam, Ethiopia. Comprehensive sampling method was used for teachers, but simple random sampling method was used to select four sections (one from each grade level) in each school. All the class students in each selected section were the participants of the study.

In the beginning, questionnaires were distributed to 47 teachers and 815 students. From these participants, however, only 44 teachers and 812 students returned the questionnaire. From the returned, three teachers and four students did not correctly provide responses irrespective of the instruction given. A total of seven questionnaires were discarded from the 856 returned. Hence, 41 (34 male and 7 female) teachers and 808 (502 male and 306 female) students participated in the study.

The English language teacher participants had a teaching service that ranged from 3 to 36 years. Of the total English language teachers, 60.96% had teaching service of 10 years and above, while 39.2% served 3 to 9 years.

Instruments

Questionnaires, interview and content analyses were used as instruments of the study. Two types of questionnaires (with three parts each) for English language teachers and students, developed by the researcher, were used to collect data about their perceptions, attitudes and practices of continuous assessment. The questionnaire for teachers constituted 38 close-ended and 3 open-ended items. The contents of 11 of the close-ended items sought information about teachers' perceptions, 12 about their attitudes, and 15 about their practices of continuous assessment. The items were developed on a five-point Likert scale that ranged from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree'. The Cronbach alpha indices for the sub-scales of teachers' perception, attitude and practice were .72, .76 and .80, respectively; and all these were moderate. The open-ended items asked teachers to provide information about their understanding of continuous assessment, its advantages and disadvantages as well as the challenges they faced while practicing it. Similarly, the students' questionnaire also demanded the student participants to provide information about their perceptions, attitudes and experiences of continuous assessment in their English language classes. The total number of the items was 41, which consisted of 38 close-ended and 3 open-ended items. The scales and the number of items used for perceptions, attitudes and practices in the close-ended items were akin to those used in the teacher questionnaire. The Cronbach alpha indices indicated that the reliability of the items for student perceptions, attitudes and practices were .68, .72 and .70, respectively; and these were moderate. The open-ended items were included to obtain information about students' conceptions of continuous assessment, its advantages and disadvantages as well as the challenges they encountered while implementing it.

The second data gathering instrument used was content

Table 1. One sample t-test results of teachers' and students' perceptions, attitudes and perceived practices of continuous assessment.

Participants	Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	t-value	df	Sig
Teachers [N=41]	Perception	38.2195	6.47500	5.162	40	.000
	Attitude	40.6829	7.06201	4.246	40	.000
	Practice	55.1220	7.81087	8.298	40	.000
Students [N=808]	Perception	39.5458	6.70703	26.638	807	.000
	Attitude	40.6832	8.29379	16.657	807	.000
	Practice	48.6832	8.50766	10.657	807	.000

Significant at $p < 0.05$ (2- tailed).

analyses, particularly the contents of assessments (assignments) given to students. Five teachers' continuous assessments were gathered to assess the types and contents of items they included in the assignments. The items in the assignments were evaluated if they could promote the three domains of learning-cognitive, affective and psychomotor- and students' social interaction skills.

Furthermore, interview was used as an instrument to collect data from teacher participants. Five teachers were randomly selected from Injabara and Tillili secondary schools for the interview. The interview was conducted by an MA student in TEFL at Bahir Dar University. Three prompt interview questions that focused on the teachers' practice of continuous assessment, their reasons for not applying it and the challenges they encountered were used. Each of the interviewees took 5 minutes on average, and the interviewer took notes of their responses.

Methods of data analyses

The data gathered through the close-ended questionnaire were analyzed using a one-sample t-test applying SPSS 16. The variables were compared against specified constant values

(expected means). For instance, the calculated means of teachers' and students' perceptions, practices and attitudes towards continuous assessment were compared against the expected means of 33, 45, and 36, respectively. Likewise, the means of teachers' understanding of the functions of continuous assessment as narrow or broad functions were evaluated against the expected mean of 9. Finally, the means of the variables related to the students' social interaction skills, intellectual, psychomotor and affective development were evaluated against the expected mean of 3. The reason for determining the expected mean was because the researcher did not find any standard measurement established to evaluate against the obtained means.

The open-ended questionnaire items, teachers' quizzes and assignments as well as interview results were narrated and some were described in themes. Finally, the findings of the close-ended and open-ended questionnaire items, quizzes and interviews were triangulated in the discussion section.

FINDINGS

High school English language teachers' and students' perceptions, attitudes and perceived practices of continuous assessment

Table 1 summarizes the one-sample t-test results of

teachers' and students' perceptions, attitudes and perceived practices of continuous assessment. Table 1 incorporates the means, standard deviations, t-values and significance of the variables.

A one-sample t-test was computed to see whether or not teachers' perceptions and perceived practices were statistically significant compared against the expected means of 33 and 45, respectively. As shown in Table 1, the mean of teachers' perception ($M=38.22$; $SD=6.48$) exceeds the expected mean of 33; and this was significant at $p < 0.05$. Similarly, the mean of teachers' perceived practice ($M=55.12$; $SD=7.81$) goes significantly above the expected mean of 45 at $p < 0.05$. Therefore, the results suggest that teachers' perceive continuous assessment positively and believe that it is part of their teaching.

A one-sample t-test was also calculated using SPSS 16 to see whether or not students' perception and perceived practice were significant compared with the expected means of 33 and 45. Table 1 displays that the mean of students' perception ($M=39.55$; $SD=6.71$) significantly exceeds the expected mean of 33. Likewise, the mean of students' perceived practice ($M=48.68$; $SD=8.51$) goes far beyond the expected mean of 45 at $p < 0.05$. This result suggests that students perceived continuous assessment positively, and assumed that they practice it in their learning process. The same procedure was followed to see the significance level of teachers' and students' attitudes ($M=40.68$ and 40.68 ; $SD=7.06$ and 8.29 for teachers and students, respectively) towards continuous assessment. The results indicated that both groups had a statistically significant favorable attitude at $p < 0.05$.

High school English language teachers' category of the functions of continuous assessment as broad and narrow

Table 2 summarizes teachers' views of the functions of continuous assessment as broad and narrow functions. Table 2 includes the means, standard deviations, t-values

Table 2. Teachers' perceptions of the roles of continuous assessment

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Broad	41	11.0000	2.42899	5.272	40	.000
Narrow	41	10.2439	2.43701	3.268	40	.002

Table 3. One-sample t-test results of teachers' and students' perceptions of the purposes of CA in developing the whole person.

Participants	Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Teachers [N=41]	Social interaction skill	3.7073	.92854	4.878	40	.000
	Emotional changes	3.5610	1.09656	3.276	40	.002
	Physical development	2.8780	1.24890	-.625	40	.535
	Intellectual development	3.8537	.96335	5.674	40	.000
Students [N=808]	Social interaction skill	3.9703	1.18085	23.357	807	.000
	Emotional changes	3.5334	1.20978	12.552	807	.000
	Physical development	2.7488	1.34689	-5.302	807	.000
	Intellectual development	3.9394	1.24856	21.386	807	.000

and the significance level of the variables.

Six of the items (3 each for broad and narrow) in the questionnaire sought information about teachers' perspectives regarding the roles of continuous assessment in schools. The teachers were asked if continuous assessment could serve classroom objectives in providing feed-back to students, in improving instructional methods and the teaching/ learning process (narrow perspective), and/or functions beyond the classroom for change of curricula, programs and learning objectives (broad perspective). The findings disclosed that the means for both variables (M=11.00 and 10.24; SD=2.43 and 2.44 for broad and narrow perspectives, respectively) were greater than the population mean 9 and were statistically significant at $p < 0.05$. This result suggests that teachers thought that continuous assessment plays a role in the change of both classroom teaching and beyond; that is, in the change of curricula, programs and learning objectives.

High school English language teachers' and students' perceptions of the roles of continuous assessment in developing students' cognitive, psychomotor and emotional skills

As indicated in the Methodology part of this paper, teachers and students were asked to express their ideas about the roles of continuous assessment in enhancing students' social interaction skill, emotional changes, physical development, and intellectual development. Table 3 summarizes the results.

A one-sample t-test was also computed to see whether

or not teachers and students perceive that continuous assessment enables students to develop their social interaction skills, changes their emotions, and helps them develop physically and/or intellectually. The findings indicated that the mean differences of both teachers and students, except mean of teachers' responses for 'physical development' were statistically significant compared with the expected mean 3 at $p < 0.05$. In other words, the results showed that both groups believe that continuous assessment significantly contributes to students' social interaction, cognitive, and affective growth. Continuous assessment, however, was not assumed to contribute to students' physical development by teachers.

Findings from open-ended items

The participants' responses to the open-ended items revealed that continuous assessment was assumed to be advantageous. It was considered as a tool for gathering information about and identifying the overall development of students' behavior, knowledge, skills and attitude. It was also assumed to be a means of checking students' understanding of the lessons they were taught, and evaluating their day-to-day progress, skills development and performance.

In expressing the purposes of continuous assessment, 56.10% of the English language teacher participants said that it helps assess students' progress. Of this, 8.69% opined that it helps students develop the four language skills. 27.31% assumed that it is helpful to follow up students' day-to-day activity, while 7.21% argued that it promotes active learning and enhances students' problem-

Table 4. Teachers' responses about the disadvantages of continuous assessment in percent.

No	Disadvantage	Percent
1	Time consuming [Waste of time]	48.78
2	Burden to teachers	29.27
3	Mark inflation	26.83
4	Large class size	21.95
5	Dependency	12.20
6	Unable to cover annual plan	07.32
7	Doesn't show students' overall performance	07.32
8	Students' lack of interest	07.32
9	Poor level of students	07.32
10	Teacher commitment	07.32
11	Teachers' unskilled record keeping	02.44
Total		178.07*

*percent exceeds 100 because teachers gave multiple answers.

solving skill. And the other 9.40% expressed that it helps students achieve good results.

The responses of teachers concerning the disadvantages of continuous assessment were categorized in themes as summarized in Table 4.

As can be seen in Table 4, nearly half of the teacher respondents think that continuous assessment consumes (even some expressed it as 'wastage') much time, and incurs additional work load to teachers. They also said that it causes mark inflation, and is difficult to apply it in large classes. They assumed that it develops dependency among less capable students.

Students were also asked about the advantages and disadvantages of continuous assessment. 99.01% of them said that it is helpful to assess their performances, while 11.88% of them considered it advantageous in increasing their English language results. Student participants also told that continuous assessment increases their initiation to learn (07.92%), develops their critical thinking ability (03.96%), and enhances their relationship with their teachers (03.96%). Some of them (15.84%), however, expressed its disadvantages as time consuming. Others (07.92%) criticized teachers' indifference, while 23.53% blamed it for creating dependency of less capable students on better performing peers. The majority (63.37%) of them questioned its reliability in actually measuring their performance. They attributed teachers' unfair marking to the assessment system.

[Percent exceeds 100 because students gave multiple responses].

Interview results

The interview questions targeted to ferret out English language teachers' actual performance of continuous

assessment and their particular focus in assessing their students. Interviewees responded that they gave repeated assessments to get feedback about students' understanding of the taught lessons. The interviewees also pointed out that continuous assessment was used to help students pass, and the assessment questions were prepared from the lessons the students have covered. They said this offers students the opportunity to recall all that they have studied within a month and score better. Besides, students' class work and homework assignment results are also included in students' evaluations; and this helps reduce the attrition rate. As the interviewees attested, the teacher-made assessments, except the mid-semester and final examinations which include reading and vocabulary, were utterly grammar-based.

Content analysis: Teacher-made assessments

Continuous assessments were given during special schedules set by the schools. Special schedules were set to save time because continuous assessment was assumed to consume (even waste) time. Assessments were given to students five times a semester. The assessments were easy and did not exceed 10 items covering the grammar lessons taught after each assessment. The common item types were true/false, multiple choice, transformation of sentences, and others, all of which were typical of the mid-and final examinations (A sample assignment is attached in the Appendix section).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to find out high school English language teachers' and students' perceptions,

attitudes and perceived practices of continuous assessment. The statistical findings regarding teachers' and students' perceptions about continuous assessment showed that both teachers and students had positive and statistically significant perception. As Abiy (2000, 2002), Cain (2012), Fang (1996), Vibulphol (2004) and others have noted, teachers' and students' positive perceptions are decisive for success in developing students' learning.

Gravaso et al. (2002) also alluded that assessments influence instruction and learning. Teachers need to be convinced about the type of assessment, the contents and various instruments they employ in assessments. And these need to be reciprocated by their students. The agreement between the two parties is likely to bring the desired success in English language competence development. In this regard, the one-sample t-test results have confirmed that both parties have desirable perception towards continuous assessment as a component of English language teaching/learning. Contrarily, however, the open-ended items of the questionnaire and the teacher interview results showed that both teachers and students had a misconception about continuous assessment. The findings revealed that continuous assessment for them means dividing the one-or two-time summative tests into many 'continuous tests' (Kapambwe, 2010). This indicates that their conception is highly enmeshed with their past experiences of terminal (summative) examinations. Teachers and students' thinking of continuous assessment as 'continuous tests' conforms with Kapambwe's (2010) finding in Zambia. This finding goes astray from the instructional objectives of enabling students to become problem-solvers, critical thinkers, creative and deep learners (ETP, 1994). Teachers and students did not apply continuous assessment in the schools as expected. This problem of relegating continuous assessment was also reflected in studies conducted in higher institutions in Ethiopia (Tebeje, 2009; Dagne, 2009; Meba, 2008). One of the causes for this might be (as the teacher participants' responses in the personal information part indicated) lack of adequate training. 92.68% (39 Out of 41 teachers) of the respondents said that the training they had about continuous assessment was not adequate. Another possible reason could be the influence of their past experiences, which in most cases is very difficult to detach from. Though only 7.2% of the teachers said there is lack of commitment, 48.78% of them and 15.84% of the students have said in the open-ended questionnaire that it is time consuming.

Therefore, teachers' and students' attitudes coupled with their low commitment might have also contributed to teachers' failure of applying continuous assessment in high schools.

Teachers and students also had a positive attitude towards continuous assessment and they assumed that they would practice it in the teaching/ learning process to promote students' intellectual, emotional, physical and

social interaction skills. However, this was not realized in both the teachers' and the students' open-ended questionnaire items and teachers' interview responses as well as in the assignments given. The focus has been found to be only on the intellectual skill development leaving the rest of the skills aside. This result can be attributed to teachers' inadequate training, less skill and capability.

The close-ended questionnaire results differed in most cases from the open-ended questionnaire, the interview and content analyses results presumably because the former might have been influenced by social desirability effect, while the latter disclosed the reality. Klassen et al. (1975) contended that responses influenced by social desirability influences survey results. It is sheer denial of socially undesirable traits and claim of socially desirable ones. It is a coping strategy by tending towards the desirable responses (Paulhus, 1984).

The one-sample t-test also indicated that teachers thought that continuous assessment has an effect both on classroom instruction (Falayalo, 1986; Juliet, 2007) [narrow definition] and decision making regarding curricula, programs, and even educational policy (Asabe, 2007) [Broad definition]. However, the majority of the teacher respondents have asserted that it helps assess students' progress, follow-up students' day-to-day activity, promote active learning, and improve students' results in their open-ended questionnaire results. All these are connected to classroom instruction. The teachers' interview results similarly indicated that teachers assume that continuous assessment helps enhance classroom instruction. The underlying reason for the discrepancy of teachers' responses may be again related to 'self-deception'; that is, social desirability bias on teachers' responses to the close-ended questionnaire items (Millham and Kellogg, 1980).

Which students' skill does continuous assessment ameliorate? The one-sample t-test has designated that both teachers and students believe that continuous assessment enhances students' social interaction, emotional changes and intellectual development skills. Both groups, however agreed that it does not have any effect on students' physical development. In contrast to the one-sample t-test results, however, the results of the open-ended items, the interviews and the actual classroom quizzes revealed that teachers almost entirely provide intellectual skills. The studies conducted in Ethiopia (Tebeje, 2009; Dagne, 2009; Meba 2008) indirectly showed that teachers focused on testing intellectual skills; that is, testing the contents of the lessons taught. This is a mere reflection of what teachers teach in Ethiopian schools. Other domains than the cognitive domain seem to be forgotten by teachers in their instructional objectives and lesson plans. The inconsistency in teachers' and students' responses between their perception and actual practices occurred probably because teachers, in their responses to the close-ended

questionnaire, referred to the theories they learned during training about continuous assessment, and the students merely expressed what they think is right; that is, without reference to what is actually being done. This may be related to Millham and Kellogg's (1980) social desirability bias by others, which they termed as 'other-deception'.

As indicated in the literature, continuous assessment serves as a diagnostic tool for teachers to identify students' strengths and weaknesses, evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching strategies, and modify their instructional approach (Alausa, 2006). However, this was not practical, and the *teaching-assessment-re-teaching cycle* was not in order most probably because teachers (48.78%) considered continuous assessment as time-consuming (even as waste of time by some of them), or because they were influenced by the traditional view of 'testing for evaluation'. Literature also shows that continuous assessment enhances communication between teachers and students, and motivates students to develop a higher level of competency (Owolabi and Onuka, n.d.). The results in this study to some extent conform to the literature in this regard. A significant number of teacher and student respondents seem to understand continuous assessment as a means of obtaining good marks for students.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Continuous assessment is understood by the participants of the study as giving continuous tests that can support students to develop their intellectual capacity. In other words, it was used for the purpose of student mastery of the subject matter. Its service to diagnose students' problems and modify teachers' teaching approach was limited, and even absent in most cases. Generally, it may be possible to conclude from the findings that continuous assessment was not properly practiced in the schools studied. Therefore, it was recommended that continuous on-job training be given to secondary school English language teachers in Ethiopia.

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Appendix. 2005 E.C. Grade 10 sections K-N test

1. Alem is a policewoman ---job is very interesting.
a. who b. whom c. whose d. all
2. Students and teachers ----respect each other.
a. mustn't b. must c. might d. can
3. Cities are boring to her, so she has decided to go---to Bahir Dar -----to Awasa.
a. either/or b. either c. neither/nor d. both/and
4. I ---on holiday next Monday.
a. am going b. will go c. shall go d. all
5. Zelalem and Haile go away on holiday very often, so they ---have short of money.
a. shall b. won't c. can't d. mustn't
6. Congratulations on passing your exam. You -----be very pleased.
a. must b. can c. will d. shall
7. Write a present perfect tense sentence.
8. Write a meaningful past simple tense sentence.
9. Write the opposite of the following words using the correct prefixes.
a. respect b. employ c. appear d. adjust