

## **Knowledge, Perception, Practices and Challenges of Assessment for Learning (AfL) among First Cycle Primary School Teachers in Somali Regional State**

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study was to investigate teacher's knowledge and perception towards assessment for learning. Besides, factors that affect the implementation of assessment for learning was examined. For such pursuit, four were das were selected purposely for the study. First cycle primary schools existed in these Woredas were selected purposefully. In the study 82 teachers, 12 principals and 4 Wereda education experts were participated in the study. Questionnaire, and interview guides were used to trap data from the study areas. The main findings of the research showed that teachers did not have knowledge of assessment for learning. What is more practiced and common is administering test, mid-exam and final exam (summative type) than continuous assessment. Both teachers and school directors did not understand the function of AfL and misuse it. Committee was assigned to develop items for exams and perceived the process as assessment for learning which was not reflecting the essence of assessment for learning. Besides, teachers did not have positive view towards assessment for learning. This stance and perception hampered the AfL implementation and the value it has for students learning and outcomes. Teachers did not believe that assessment for learning has a significant value in enhancing student's strength by identifying their need and weakness in continuous learning engagement via the application of assessment for learning. This was happened due to different factors such as large class size, time taking or insufficient time to apply AfL, lack of teacher's skill to apply AfL, lack of teacher's guide and subject syllabus for AfL and there were no supplementary materials to make use of assessment for learning effectively. So as to effectively apply AfL in schools, ministry of education, region education bureaus and Woreda education offices shall develop AfL implementation manual, AfL teacher's evaluation guide as well as provide continuous training for teachers, directors, and supervisors.

**Key words:** Knowledge, Perception, Practices and Challenges of AfL, Assessment for Learning

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1. Background**

Continuous assessment has a pervasive impact on learner's effort, motivation to learning and improves their achievement. It is a means to reach at required target with multitude task engagement in the process of learning-teaching practices. It will create favorable room for students to reflect what they are doing, what they are going to do and how they will check and carry out their education progress. This is a process in learning and makes the entire instruction active and meaningful. Plan adjustment from both teachers and students would be attributed if teachers adapt and make the system under implementation. Not only continuous assessment would have positive impact on students learning progress but it would also create more opportunities for teachers to reflect what they have done, what they have been doing and how the learning-teaching instruction would be improved for the future. Such practice would have a potential impact on quality of learning in particular and quality of education in general. One of the subsumes or important indicators of quality of education is the strategies teachers use in classrooms to measure students learning and achievement. This is expressed in terms of teacher's implementation of formative assessment, measure quality of such practices and their readiness to correct such practices on the bases of evidence trapped from such continues engagement.

Different literatures stated that assessment is expressed in term of process and product with different orientations and targets. Formative assessment supports student's ongoing learning and has similar intention with assessment for learning whereas summative assessment is served for evaluation purpose or expressed in

terms of product (Supovitz, 2012). Particularly formative assessment assists students to reduce the trial and error response in the provision of ongoing learning-teaching pursuit. It will have a chance for them to improve the quality of response in their learning (Sadler, 1989). Thus, assessment for learning makes students ready for the next step to perform their tasks in a better way. Teachers will also collect more information about students learning progress and ready to modify what they will do for the future so as to improve students' learning outcomes. This is manifested via teacher's questioning, observations, checklists, peer assessment, homework, and short writing assignments (Black & Wiliam, 1998). This would support teachers to shape the learning-teaching process for the future. It was also stated that implementation of AfL will strengthen the learning via trapping more evidence on students learning, interpreting the obtained evidence and take action on the bases of the evidence collected (Wiliam & Black 1996).

Assessment for Learning (AfL) can be applied in different institutions for learning-teaching improvement. This is manifested via questioning, feedback via marking, peer and self-assessment and formative assessment. Learning is improved through assessment as it was witnessed in research findings (Stobart 2008, p147). According to Dylay (2011), assessment strives to benefit learner to improve their teaching and learning practices.

Theoretically it was stated that AfL is not meant to ensure the validity and reliability of the assessment in which teachers are expected to apply. It is not prepared for certification rather to improve students' engagement in learning. This is embedded in continues learning-teaching practices and teachers are integrated it as an integral part of the teaching style (Black et al, 2003 p2). This is availed on the counter part of summative assessment which aimed at to measure students learning of the materials to ensure students grade and certificate levels (Wiliam, 2000 p18). This type of assessment is happened at the end of learning-teaching instruction which was not be able to show the students educational history. Thus, in this study, it was attempted to examine knowledge, perception and practices of AfL in Ethiopian Somali Regional State.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

It was discussed in literatures that there are shifts in implementation and thinking from assessment of learning to assessment for learning. Assessment of learning exclusively determines students' knowledge and skills on the specified subjects. This is not consistent with assessment for learning where its ongoing task engagement is entrenched with educational process. It steers and promotes learner to maximize their individual learning so as to enhance their ability (Martinez & Lipson 1989). Besides, AfL is useful to identify aspect of learning in the developing process and promote learner's capability. This is tried to seek out, analyses and reflects on information from students themselves, teachers and the learner's peers as it is expressed in dialogue, learner responses to tasks and questions, and observation. It is observed in everyday teaching and everyday classrooms. This is more ingrained in teaching-learning context where the learners invite to have wider perspective and appeared in the lifelong learning process (<http://www.informaworld.com>). In addition, it is deemed as midstream process which rectifies student's misconceptions and mistakes on the areas they were taught (Kahl, 2005).

Researchers believed that student's confidence, motivation and learning would not be improved by administering examination at the end of the semester. From our experience, teachers do not have knowledge of continuous assessment and value it would have for learning. Our common sense experience telling us that teacher's do have negative attitude towards implementing and assessing the impact of AfL in educational institutions. Besides, teachers are not ready to continuously engage students in their tasks since AfL practice requires more time and effort to realize its intention. In addition, they have negative perception on the value of AfL and its positive impact on students learning. All these problems do have direct impact on the overall learning-teaching implementation and students learning outcomes. Furthermore, it was also charted out the existing AfL practices and the factors that affect AfL implementation in the identified areas. The study then aims to fill the research gap by: 1) Examining first cycle primary schools Teacher's knowledge and perception of AfL; 2) Exploring the daily practices of AfL in first cycle primary schools; 3) Investigating the factors that affect the implementation of AfL in first cycle primary schools.

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Research Design**

Assessment for learning is one of the most powerful ways to improve student achievement and to design appropriate interventions for effective implementation of the concept requires complete understanding of its different facets. In order to get comprehensive understanding about the level of utilization of the concept, concurrent mixed method was used as a best suitable method to collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data. Concurrent mixed method also provides means to offset the weakness inherent within one

method (quantitative or qualitative) with the strength of the other method. Therefore, by using this method, researchers can get a complete understanding about the extent that the assessment for learning is practiced in the primary schools of Somali region, as well as the factors that facilitates or hinders its implementation.

## 2.2 Participants

In the study four Weredas of ESRS were selected purposively. This is because the findings of the study can be used as the base line data for intervention in the selected weredas. Based on this, four weredas, Yo'ale, Marsin, Dhanan and Segag were included in the study. From these weredas 12 primary schools and 82 teachers were selected using purposeful and simple random sampling techniques respectively. In addition, four education experts, and 12 directors were selected through purposively.

## 2.3 Data Collection Instruments

### Questionnaire

Questionnaires consists of 43 items focuses on the knowledge, perception, practices and challenges of assessment for learning in the classrooms were used to collect data from the 82 teachers. The internal consistency reliability score of the items were calculated: Practice Assessment for Learning, 22 items with five point Likert scale ( $\alpha = .82$ ); Perception for Assessment for Learning, six items with five point likert scale ( $\alpha = .78$ ); Knowledge of Assessment for Learning, seven items with five point likert scale ( $\alpha = .73$ ); and Challenges of Assessment for Learning, eight items with five point Likert scale ( $\alpha = .87$ ).

### Interview

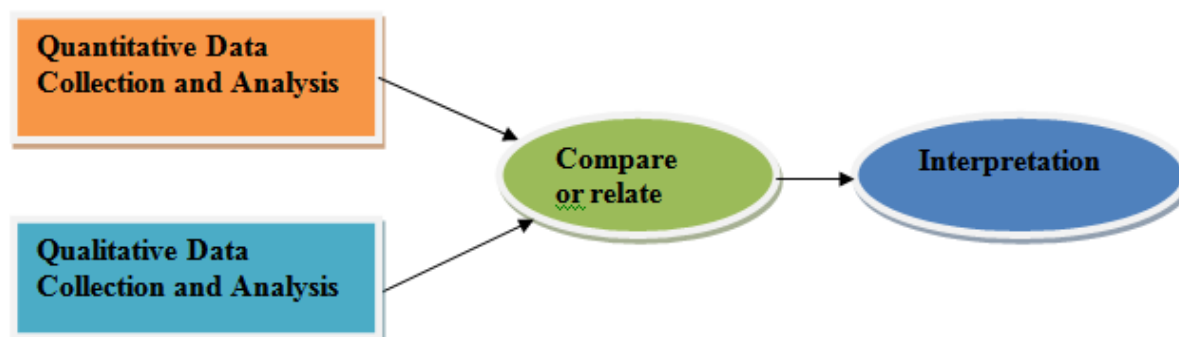
Interviews were conducted with 12 school directors, and four education experts. For school directors 11 interview guide questions were prepared, and for education officials nine interview guide questions were prepared. The purpose of the interview was to generate in-depth information about the continuous assessment practices and challenges of continuous assessment. The interviews were based on the semi-structured methods of interviewing.

## 2.4 Data Analysis

Both the quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed and interpreted. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software. First, code book were prepared to translate the data in to format suitable for SPSS software. Then the data obtained through questionnaires were entered in to the computer and analyzed using descriptive statistics namely percentage and frequency.

Fort the Qualitative data, coding system were used to analyze the data. By using comparative analysis, each participant's response was compared and connected to others, then various categories, properties, and dimensions emerged from the data which indicates to what extent principals, education experts and teachers are familiar with the concept of classroom based continuous assessment.

**Figure 1: Concurrent Mixed Method Design**



Source: Creswell, John W. (2012)

## III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Background Characteristics of the Respondents

Regarding teacher respondents, there are 64.6% male and 35.4% female respondents. Of these, 14.6%, 82.9%) and 2,4% have certificate, diploma and degree educational qualification respectively. Respondents who work < 5 years, 5-10 years and 11-15 years are 13(15.9%), 25(30.5%) and 44(53.7%) respectively.

### 3.2 Teacher’s knowledge of Assessment for Learning

The Table 1 below portrays that most of 53 % teacher respondents are against the idea of continuous assessment is giving tests to students continuously. However, 45.1% respondents responded that continuous assessment is all about giving tests to students continuously. It is only 1.2% respondents responded neither against nor for to this idea. Table 1 also demonstrated that majority (75.7%) respondents responded that the purpose of continuous assessment is not to make judgments on students’ promotion to the next grades. It is only 9.8% of respondents favoured the idea that continuous assessment is to make judgments on students’ promotion to the next grades. 14.6%of respondents didn’t decide about the stated notion.

This Table further showed that the point of continuous assessment is used to identify students got only positive response from 14.6% of respondents. 60% respondents totally disagree for the stated idea. The remaining respondents didn’t decide regarding this idea are 24.4%. Similarly, 65% respondents noted that continuous assessment information is not used to plan instruction. Whereas, respondents who have a stand that continuous assessment information is used to plan instruction are 3.7%.and 29.3% questioner respondents didn’t have a stand regarding this point.

The noted Table also indicated that majority (81.7%) of the respondents disagreed with the issues which has the notion that continuous assessment information is used to identify children’s’ strengths and weaknesses. It is only 2.4% respondents who believed that continuous assessment information is used to identify children’s strengths and weaknesses. 15.9% respondents have no stand about this issue. By the same token, most of the respondents 75.6% are not in favour of the idea that conventional examination for grade grades 1-4 learners is forbidden. It is only 1.2% respondent who agreed with this notion. 23.2% respondents didn’t decide on the issue.

The last point that is indicated in the described Table is about the education policy. Again, most of the respondents 69.5% didn’t favor the idea that education policy promotes automatic promotion of students in grades 1-4. It is only 22% respondents who agreed with this point. 8.5% respondents have no stand about this idea.

**Table 1. Teachers' Knowledge of Assessment for learning**

No	Items	Disagree		Neutral		Agree	
		Fre	%	Fre	%	Fre	%
1	CA is all about giving tests to students continuously	44	53.7%	1	1.2%	37	45.1%
2	The purpose of CA is to make judgment on students' promotion to the next grades.	62	75.7%	12	14.6%	8	9.8%
3	CA information is used to identify students’ special educational needs	50	60%	20	24.4%	12	14.6%
4	CA information is used to plan instruction	54	65.8%	24	29.3%	3	3.7%
5	CA information is used to identify children's strengths and weaknesses	67	81.7%	13	15.9%	2	2.4%
6	Conventional examination for grades 1 to 4 learners does not exist.	62	75.6%	19	23.2%	1	1.2%
7	The education policy promotes free promotion in grades 1 to 4.	57	69.5%	7	8.5%	18	22%

The knowledge base of assessment for learning for teachers and school leaders varies. The data collected indicated that both woreda education experts and school directors misunderstood the concept of assessment for learning. In addition to the objective, they are going to achieve through employing assessment for learning technique. They mix up assessment for learning with assessment of learning.

*“First cycle primary school students are assessed based on the lessons taught by their teachers through the teaching learning processes of the school. This may be on monthly basis. The tests conducted in the schools are prepared by committees that consist of directors and teachers of different schools in the woreda. The main objective of the assessment is to improve the quality of education.”*

As it was presented in the qualitative case above, woreda education office experts and school directors misunderstood who conducts or carries out assessment for learning. They mentioned the assessment is conducted by a committee (woreda education office, school directors, teachers and parents), instead of teachers, peers, students. Assessment for learning is conducted in the classroom, where there is no parent, woreda education office expert or school director. Moreover, they do not have a clear understanding of the

objective that they want to achieve. Their aim varies from formative (supporting learning) to evaluative (holding schools accountable).

Other respondents also voiced in the following way:

*“We often use final and tests to understand students’ progress in learning. This will motivate students to read more and engage in their learning task. We feel continuous assessment is to support students to get addition score in their subjects not to really understand the potential of students.”*

One of the directors which were interviewed in the study also supported the quote indicated above. He expressed in the following way:

*“Teachers understood that mid-exam and tests are taken as continuous assessment. They do not understand its value for students learning. They want to have fixed time of student’s assessment rather to make it on continuous bases.”*

From the analysis it appears that teachers and school directors misunderstood the concept of assessment and they mix with the concept of assessment of learning. From example, the result indicates that teachers and school directors consider assessment for learning as giving students a continuous tests and using the result of these tests to assign grades to the students and make promotion and retention decisions. Or in some cases, to classify students based on their performance in to high, middle and low achievers. Other studies also revealed similar findings that AfL was conceived as a continuous testing that is administered every Friday without assuming remedy that could solve student’s learning problems (Bultosa, 2017); tests, exam and class work were common assessment techniques.

According to Looney, (2011), all these characteristics relate with assessment of learning (summative assessment). Moreover, Arends & Kitcher (2010) and Brookhart (2007) clearly mentioned that assessment for learning is utilized to identify students' strengths and weaknesses by collecting information prior to or during instruction. These data also assists teachers to plan their subsequent instruction and to support students in guiding their own learning.

### 3.3 Teachers’ Perception about Assessment for Learning

Table 2 below, indicates first cycle primary school teachers’ perception about continuous assessment. As indicated in this table, most of the respondents (57%) believed that students learn more by lecturing than by doing themselves. It is only (9.7%) participants who disagree with this idea. Large number (32.9%) respondents responded nether nor against this idea. Similarly, majority (69.5%) of the respondents favored the idea that continuous assessment is time consuming. On the contrary, 24.4% believed the opposite. There are 6.1% respondents have no stand regarding this scenario.

Furthermore, the noted Table indicated that majority (81.7%) of the respondents believed that continuous assessment does not help students to assess themselves. There are only 13.4% respondents who have an opposite stand. There are neither also 4.9% respondents who have no response. Besides, 76.9% respondents believed that the assessment also doesn’t make students to assess each other. There is only 1.2% respondents who have the opposite idea. There is large number 22% who didn’t decide about the issue.

In addition, most of the respondents (83%) stated that continuous assessment doesn’t improve students’ learning. This idea got negative response from 11% of respondents. There are 6.3% respondents who got difficulty to decide for or against this view. The last but not list point indicated in the Table is about students’ education. 54.9% respondents agreed with the issue that continuous assessment is used to identify students educational. 31(37.8%) respondents are not in favour of this idea. There are 7.3% respondents who didn’t decide about the issue.

**Table 2. Teachers' Perception about Assessment for Learning**

No	Items	Disagree		Neutral		Agree	
		Fre	%	Fre	%	Fre	%
1	Students learn more by lecturing than by doing themselves	8	9.7	27	32.9%	47	57.3%
2	Time consuming	20	24.4%	5	6.1%	57	69.5%
3	Students couldn’t assess themselves	11	13.4%	4	4.9%	67	81.7%
4	Students couldn’t assess each other	1	1.2%	18	22%	63	76.9%
5	CA doesn’t improve students’ learning	9	11%	5	6.1%	68	83%
6	CA is used to identify students’ educational need	31	37.8%	6	7.3%	45	54.9%

One teacher also stated in the following way on the agenda rose.

*“We don’t use continuous assessment in our class since we perceive it will not contribute more for students learning. We feel this will assist students to get more marks without exerting more efforts.”*

One of the experts interviewed was also supported the case it was presented above. He presented in the following way:

*“Teachers do not have positive attitude towards continuous assessment and student center teaching. They want to apply mid and final exams only.”*

The study identified the negative perception of the teachers toward the assessment for learning. Majority of teachers believe that assessment for learning consumes more time and students learn more by lecturing than by doing themselves. Similarly, teachers perceive that assessment for learning could not improve student learning and students could not assess themselves or each other. This creates barrier to implement the practice of assessment for learning. This contradicts with the findings of Black & Wiliam (1998) and Cauley & McMillan ( 2010) which clearly stated that the assessment for learning improves student learning and students can assess their performance and the performance of their classmates.

### 3.4 The Practices of Assessment for Learning

The Table 3 presents practice of continuous assessment among first cycle primary teachers. Of all respondents, 64.4% respondents never checked students’ achieve of MLC. However, there are 40.2% participants sometimes did check students’ achieve of MLC. There are only 13.4% respondents who often conducted MLC checking process. This table also portrayed that most of the respondents 53.8% responded that teachers sometimes help learners to take responsibility for their own learning. Whereas, 26.8% respondents reported that teachers never help learners to take responsibility for their own learning. On the contrary, respondents who reported that teachers often help learners to take responsibility for their own learning are 24.4%.

In addition, 44% respondent indicated that teachers never assist students’ learning throughout the session. However, 23% respondents responded that teachers often assist students’ learning throughout the session. As 33% respondents reported teachers sometimes assist students’ learning throughout the session. Moreover, majority of the respondents 70% reported that teachers let students assess their work each other. It is only 8.5% respondents who reported that teachers often let students assess their work each other. Respondents who reported that teachers sometimes let students assess their work each other are 20.7%. By the same token, most of the respondents 79.3% reported that teachers never measure individual learners against their own previous performance not comparing to their peers. There are only 3.7% respondents who responded that teachers often measure learners against their previous performance not to their peers. Whereas, 17% respondents reported that teachers sometimes measure learners against their previous performance not to their peers.

**Table 3. Practices of Assessment for Learning among First Cycle Primary Teachers**

No	Items	Often		Sometimes		Never	
		Fre.	%	Fre.	%	Fre.	%
1	Check students’ achieve of MLC	11	13.4%	33	40.2%	38	64.4%
2	Help learners to take responsibility for their own learning	20	24.4%	44	53.8%	22	26.8%
3	Assist students’ learning throughout the session	19	23%	27	33%	36	44%
4	Let students assess the work of other students	7	8.5%	17	20.7%	58	70.7%
5	Measure individual learners against their own previous performance and not to their peers?	3	3.7%	14	17%	65	79.3%
6	Develop quiz/items that correspond to MLCs	14	17%	31	37.8%	37	45.2%
7	Use CA as an ongoing component of student learning	5	6%	18	22%	59	72%
8	Engage students in varieties of activities	19	23%	30	36.6%	33	40.4%
9	Consider the knowledge, attitude and skills components of learning	21	25.5%	25	30.5%	36	44%

Moreover, the qualitative data indicates that both Woreda education office experts and directors do not have a student assessment policy guideline and they mentioned that the assessment data is used to give grades, to promote or retain students, and to categorize students into high, middle and low achiever students. All these assessment activities are part of assessment of learning, and cannot be considered as assessment for learning. In assessment for learning, the assessment data is used only to identify students' weaknesses and strengths, and to assist teachers in planning of next classes.

Furthermore, Table 3 noted that 45.2% respondents reported that teachers never develop quiz that correspond to MLC. Almost similar number 37.8% respondents on the other hand reported that teachers sometimes develop quiz items that correspond to MLC. Respondents who reported that teachers often develop quiz that correspond to MLC are 17%. Besides, majority 59(72%) respondents' reported that teachers use continuous assessment as ongoing component of MLC. it is only 6% respondents who reported that teachers use continuous assessment as ongoing component of MLC. there are 22% respondents who responded that teachers sometimes use continuous assessment as ongoing component of MLC.

There are only 23% respondents who reported that teachers often engage students in varieties of activities. On the other side, 40% respondents responded that teachers never engage students in varieties of activities. Respondents who responded that teachers sometimes engage students in varieties of activities are 36.6%. The last but not list point indicated in this table is about knowledge, attitude and skills components of learning. For this item, there are 44% respondents who reported that teacher never consider the knowledge, attitude and skill components of learning. 30% of the respondents reported that teachers sometimes consider knowledge, attitude and skill components of learning. 25.5% respondents indicated that teachers often consider the knowledge, attitude and skill components of learning.

### 3.4.1 Practices of using teachers' guide and syllabus to prepare instructional lesson

As indicated in Table 4 below, over half (52.4%) of the respondents sometimes used teacher's guide to set learning objectives where as the remaining 45.2% of teachers never used the teacher's guide for lesson planning. Concerning use of syllabus for lesson planning and setting learning objectives, nearly two-third (61%) of respondents never used (seen) the material.

**Table 4. Practice of using necessary documents to prepare lesson plan**

No	Items	Often		Sometimes		Never	
		Fre.	%	Fre.	%	Fre.	%
1	Use teacher's guide during lesson planning	2	2.4%	43	52.4%	37	45.2%
2	Use teacher's syllabus during lesson planning	5	6.1%	27	32.9%	50	61%

### 3.4.2 Practices of recording and documentation of students' progress

Concerning practices of recording and documentation of students' progress, Table 5 below reveal that majority (81.7%) of respondents often keep records of students' progress while a small proportion (14.6%) of respondents reported to keep records of students' progress sometimes. The remaining small proportion of teachers never kept students' progress. In regards to use of continuous assessment information to plan instruction, majority (70.7%) of teachers never reviewed continuous assessment data. Only the remaining 29.3% of respondents mentioned to sometimes or often review students' continuous assessment information while planning instruction. Moreover, one-third (34%) of teachers used continuous assessment information to address students' special educational needs but more than half (57.3%) of respondents had never used continuous assessment data to address students' special educational need.

**Table 5. Practice of recording and documentation of students' progress**

No	Items	Often		Sometimes		Never	
		Fre.	%	Fre.	%	Fre.	%
1	Keep records of students' progress	67	81.7%	12	14.6%	3	3.7%
2	CA to review while planning instruction	8	9.8%	16	19.5%	58	70.7%
3	CA information to address students' special educational needs	7	8.7%	28	34%	47	57.3%

### 3.4.3 Practices of feedback provision about students' progress

Regarding feedback provision on students' performance, Table 6 below indicate that nearly two-third (62.2%) of respondents often provide feedback to students. But nearly a third (30.5%) of respondents provide feedback only sometimes. Moreover, Table 6 reveal that more than half (57.3%) of respondents never give feedback to parents about their students' progress. The remaining 40% of respondents however sometimes or often provide such feedback. Concerning feedback provision to school, majority (78%) of respondents often provide feedback about students' progress, while 18.3% of respondents do so sometimes.

**Table 6. Practice feedback provision about students' performance**

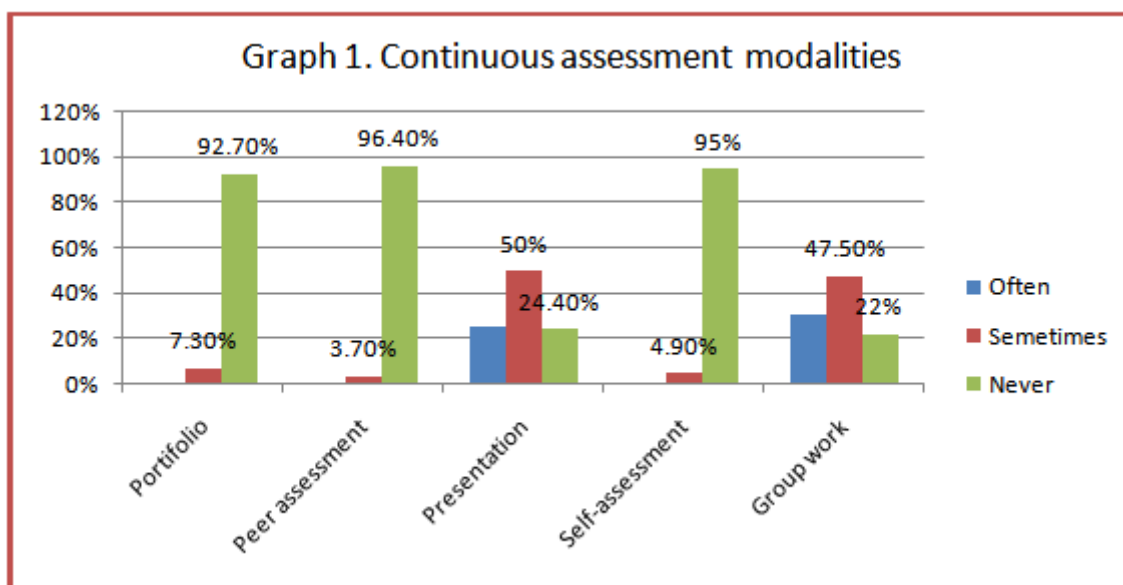
No	Items	Often		Sometimes		Never	
		Fre.	%	Fre.	%	Fre.	%
1	Provide feedback to students	51	62.2%	25	30.5%	6	7.3%
2	Provide feedback to parents	23	28.5%	12	14.6%	47	57.3%
3	Provide feedback to school	64	78%	15	18.3%	3	3.7%

Data collected from school directors reveals that teachers give feedback both to the parents and students themselves. But the content of the feedback given to the parents differ the one given to the students. School directors mentioned that:

*"Teachers give feedback to the parents. The content of the feedback consists of whether student are absent from the school or not, whether they have their textbooks and exercise books etc. we give parents the feedback on monthly basis from the school directors side but they get daily feedback from the teachers. Parents are satisfied with the result of their students, but some parents do not know the benefit of education, so they involve and come to the school only when they get a feedback from the school. But if we did not give them a feedback, they do not come and know whether their children learn something or not; or go to school or not. But after we give the feedback, they began to have more interest in the education of their children."*

### 3.4.4 Modalities of Continuous Assessment in the Classroom

Regarding modalities of continuous assessment, Graph 1 below show that the majority of respondents never use portfolio, peer assessment and self-evaluation as a continuous assessment technique(tool) in their classroom (92.7%, 96.4%, and 95% of respectively). Presentation and group work seem relatively better used as a technique where 50% and 47.7% of respondents mentioned to sometimes use the techniques, respectively. Moreover, Graph 1 below revealed that 30.5% and 25.6% of respondents often used presentation and group work as continuous assessment method respectively.





School directors monitor the implementation or the practice of assessment for learning by utilizing different monitoring techniques such as *entering and sitting in the classroom during the lesson, checking the lesson plan of the teachers and exercise books of the students etc.*

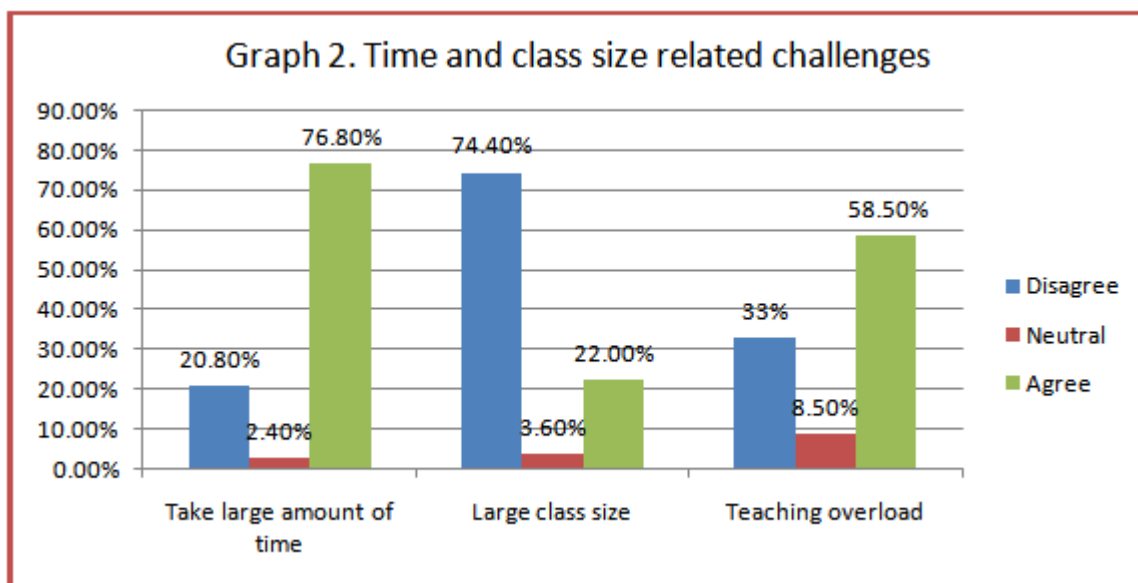
*“We continuously monitor teachers and student by entering and sitting in the classrooms during the presentation of the lessons in order to determine whether teachers use continuous formative assessment in their classrooms. We assess teachers based on their lesson plans, the way they present and explain lessons how students write their lessons and whether students understood the lesson or not.”*

### 3.5 Challenges of implementing continuous assessment in the classroom

#### 3.5.1 Large class size and time-taking

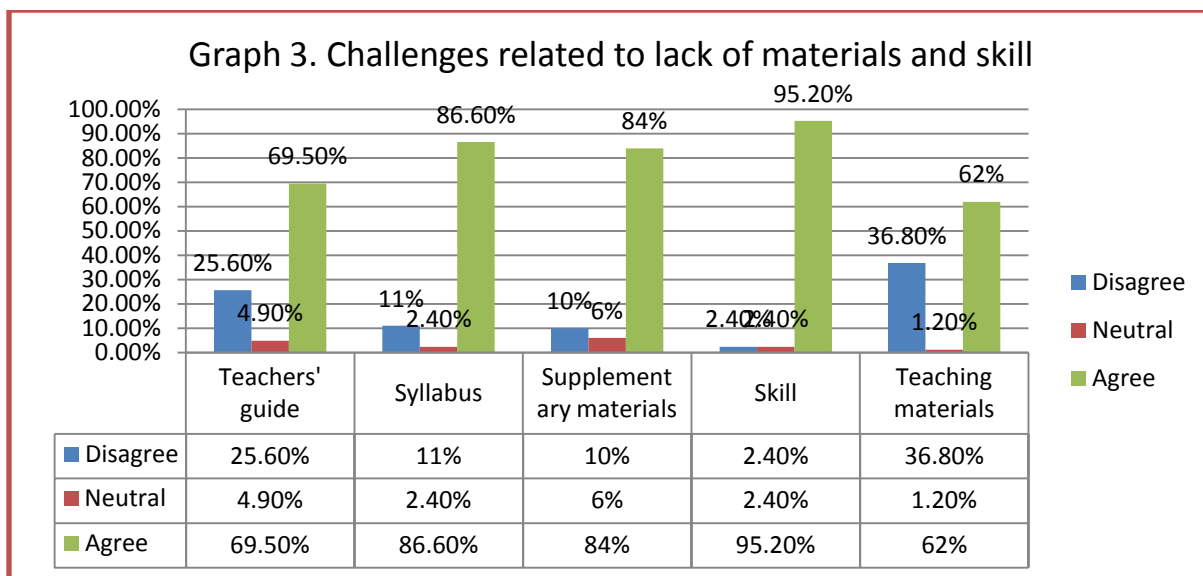
As illustrated in Graph 2 below, the majority (76.8%) of respondents hold the view that implementing continuous assessment takes large amount of time whereas a few (20.8%) of respondents don't think time as a challenge. And only few (22%) of respondents take large class size as a challenge of continuous assessment implementation. Moreover, nearly 59% of respondents agreed that teaching overload inhibits continuous assessment implementation in the classroom whereas one-third (33%) of respondents expressed their disagreement on it. Interviewee 3 who was 27 and had four years of teaching experience in the primary school remark reinforced the quantitative finding:

*“Continuous assessment takes large amount of time to prepare and implement in the classroom. That is why I am not using it consistently.”*



#### 3.5.2 Lack of materials and skills

Graph 3 below show that majority of respondents agree that lack of teachers guide, syllabus, supplementary materials, teaching learning facilities affect continuous assessment implementation in the classroom. Moreover, more than 95.5% of respondents agree that lack of knowledge and skill about formative continuous assessment could be a challenge for continuous assessment implementation.



The study found that the main challenges that faces the implementation of assessment for learning are lack of teaching aid materials, large class size, teaching overload and lack of skill and knowledge of assessment for learning from the side of the teachers who are expected to own and implement this technique. These findings are in line with other studies that are conducted in Ethiopia. For example, a study conducted by Haile Tefera (2012), Takele (2012), Bulto, et al (2017), Eshetu, (2015) found that the major barriers for the implementation of the assessment of learning are poor infrastructures, poor record keeping of learners' continuous assessment achievement, weak follow up, lack of school facilities, additional school activities and work load, large instructional content. Moreover, the findings of the study are consistent with Tamene's (2007) findings that lack of skill and knowledge, lack of instructional materials and school facilities, seem to hinder the effectiveness of the implementation of CA.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

##### 4.1. Conclusions

##### *Teachers have Misconceptions about Assessment for Learning*

- Teachers responded differently for items that assessed teacher's knowledge of assessment for learning. Teachers were confusing assessment of learning with assessment for learning. Even when tests were developed by a committee, considerations were not made for proper implementation of assessment for learning. The majority of the respondents did not understand the purpose of assessment for learning. Moreover, study respondents provided contradictory responses.
- Although the purpose of continuous assessment is to identify the strength and weakness of students on their learning as well as to identify special needs of students, respondents do not agree with such purpose. As it was explicated in the study, teachers did not concur with the role of assessment for learning. Instead, teachers took final exams and tests as bedrock for students, to motivate students for learning and engage students in the learning-teaching process. Teachers favored fixed schedule of mid-term exams and other tests rather than utilizing continuous assessment to measure students' ongoing learning engagement and progress.
- As to our reflection, misconceptions in what constitutes continuous assessment pose serious hurdles for proper implementation of continuous assessment its true sense. Without the right conception of continuous assessment, teachers will not be able to apply assessment for learning to the fullest. Some teachers are not even open to consider the role of continuous assessment for learning. Others who understand the value of assessment for learning do not use it properly.

##### *Teachers have Negative Attitude towards Assessment for Learning*

- Majority of teachers perceive continuous assessment as time consuming, less likely to contribute for students learning progress, and unfairly let students get more scores from such engagement. On the contrary, some teachers perceive that continuous assessment is a tool to identify students' educational needs. Teachers perceive that more learning is realized when teachers are utilizing teacher-centered approach instead of applying methods which entice them to actively engage students in learning. The

findings align with our expectation with this regard. Research suggests that most teachers are not ready to apply assessment for learning for different reasons. Some of them are not ready to apply it since such practices require more time to review student's on-going learning, giving feedback, ready to solve their mistakes (teacher's) and require more time to read different resources to effectively apply it. And, some of them are not aware of the essence of assessment for learning and such gap in knowledge would lead to improper utilization of continuous assessment.

#### ***Teachers Practice of Continuous Assessment is far from Continuous Assessment Proper***

- Practically, teachers were not able to assess students considering minimum learning outcomes. Assessment practice indicated that assessment for learning was not implemented to assess students learning throughout learning sessions. Moreover, teachers' assessment practice does not let students to assess each other on their learning, measurement of students' performance against own previous performance, and application of quizzes which correspond with identified minimum learning outcomes. The continuous assessment practice also failed to use continuous assessment to measure students' ongoing learning-teaching process and continuously engage students in different learning activities. What is more, the practice did not concur with the fact that teachers' knowledge, attitude and skills are an integral part of learning, though teachers agreed that it sometimes assist students to take responsibility on their learning.
- In our reflection, what we found out in this research is against existing continuous assessment practice. Teachers did not prepare exams to assist achievement of minimum learning competencies. Teachers were not also serious about continuous assessment and oblivious to what was lacking in their practice. Continuous assessment without considering minimum learning competencies is moving without a clue of where to go and how to improve discrepancies from existing practices. This has an impact on where to go, what to achieve and what gaps to fill on the bases of the implementation.
- Teachers do not use teachers' guide and syllabus to prepare lesson plans. While preparing lesson plans and setting learning objective, majority of first cycle primary school teachers did not make reference to the teachers' guide and subject syllabus.
- Recording and documentation of continuous assessment results does not align with continuous assessment principles. Majority of first cycle primary school teachers record and document students' academic progress. However, their practice is not in line with continuous assessment principles.
- The practice of reviewing students recorded data to plan instruction is poor. Moreover, teachers do not review the recorded data to address special educational need.
- The majority of teachers provide feedback about students' progress to school principals whereas parents and students do not get frequent feedback on students' progress.
- The practice of using portfolio, peer assessment, and self evaluation as continuous assessment tools is very poor. In contrast majority of first cycle teachers use presentation and group work in their classroom.

#### ***Challenges of continuous assessment implementation***

- Most first cycle primary school teachers believe that continuous assessment takes time to implement in the classroom. In addition, teaching overload is another challenge to implement continuous assessment in the classroom.
- Lack of teachers guide, subject syllabus, supplementary teaching materials, teaching learning facilities, knowledge and skill on continuous assessment are mentioned as challenges of implementing continuous assessment.

## **4.2 Recommendations**

- Policy makers shall consider the evidence obtained in this research to further address the gaps observed in the learning-teaching process with regard to assessment for learning. There shall be a strategy and guideline on the proper implementation of assessment for learning.
- The Ministry of Education and Regional/City Administration Education Bureaus shall understand the value of assessment for learning as well as the impact it has on students learning engagement. Teachers do not have the proper knowledge of assessment as well as they have negative attitude towards assessment for learning. Thus, they shall be given continuous on job-trainings on the applications and benefits of assessment for learning. The ministry and the education bureaus shall underscore the role of assessment for learning in improving quality of education in primary schools.
- Woreda education bureaus shall consistently aware directors and teachers on the role of assessment for learning for students learning progress.

- Directors and supervisors shall develop a system that will assist them to follow the proper implementation of assessment for learning in their respective schools. They should give training on the area and are expected to conjugate the entire process with students' minimum learning competencies.
- Teachers shall understand the value of assessment for learning (AfL) and develop a positive attitude towards it, since application of AfL has direct positive impact on students' active engagement in their learning. Teachers also have to understand that AfL will not be realized without seriously considering students' minimum learning competence. AfL assists teachers to understand what they do, what to improve in teaching and learning as well as make students engaged in their tasks.
- NGOs shall join hands with concerned bodies like government officials to design and provide trainings that improve proper application of AfL in the classroom.
- Regional education bureaus should provide materials like syllabus and teachers' guide, and continuous assessment implementation manuals to all first cycle primary schools.
- School principals and Woreda Education Bureau supervisors need to make sure teachers include continuous assessment in their annual, semester and daily lesson plans.
- The regional Education bureau in collaboration with Universities, Teacher Training Colleges and other stakeholders should provide annual or semester based continuous professional development trainings for first cycle primary school teachers on continuous assessment principles, feedback provision in the daily teaching learning process, recording students' progress and how to use it for future progress, modalities of continuous assessment and other basic concepts of continuous assessment.
- Further research need to fill the gaps observed in this study.

### **Limitations**

Long distance of the study areas and expected population of teachers in the schools were some of the problems encountered in the process of data collection. Particularly the expected teachers' population and the actual number of teachers working in the schools were not to be matched. Almost half of the expected teachers in the schools were not found in the study site. Therefore, generalization of results to populations with different demographics must therefore be made with caution.

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