

## **EFFECTIVENESS OF CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT LEARNING ACTIVITIES BY SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NYANGA DISTRICT, ZIMBABWE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The study sought to determine the effectiveness of the implementation of Continuous Assessment Learning Activities (CALA) by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Nyanga, Zimbabwe. The researchers were motivated to carry out the research due to the endless outcry by students who are finding CALA difficult to execute and teachers who are also finding it difficult to guide the students. As such the two main objectives of the study were to identify the main challenges facing CALA in Zimbabwe and to suggest strategies to improve effectiveness of CALA in Zimbabwe. The initiative was introduced by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education arguably without proper planning and budgeting, which has so far affected the implementation process. The researchers adopted an exploratory research approach to understand the key factors that have impacted on the implementation of Continuous Assessment Learning Activities (CALA) in Zimbabwe. A qualitative research approach was used by the researcher through the use of questionnaires as a data collection instrument for the research. A total of 35 questionnaires were distributed to both the students and teachers from various schools in Nyanga District in Manicaland and a response rate of 94% was yielded. The results indicate that the decision to introduce continuous assessment activities in secondary schools was noble, but it was negatively affected by a number of controllable factors. The findings of the study also showed that there was poor planning by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in the implementation of CALA, which has led to students' outcry. The researchers recommended the involvement of teachers in the decision making process as they are the implementers of the initiative. The importance of teachers in the process should not be overlooked as they are the gatekeepers who play an important role in the success of this noble initiative.*

**Keywords:** *Continuous Assessment, Teacher Motivation, Secondary Education, Continuous Learning Assessment Activities*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Since 2014, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) has embarked on a comprehensive national curriculum reform process which is meant to enhance the quality of education in Zimbabwe. A new competence-based curriculum framework was developed and finalized in 2015 whose phased implementation commenced in 2017. Several innovations were introduced in the new curriculum with broad implications for stakeholders at all levels (MoPSE, 2021). Continuous Assessment as part of the new curriculum being implemented will see learners being marked from tasks and projects given by their teachers during normal learning, and also final examinations. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, through the Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC), introduced CALA in 2021 as a candidate assessment procedure that requires pupils to perform, demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and proficiency in their learning areas before the main public exam. Under CALA, learners are supposed to carry out projects and tasks in schools, which will constitute 30% of their coursework for the final examination under the Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) for each subject. The development will see students being assessed from both the course work and the final exam unlike when they were graded using the final exam mark only in the past.

Continuous Assessment is a learning strategy evaluation that assesses learners' development or performance during the course of a programme. This is done to avoid relying solely on tests at the conclusion of the academic term. It is a technique for evaluating students' final grades in cognitive, affective, and cognitive areas of performance over a particular time period. It is the phenomena in which pupils are regularly tested during the majority of their schooling. According to Marley (2012), the Federal Government Handbook on Continuous Assessment proposed CA as a means of determining what the child received during active learning in terms of understanding, problem solving and reasoning, characterization, and industry. Aboni et al. (2005) defined continuous assessment as a way of evaluating a learner's competence in acquiring knowledge, cognition, understanding, and character learning activities utilizing various instruments such as examinations, tasks, projects, observations, interviews, and quizzes. The findings of continuous assessment are used at the conclusion of each course, and the findings are put into consideration once students leave school. Continuous assessment is a means of receiving the information from the school authority about any student. It considers students' termly or periodic achievement in assignments, tests, projects, and other education programs. This is to explain that in continuous assessment, the emphasis is on assigning points to any piece of work completed by the student. It is a technique that systematically takes into account students' final grades in cognitive, emotional, and sensorimotor domains of education throughout a certain term in the educational system. This type of assessment considers numerous ways or modes of evaluations used, with the goal of guiding and improving students' learning capacity as well as their various accomplishments.

The whole essence of CALA is the blending of theory and practical experience. The efficacy of continuous assessment learning area will never be in any serious doubt if properly planned (Zhou, 2021). The basis of such success is robust engagement of teachers as the implementers of educational reforms, availing resources by state for workshops and successful implementation based on developed standardized tools of assessment and interoperability, as well as adequate time for piloting the intended reforms before implementation. Broad engagement of teachers as the implementers is crucial as they in essence develop CALA,

assessment instruments, contextualize CALA, facilitate learning and CALA execution, administer CALA assessment instruments; monitor, supervise and support learners during CA activity; mark CA records, keep CA records, profile learners' competencies, report performance of learners to stakeholders, ensure security of CALA scripts, and guard against malpractices (National Association of School Heads, 2021). The teachers must provide comprehensive standardized assessment tools to guarantee success of continuous assessment (CA). There was no engagement of teachers for the implementation process and no budgetary preparation for its implementation in advance. The Ministry announced through the media that with immediate effect CALA would be implemented in schools starting with 2021 candidates. The Ministry also commanded provinces around the country to arrange rushed workshops for all exam classes without taking into contemplation various factors which affect implementation of the initiative. There was no budget for such workshops and schools are expected to fund teachers and school heads attendance of such workshops. Therefore, it is against this background that this study seeks to determine the effectiveness of Continuous Assessment Learning Activities being implemented by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Nyanga, Zimbabwe.

The study is explained by the behaviorism theory. The behaviorist learning view emerged in the early 1900s and came to dominate in the early twentieth century. The primary principle behind behavioral psychology is that learning is characterized by a change in behavior as a result of the absorption, reinforcement, and adoption of patterns between environmental stimuli and monitoring functions of the organism (Clark, 2018). Behaviorists are fascinated by observable changes in behavior. Thorndike, a famous behaviorist theorist, proposed that a reaction to a stimulus is reinforced when it is followed by a positive rewarding consequence, and a reaction to a stimulus is strengthened via exercise and recurrence. This approach to learning is similar to "drill-and-practice" programs. Skinner, another famous behaviorist, introduced his "operant conditioning" variation of behaviorism. Rewarding the proper aspects of more complicated conduct, in his opinion, reinforces and promotes its recurrence. As a result, reinforcers influence the incidence of the desired incomplete behaviors. Learning is defined as the gradual or continuous approximations of the desired partial actions through the application of positive and negative reinforcement. Skinner's theory is best recognized for its application in "programmed instruction," in which the schemes of partial actions to be learnt are described by extended task analysis (Weeger and Pacis, 2012).

Cognitive psychology also explains the present study. Cognitive psychology was established in the late 1950s, and it played a role in the movement away from behavioral psychology. Individuals are no longer seen as assemblages of environmental stimuli, as interactionists believed, but rather as information processors. Cognitive psychology was inspired by the advent of computers as an information-processing technology, which became similar to the human mind, and paid attention to sophisticated mental events that were disregarded by behaviorists (Clark, 2018). Learning is defined in cognitive psychology as the pursuit of knowledge: the student is an information-processor that receives information, performs cognitive operations upon that, and stores it in memory. As a result, its preferred teaching methodologies are lecturing and handbook reading. Thus, at its most extreme, the student is a passive receiver of knowledge from the educator.

In addition constructivism also helps understand the present research. Constructivism originated in the 1970s and 1980s, bringing rise to the notion that students are not passive consumer of information, but actively constructs it through environmental stimuli and the restructuring of their psychological mechanisms. Learners are thus considered as sense-makers, not merely recording but also evaluating information. This perspective on learning resulted in

a move from the "knowledge-acquisition" metaphor to the "understanding" metaphor. The rising body of evidence supporting the constructive form of knowledge was also consistent with and supported by the previous work of key theorists like Jean Piaget and Jerome Bruner (Clark, 2018). Although there are various variants of constructivism, what they all have in common is a learner-centered approach in which the teacher is becoming a cognitive guide of the learner's learning rather than a knowledge carrier.

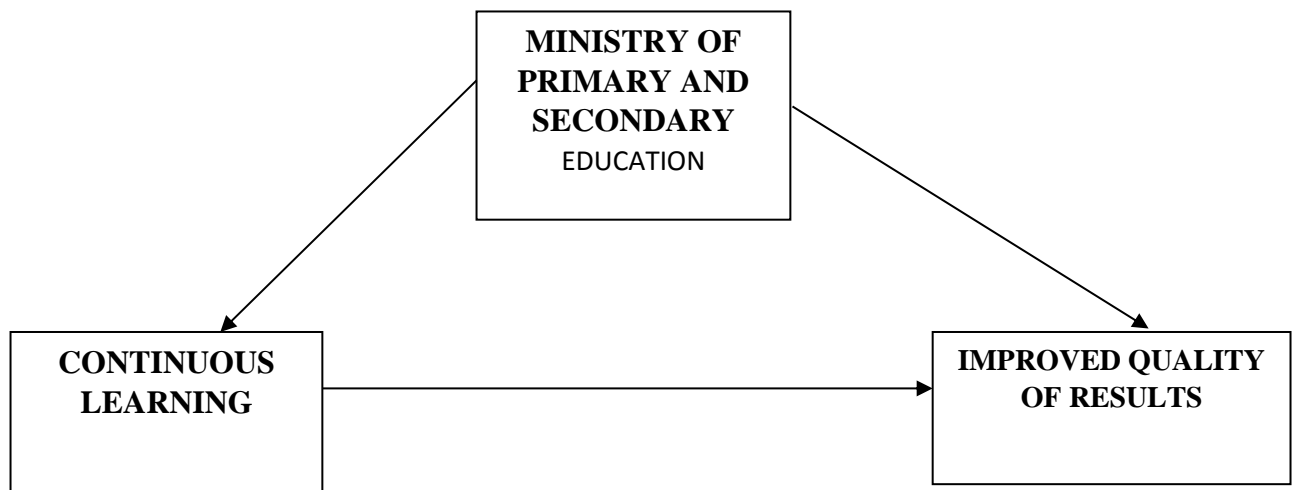
In Zimbabwe, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education's mandate is to offer a well-rounded education for all Zimbabweans. It is the Ministry's role to ensure that education system should be easily accessible and cheap, allowing citizens to contribute in the country's socioeconomic change.

**Table 1: Overall functions of the Ministry;**

Conduct strategic policy research to inform policy, curriculum and decision making, innovation and development and monitoring and evaluation
Monitor and evaluate programmes, projects, educational materials and state of school infrastructure
Promote access to education through establishment and registration of schools' infrastructural development and maintenance
Plan for educational needs of the country
Assess and process applications for authority to enter schools
Collect and process educational statistical data for decision making
Establish an Efficient Management System (EMIS) that assists in policy for formulation
Education sector diagnosis, planning and programming

**Source:** *Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) (2021)*

**Conceptual model**



**Source:** *Researchers (2021)*

In view of the above background and introduction, research carries two broad objectives

- 1 To identify the main challenges facing CALA in Zimbabwe
2. Suggest strategies to improve effectiveness of CALA in Zimbabwe

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

An exploratory research design was used for the research to understand the nature of phenomenon. The researchers made use of primary data for the research gathered through questionnaires. Questionnaires were distributed to 35 students and teachers for their completion from selected secondary schools in Nyanga. From the 35 questionnaires which were distributed electronically and physically by the researchers, 33 were returned yielding a response rate of 94% which is acceptable. The respondents were chosen randomly from schools to take part in the research.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings were that Covid-19 has presented an unprecedented challenge to the CALA system, exposing the lack of forward planning (UNICEF, 2020). The outbreak of the deadly virus meant that some restrictions were to be imposed. The outbreak led to an unending national lockdown in Zimbabwe which affected many sectors in the country, including the education sector. During the lockdown, students were forced to do online lessons, which slowed down the learning process as students were learning from their homes. The whole learning process was disrupted, especially in rural areas where there were challenges to connectivity, which also affected online learning. The introduction of the CALA initiative was negatively affected by the COVID 19 outbreak as it disrupted the learning process, leaving students unprepared even for the ZIMSEC examinations. Students had a lot of ground to cover after schools were opened, leaving them with less time to focus on continuous assessment initiatives, thereby affecting their development. Due to limited time to complete the syllabuses and complete the CALA projects, some Zimsec 2021 candidates are seeking assistance from ordinary community members, forcing parents to fork out between US\$10 and \$20 to pay for the services (National Association of School Heads, 2021). Teachers objected to the implementation of the programme, arguing that it was unnecessarily disrupting pupils' learning in schools when they had limited time to complete the syllabuses after the COVID-19 disruptions. Students are hard-pressed as they are struggling to catch up with their unfinished syllabuses while at the same time battling with the newly-introduced CALAs, which are still little known even to their own teachers.

The other finding as gathered from teachers was that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education did not plan properly prior to the introduction of Continuous Assessment Learning Activities (CALA). To ensure the success of the initiative, the Ministry should have budgeted funds for the implementation of the initiative. There was a need for training of teachers who are the drivers of the programme to ensure that they fully understand what is expected of them before the commencement of the initiative. Teachers were not fully trained on how they should assist students during the process, which is triggering some resistance from the teachers. Those that have an appreciation for the new system have seen a way of making



money as they are the ones who are doing the tasks for the students (National Association of Schools Heads, 2020). Also, having noticed the effects of COVID 19 on Zimbabwe's education system, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should have suspended the initiative as the Ministry had a lot to do towards covering the gap which was brought about by the deadly virus; hence the timing of the implementation was wrong.

Additionally results of the study yielded that the representatives of teachers in the country have been complaining and have since raised cases of deteriorating standards of the welfare of teachers. The rising complaints meant that the motivation levels of the teachers were low; hence acceptance of change was difficult. As a result, the welfare status of teachers has deteriorated due to economic hardships. As a result, they are now channeling their efforts towards fund-raising activities at the expense of their main mandate. The need for money has driven some teachers to do the CALA tasks on behalf of the students for a certain fee, which disrupts the whole purpose of the initiative, which is targeted at improving the education system and the research skills of students in the country so that they can contribute to socio-economic development, even at lower levels.

In terms of funding, the results indicates that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) did not fully budget for the introduction of Continuous Assessment Learning Activities (CALA), which negatively affected the implementation process. The presence of a budget would have increased the chances of successful implementation of the initiative as funds would have been set aside for promoting the idea.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

In view of the above findings, researchers recommends that there should be enough involvement of key stakeholders on important issues primarily school teachers. Key stakeholders such as teachers and parents should have been informed about the CALA initiative prior introduction to reduce resistance to change. Parents and teachers should be involved in the implementation process as they directly influence the success of the development. The teachers and the parents should be the drivers of the initiative hence they should be also consulted before the implementation phase.

In addition, Planning should be prioritized. Planning is important in every aspect of life and should never be overlooked. To increase the chances of success for CALA, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should go back to the drafting board and properly plan. Parents should also have been notified on time since they are some stationery items including bond paper, flat files, and glue amongst others which they were supposed to purchase since they were a requirement for the initiative.

The other recommendation is that the CALA initiative should be well budgeted .The Ministry should budget for the initiative so that all events will be well funded. In the absence of adequate funding the idea will fail. There is also need for Prioritization of teacher's welfare. The welfare of teachers should be improved through coming up with convincing packs which motivate them to work extra hard. Teachers should also be trained. There is need for an expanded effort to conduct CALA workshops so that teachers as programme implementer become very acquainted with what is expected of them. Researchers also recommends that there is need for a restructuring the initiative. The tasks should be reduced from 3 to one. Most of teachers are failing to complete the ZIMSEC syllabuses due to increased pressure of the Continuous Learning initiative which have affected the students in the process as they will be having a lot of ground to cover. Also students who failed the national examinations for 2020 were not able

to register for the June 2021 examinations as they did not have the Continuous Assessment marks.

Additionally, Teachers should be given additional allowances. All stakeholders should have been consulted before the introduction of the initiative and all events should have been well planned. The Ministry introduced the initiative without properly planning for it which have resulted in it not going as intended. The teachers as the drivers of the initiative should be given some additional allowances since there is now increased work load.

Finally, Students should be afforded some workshops. The students should also be trained on how to carry out some researches. Seminars should be conducted by schools to equip students with research skills. The students do not have the required research skills which have pushed them to hire consultants to do the tasks on behalf of them.

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