

Continuous Assessment Learning Activity Implications on Quality of Basic Education in Chikomba District, Zimbabwe

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Abstract. Zimbabwe adopted a new perspective of continuous assessment in 2015. However, due to myriads of constraints CALA was shelved for certification as from intended year, 2015 until 2021 to date. It was implemented as part of certification for completion of Elementary, Ordinary and Advanced level courses. Under this CALA framework, the teacher has to set five research based activities drawn from syllabus. Teacher shall mark the tasks, convert to percentage and record average of the marks. The mark is then send to Zimbabwe School Examination Council for certification and it constitute 30% while the reminder 70% is for summative mark. Thus, this study seeks to explore key tenets of quality basic education, examine the link between CALA and quality basic education, analyse the challenges faced by learners and teachers in the implementation of CALA in secondary schools and to establish strategies and a framework or model for solving CALA limitations to quality basic education. Research methodology to be adopted is mixed. This implies that, both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods are to be used jointly or sequentially in unpacking all five stated research objectives. Data collection tools that shall be used are interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaires. Data analysis to be done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences, descriptive statistics inform of mean, mode, histograms, pie charts, pairwise ranking matrix and thematic analysis. This study is important as it informs policy makers in Zimbabwe about the challenges hindering effective implementation of CALA and recommendations that can be adopted.

Key words: Continuous Assessment Learning Activity, Implications, Quality, Basic Education

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1 Introduction and Background of the Study

Continuous Assessment Learning Activity, (CALA) as an educational public policy for quality basic education has been a domain of major concern across the globe. Accordingly, countless strenuous efforts have been effected to embrace quality of basic education. This actually necessitated the inclusion of Sustainable Development Goal 4 for quality education by United Nations (UN) in September 2015 [21]. In line with this international perspective, most countries in various continents have implemented CALA in their basic education. In Europe, Greece is one of the leading countries that adopted measures to improve quality basic education. At the heart of these steps was the incorporation of formative assessments [16]. As a result, one of the key outcomes of their study buttresses the need for learner centred approaches on research based continuous assessments assigned.

In addition to that, attempts were also appropriated in Asia by Pakistan in implementation of CALA. Thus, a study was conducted to examine the impacts of Continuous Assessment Methods on learners' ability at primary level at Lahore [12]. Key findings revealed that continuous assessment improves academic performance of learners which has a positive bearing on quality basic education [12]. This concurs with results that were also obtained in Nepal, Asia. Accordingly, a study was carried out for Grade Four students in Sunsari District [9]. The aim was based on comparing the Mathematics achievement of Continuous Assessment System (CAS) student and non CAS student. Results indicated better achievement in Mathematics for students with CAS and lower marks for non-CAS marks [9]. This demonstrates the significance of continuous assessment in improving understanding of learners and quality basic education.

In Africa, there were many Sub-Saharan countries that adopted Continuous Assessment Learning Activities in their elementary and secondary levels [4]. This concurs with the views that, African countries have embraced Continuous Assessment Learning Activities copying it from More Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs) and newly developed [22]. These countries include but not limited to Uganda, Ethiopia, Ghana, South Africa and Nigeria [1-4,17]. For instance, in Ethiopia a study highlighted that, implementation of CALA on Sports Science learners in basic education improves skills, performance, learner's engagement and motivation [3]. This will in a long run facilitate pupils to identify their inherent strengths and limitations hence quality basic education [3]. This is also in tantamount with the results obtained in Uganda's Kabale Municipality primary schools on the effects of CALA on pupils' academic performance [2]. The research concluded that CALA improves academic performance of learners due to increased assignments and learner's engagement. The results are also in line with findings from Asia specifically in Pakistan and Nepal [9,12].

On contrary, CALA was perceived to jeopardize quality basic education in some African countries notably in Ethiopia and Nigeria. A study carried out in Chagni City Administration, Ethiopia on the impacts of CALA to elementary education depicted negative results [17]. They were chiefly caused by the failure of educators to strictly follow what CALA policies demand in reality in schools [17]. This is also in line with

findings from Nigeria in Obowo local government area of Imo State. CALA was not well implemented due to shortage of trained educators, being expensive to manage, requiring a lot of time and energy, too much paper work and that its demands were difficult and complex to implement [1]. As a result, this research is of paramount significance to add knowledge to existing literature. This is highly imperative taking into cognisance that, Zimbabwe for the first time in history, incorporated continuous assessments and summative assessments for certification of grade 7, form 4 and 6 examination classes in 2021, 2022 and 2023 [11]. In addition to that, the study is crucial at least as the first one in Chikomba District to ascertain the implications of this new educational public policy. This should be done taking into account the fundamental differences in political, economic, socio-cultural and technological that exist in Europe, Asia and other fellow African countries with that of Zimbabwe, hence the research is worth undertaking.

In Zimbabwe, CALA public educational policy was introduced as one of the notable key change of the new curriculum. This was implemented partly in line with the recommendations of the commission of inquiry that was established by the government [15]. It entirely advocates for outcome-based curriculum. It also criticised old curriculum of being too much theoretical by relying on summative assessments only which produce learners who are unable to solve real life problems [15]. In addition to the core cause, locally, Zimbabwe introduced new curriculum in line with National Development Strategy (NDS1) policy document [11]. This blueprint calls for Zimbabwe to be a middle-class economy by 2030 which should be attained through education for industrial development [11]. Thus, as from 2014, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary (MoPSE) initiated on a detailed national curriculum overhaul to enhance basic quality education in Zimbabwe [10]. Several innovations were introduced in the new curriculum with broad implications for stakeholders at all levels [11].

Despite the new curriculum framework being launched in 2015, CALA was finally implemented by Zimbabwe School Examination Council, (ZIMSEC) for certification of Grade 7, Forms 4 and 6 examination classes in 2021. The prime objective of CALA was for learners to perform, demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and proficiency in their learning areas before summative assessment [10]. Under this model, continuous assessment coursework constitutes 30% and summative assessment 70% for each learning area [10]. The main thrust was to achieve quality education by producing students who are capable of applying skills acquired to solve practical problems there by sustaining a decent living [10]. This is also in line with the sentiments that, the entire importance of CALA is the merging of theory and practical experience [22]. Zhao further pinpoints that the goodness of continuous assessment in a learning area will never be compromised if properly articulated. Therefore, this study is critical to sniff out the implications of this newly introduced curriculum policy as a first of its kind since attainment of independence in 1980 and given contradicting positive and hast experience in some fellow African nations.

2 Statement of the Problem

Zimbabwe is battling to improve quality basic education through newly introduced CALA public educational policy as it is populated with numerous myriads of challenges [13]. These constraints include limited time for learners to complete tasks, failure by teachers to complete the syllabuses, corruption by teachers and students and learners being overburdened with a lot of tasks [13]. It further postulates other constraints associated with CALA implementation as to be hinged on lack of training on the part teachers, lack of supervision on standardisation of CALAs and shortage of resources. This is in tantamount with the utterances that, the rationale for CALA implementation was highly compromised as the updated curriculum requirements were associated with a lot of implementation requirements that many could not afford [18].

It further, specifies the necessities that were out of reach to many learners as shortage of ICT tools and gadgets, lack of phones with internet access, high cost of data charges especially for the poor and marginalised minority communities and digital infrastructure in schools. Thus, in this scenario, fundamental stakeholders such as parents, teachers and learners felt that CALA was leaving out the existing vulnerable marginalised and disabled hence, then it must be removed [18]. This is also tantamount to the views that, absence of prerequisites for CALA implementation has caused unjustified pressure on key educational stakeholders [19]. Above all, at one point in time, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education was dragged to court by stakeholders who were totally against the implementation of this updated curriculum and argued for its temporary abandonment [14]. Based on the divergent perspectives above, it can be concluded that more needs to be done in various capacities to achieve the intended yields of CALA in basic education. It is against this background that, the researcher decides to carry out a detailed study on the implications of CALA with the view to achieve quality basic education in Zimbabwe.

3 Research Objectives

The overall objective of the study is to analyse CALA implications on quality of basic education in Chikomba District, Zimbabwe. Accordingly, specific main objectives of the study are to:

- i. Explore key tenets of quality basic education in line with international best practices.
- ii. Examine the link between CALA and quality basic education.
- iii. Analyse the challenges faced by learners in the implementation of CALA in secondary schools.
- iv. Assess the problems faced by teachers in the implementation of CALA in secondary schools.
- v. Establish strategies and a framework or model for solving CALA limitations to quality basic education in Zimbabwe.

4 Research Questions

Accordingly, the objectives would rationally respond to the research questions as to:

- i. What are the key tenets of quality basic education in line with international best practices?
- ii. What is the link between CALA and quality basic education?
- iii. What are the challenges faced by learners in the implementation of CALA in secondary schools?
- iv. What are the problems faced by teachers in the implementation of CALA in secondary schools?
- v. What are strategies and a framework or model for solving CALA limitations to quality basic education in Zimbabwe?

5 Methodological Approach Used

5.1 Research Design

Research design is defined as a model of ways and methods selected by the researcher to merge several elements of study in a sensibly coherent way so that the research challenge is adequately and effectively tackled [8]. Furthermore, it involves all other component parts of research, such variables, hypotheses, experiments, methodology and statistical analysis [6]. A research design is of paramount significance as it facilitates the uncovering of processes and logistical set ups to start a study [8]. In this study, cross-sectional research design was utilised for the phenomena studied. It was used as cross-sectional studies are cheaper, less time consuming than many other types of study, they allow to easily collect data that can be used as a basis for further research [20]. It further seeks to record the information that is readily available in a population at a single time without manipulation of variables [20]. Thus, cross section research design also adds knowledge to already existing ones.

5.2 Research Approach

Mixed research method is to be adopted in this study. Mixed-methods research (MMR) is a research methodology that incorporates multiple methods to address research questions in an appropriate and principled manner [5]. This implies that both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were used jointly or sequentially in unpacking research objectives as indicated in section 1.3. Key strengths of mixed approach include complementary through triangulation of two approaches namely qualitative and quantitative. This means that, the net disadvantages of one method is mitigated by another and vice versa hence enhancing validity and reliability [7]. Though the merits of mixed methodology are quite convincing, it has some limitations. These include lack of time, energy and resources [23]. The researcher shall overcome some of the limitations by being granted Manpower Development Leave (MDL) to create more time to undertake the research as well as saving from his

income streams to fund the research related costs. Consequently, it can be deduced that the demerits are outweighed by the advantages hence the adoption of the mixed method research approach.

5.3 Data Collection Tools

In this study, during pilot research and the entire course of the study, the researcher shall use questionnaires, focus groups and key informant interviews. These shall be utilised to extract data from respondents, namely learners, teachers, parents and school heads. Additionally, Chikomba District Supervisory Inspector (DSI), Chikomba District Secondary Inspectors, Provincial Educational officers and ZIMSEC provincial officers. Above all, MoPSE Head office officials, Teacher’s union leaders in Chikomba District, renowned educationists and educational based charity organisations for children in Chikomba district.

5.4 Data Analysis Framework

The summary of the research objectives, the respective variables under study and the several tools for data analysis which shall be used in this study is as shown in Table 1.1 below.

Table 3.4 Data analysis Framework.

Research objective	Variables	Analytical tools
1. To explore key tenets of quality basic education.	Teacher’s qualifications and experience, learning areas taught, resources, amount of research work, learner’s own new models, use of ICT tools.	Thematic analysis, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). (mean, mode, histograms, pie charts).
2. To analyse the link between CALA and quality basic education.	New models or initiatives, amount of research-based activities, pass rate, time, ICT tools used, resources, reported high workloads.	Thematic analysis SPSS,(mean, mode, histograms, pie charts).
3. To examine challenges faced by secondary schools learners during implementation of CALA.	Time, tasks, resources, reported failure to supervise learner’s tasks, cases of corruption, Covid-19, internet and ICT tools, infrastructure and cases of CALA missing marks, geographical location.	Thematic analysis Pairwise ranking matrix

<p>4. To determine challenges faced by secondary school teachers in the implementation of CALA in Zimbabwe.</p>	<p>Resources, time, qualifications, experience, workloads, salaries, infrastructure, teacher pupil ratio, CALA missing marks, ICT tools and number of learners failing to complete CALA tasks.</p>	<p>Thematic analysis Pairwise ranking matrix</p>
<p>5. To establish strategies for effective CALA implementation in secondary schools of Zimbabwe.</p>	<p>Training, resources, salaries, employment of staff, digital infrastructure, records keeping, monitoring and evaluation, educational policies and legislation.</p>	<p>Thematic analysis SPSS (mean, mode, histograms, pie charts)</p>

6 Description of the Artefact

6.1 CALA Model in Zimbabwe

A framework was established called Assessment Model for assessing performance of learners in a learning area [10]. The model integrates both CALA with weight 100% and Summative Assessments with same weight of 100%. Additionally, it shows that, though CALA and summative marks constitute 100% each, the weight may be reduced to accommodate each other for certification. Thus, as from 2021 to 2023, CALA constituted 30% and summative examinations 70% for grade 7, forms 4 and 6 examination classes [11]. Furthermore, the framework also involves profiling of learners through proper record keeping. These records can be also used when a learner wishes to transfer. Additionally, emphasis is on learner exit profile upon completion, final mark for certification and learner profile certification. Fig 6.1 provides a summary of Assessment model in Zimbabwe.

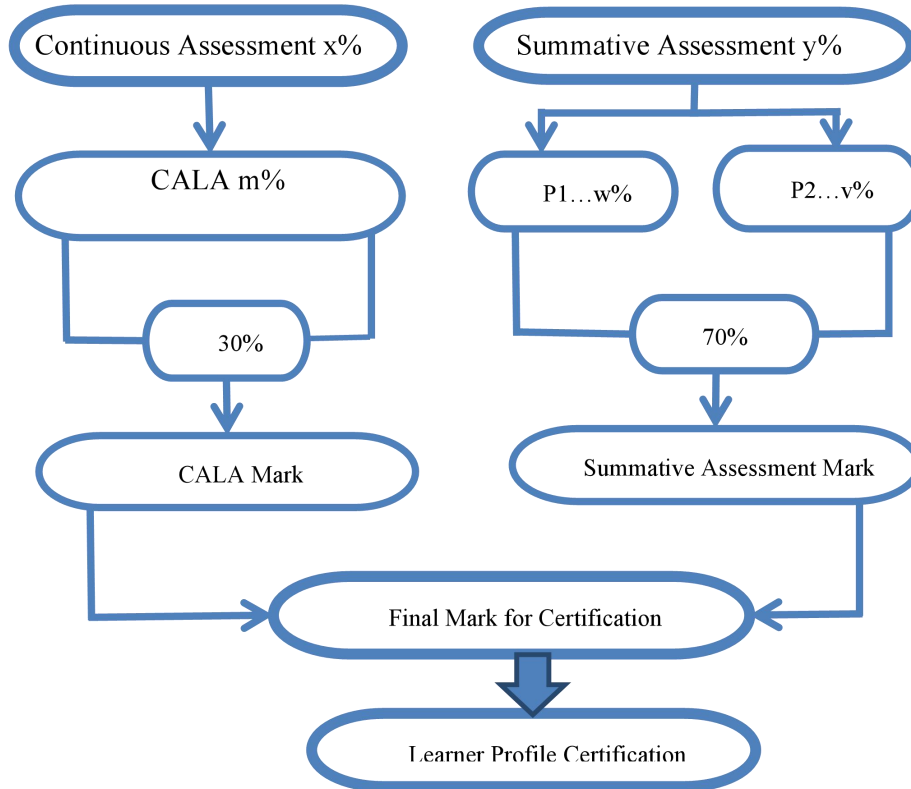


Fig. 6.1: CALA Assessment Model in Zimbabwe. Source: (MOPSE, 2015)

7 Summary of Work done to date

The researcher physically attended three international conferences where he made oral presentations. These were: 1. Society 5.0 organised by University of Technology, Mauritius and University of Pretoria, South Africa. 2. International Conference on Future Education 2024 hosted by International Institute of Knowledge Management. 3. International Conference co-hosted by Manjara Charitable Trust and Mauritius Institute of Education. Accordingly, the researcher submitted 2 full research papers and 1 Doctoral Symposium which are under editorial team for publication. Moreover, the researcher has two accepted abstracts to be presented at international fora. The first one was accepted by University of Seychelles and the Orebro University. The researcher is working on the compilation of full research paper with his supervisor. The second one was accepted by University of Johannesburg and Mauritius Institute of Education and the researcher shall work on producing the full research paper. Currently he is on working on final drafts for chapter 2 and 3 which are Literature review and Research methodology respectively.

8 Expected Contribution of the Work

The work is expected to contribute in the following ways:

- a) Enlightening educational stakeholders especially learners, teachers, parents, educational unions, government and possible employers about some of the key tenets of quality education and how CALA best addresses those tenets.
- b) Informing the policy makers primarily in Zimbabwe such as those from MoPSE and ZIMSEC on the challenges being faced by teachers and learners in implementing CALA for quality basic education.
- c) Proposing strategies as recommendations to policy makers primarily in Zimbabwe such as those from MoPSE and ZIMSEC for realisation of quality basic education through CALA educational policies and supportive pieces of legislation.
- d) Alignment of education's system to meet national broad objectives of Zimbabwe as enshrined in National Development Strategy (NDS1 and NDS2) which were set for 2021 to 2025 and 2026 to 2030 timelines respectively.
- e) Establishing an educational system that is in line with envisioning Industry 5.0 which advocates for an well-equipped and adaptable workforce and Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 for it to be an middle upper class economy.
- f) It adds to the attainment of United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) which advocates for quality education.
- g) Drawing of lessons from Zimbabwe by other countries regionally and globally with the view to improve their respective basic educational policies and legislations in their respective countries.

9 A Plan to ensure Research Transparency of my Work

The researcher shall secure clearance certificate to conduct research from University of Technology, Mauritius and Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe. Additionally, participants are given opportunity to decide freely whether to take part or not without being coerced. The researcher shall clearly explain the purpose of the research to enhance informed consent from the participants. Furthermore, special considerations to anonymity and confidentiality of the participants to be at the heart of the study. Moreover, the researcher to acknowledge all literature used properly and emphasise to be also on right to withdraw from the study and timely publication of the results.

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