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## **Investigation of the Existing Practices of Continuous Assessment in Wolaita Sodo University, College of Natural and Computational Sciences**

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### ***Abstract:***

*A greater attention is given to continuous assessment in the new education and training policy of Ethiopia. However, the knowledge and perception of teachers and students towards implementation of continuous assessment is not that much studied by previous researchers. The research aimed to assess the actual practice, knowledge and perception of instructors and students regarding continuous assessment. The subjects of the study were selected by using simple random sampling technique from Biology, Chemistry, Environmental Science, Geology, Mathematics, Physics, Sport Sciences and Statistics. Data were collected via questionnaire and analyzed by Likert Scale.*

*Teachers knowledge about meaning, purpose, quality, provision of appropriate procedures and feedback to enable their students accomplish the assessments were all rated to be high while those of the students were rated to be medium on the Likert Scale. Exceptionally, the knowledge of students about the purpose of continuous assessment was rated to be high. These Likert Scale ratings imply that teachers do not have awareness problems unlike their students and that students witness the lack of quality and non-provision of feedback to continuous assessment. Lack of teachers' motivation, large class size, poor capacity of the students, lack of pedagogical training, poor awareness level of students and shortage of time especially for block courses are the most notable factors that impede the practice of continuous assessment. Final examinations, tests and group assignments are most commonly applied while oral questions, class and home works and classroom observations are not frequently practiced. Most of the teachers said that they used to provide six continuous assessments per course on average while students witnessed only five assessments. This implies that teachers and students are considering only marked assessments as continuous assessments. Hence, integrated efforts should be made to improve the proper practice of continuous assessment in the college.*

***Keywords:*** Continuous assessment, Liker Scale, weighted mean score, percentages

### **1. Introduction**

Airasian, P.W. (1991) describes continuous assessment as an assessment approach which should depict the full range of sources and methods teachers use to gather, interpret and synthesize information about learners; information that is used to help teachers understand their learners, plan and monitor instruction and establish a viable classroom culture. Continuous assessment should involve a formal assessment of learners' affective characteristics and motivation in which they will need to demonstrate their commitment to tasks over time, their work force readiness and their competence in team or group performance contexts.

From these definitions, one could infer that continuous assessment is an assessment approach that involves the use of a variety of assessment instruments, assessing various components of learning, not only the thinking processes but also including behaviors, personality trait and manual dexterity. Continuous assessment will also take place over a period and such an approach would be more holistic, representing the learner in his/her entirety. It will begin with the decisions that the teachers perform on the first day of school and end with the decisions that the teachers and administrators make on the learners regarding end of year grading and promotion. Continuous Assessment is the periodic and systematic method of assessing and evaluating a person's attributes (Getinet Seifu, 2016).

Continuous assessment is an outcomes-based approach which requires the teachers to assess the learners on a continuous and ongoing basis. It is an ongoing, diagnostic, classroom-based process that uses a variety of assessment tools to measure learner performance. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) asserts that continuous assessment allows teachers to monitor the impact of their lessons on pupils' understanding (Dingake, 2011).

Furthermore, continuous assessments are “planned activities, purposefully implemented to gather evidence of learning. They are conducted unobtrusively as a natural part of the instructional activity, and “short-cycle,” occurring during a lesson or unit of study and providing immediate feedback to the teacher” and are not end-of-course assessments or mid-term or final exams or unit exams (Shane P. and Janelle R., 2015). Continuous assessment can also be defined as 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 (Sintayehu B., 2016).

In summary, continuous assessment is not just one thing indeed; the analysis of the literature reveals a variety of definitions at both a conceptual and a practical level. Continuous assessment is most appropriately characterized as a long a continuum with two operational extremes:

- Fully structured, planned mechanisms conducted at regular intervals over the course of a term for primarily summative purposes, generating grades to combine with the score or scores from a system’s official end-of-year examinations and
- Unstructured and even spontaneous methods to identify students’ comprehension of a concept, content, or technique during instruction in order to make immediate adjustments to instruction and to provide prompt precise feedback to strengthen the learning of students, both individually and in groups.

Whether formal and structured or more spontaneous and less structured, it is affirmed from the literature that continuous assessment, in any of its guises, is anything but casual. Rather, it represents an integral component of the teaching-learning process (Sintayehu B., 2016).

Continuous assessment process is much more than an examination of students’ achievement. It is also a powerful diagnostic tool that enables pupils to understand the areas in which they are having difficulty and to concentrate their efforts in those areas. Continuous assessments also allow teachers to monitor the impact of their lessons on students’ understanding. Teachers can modify their pedagogical strategies to include the construction of remediation activities for pupils who are not working at the expected grade level and the creation of enrichment activities for pupils who are working at or above the expected grade level. Hence, the continuous assessment process supports a cycle of self-evaluation and pupil specific activities by both pupils and teachers.

Furthermore, frequent interactions between pupils and teachers means those teachers know the strengths and weaknesses of their learners. These exchanges foster a student-teacher relationship based on individual interactions. Pupils learn that the teacher values their achievements and that their assessment outcomes have an impact on the instruction that they receive. One-to-one communication between the teacher and the pupils can motivate pupils to continue attending school and to work hard to achieve higher levels of mastery. Teachers can also share assessment results with important education stakeholders including parents, other teachers, community members, and the learners themselves. Parents especially want to know how their children are doing in school. Regular reports from the teacher based on continuous assessments allow the parents to know about their children’s progress. With this knowledge in hand, parents can assist and support children with their studies during the school year before opportunities for grade level achievement have passed.

Another advantage of continuous assessment is that it places teachers at the center of all performance- assessment activities. It encourages more teacher participation in the overall assessment or grading of his/her learners. Through this approach, teachers would be able to integrate assessment and assessment results into instructional practice. Teachers must also embed the assessment in their instructions, scour the assessments and discuss standards for good learners’ work with colleagues, parents and learners (Lewis, 1997).

In summary, continuous assessment is an important part of everyday activities in the classroom because:

- it provides regular information about teaching, learning and the achievement of learning objectives and basic competencies;
- it allows teachers to assess performance based activities which cannot be assessed by written tests;
- it provides opportunities for local environment as resource for learning and effective use of contemporary events, problems and issues;
- it enable learners to consider evidence, solve problems, make decisions, clarify their values and develop their inquiry skills;
- it provides opportunity for learners to develop new ideas and increase their understanding of aspects of Design and Technology through active consideration of a variety of sources of information
- it allows learners to demonstrate the ability to handle various kinds of information: fieldwork, data, maps, graphs, statistics, and discuss with other learners, write tasks through which they are required to evaluate ideas for improving the feedback to both learners and teachers on the effectiveness of their learning and teaching respectively (Okahandja, 2015).

According to OECD (2008), good continuous assessments are characterized by the following issues.

- Establishment of a classroom culture that encourages interaction and the use of assessment tools.
- Establishment of learning goals, and tracking of individual student progress towards these goals.
- Use of varied instruction methods to meet diverse student needs.
- Use of varied approaches to assessing student understanding.
- Timely feedback on students’ performances and adaptation of the instruction to meet identified needs.
- Active involvement of students in the learning process.

On the other hand, Osadebe (2015) states that an assessment is said to be good if it:

- gives the teacher greater involvement in the overall assessment of his or her pupils,
- provides a more valid judgement of the child’s overall ability and performance,
- enables teachers to be more flexible and innovative in their instructions,
- provides a basis for more effective guidance of students,
- provides a basis for the teacher to improve his or her instructional methods, and

- Reduces examination malpractices.

Furthermore, as it is pointed out by Brown and Pendleburg (1992), good measurement resulting in accurate data is the foundation of sound decision making. But many other authorities assert that the different assessment techniques yield good information about student's performance when they are used continuously. According to Race (1996), continuous assessment of learners' progress could be defined as a mechanism whereby the final grading of learners in cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning systematically takes account of all their performances during a given period of schooling. Many scholars believe that such an approach would be more holistic, representing the learner in his/her entirety.

High quality formative continuous assessment must identify gaps (in what students know and what they need to know), be relevant to learning goals, provide specific, constructive feedback to the student, avoid comparison to other students and include teaching students how to self-assess.

Quality of continuous assessment is manifested when teachers adapt instruction to meet student needs, give specific ideas for making progress and students know their learning goals, recognize examples of good work, and know how they are progressing (Shane P. and Janelle R., 2015).

Generally speaking, attributes of effective classrooms can be described by the ideas: expectations that academic staffs have for their students and that students have for themselves, provision of academic support to the students to enable them achieve learning goals, periodic assessment and timely feedback, and involvement or engagement students in classroom activities (Tinto V., 2012).

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Description of the Study Area

The target area, Wolaita Sodo University, is found in Wolaita Zones, Southern Ethiopia. Wolaita Zone is organized in 12 woredas and 3 city administrations (Sodo, Areka and Boditi) and lies between 6°54'N and 37°45'E with elevation ranging from 1600 to 2900 meters above sea level. It is located at about 330km south west of Addis Ababa, 160km from Hawassa and has a total area of 4471.3 km<sup>2</sup>.

Wolaita Sodo University is one of the second-generation government universities in Ethiopia. It is organized in 6 colleges, 3 schools and 50 departments. The university is committed to training students from around the country in regular, weekend and summer programs. It is also running 26 Masters and 2PhD programs.

### 2.2. Sample Size Determination and Data Collection

For any sample design, deciding upon the appropriate sample size is affected by five key factors namely, margin of error (precision), variability in the population, confidence level, the population proportion and the population size (American Statistical and Technical Team, 1992). For this study, 120 students and 38 instructors were selected using simple random sampling and data collection was conducted between January and March 2018. Besides observation, questionnaire surveys (both open-ended and close-ended) were used for data collection. Moreover, the reliability index of the data collection instrument (Cronbach alpha value) was found to be 0.81 which is greater than the minimum value of 0.70. This value indicated that the data collection instrument (the questionnaire) was reliable.

### 2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. The data analysis that can be done depends on the data gathering that was done.

Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data. Qualitative data analysis is recurring patterns or themes from collected data or looking for critical incidents so as to help focus on key events. Conceptualization, explanation, categorization and theme-based analysis were used as tools for the qualitative data analysis (Walde G., 2016).

Whatever the data are, it is their analysis that, in a decisive way, forms the outcomes of the research. Anyone interested in the current state and development of qualitative data analysis will find a field which is constantly growing and becoming less structured (Uwe Flick, 2013).

For this research, analysis of qualitative data (obtained from open ended questions and observations) and quantitative data (obtained from structured questions) have been carried out complementarily. The quantitative data was analyzed through the application of five point Likert scale while the analysis of the qualitative data involved data organization, breaking data in to manageable units and searching for patterns/themes to discover what is important to tell about the existing situations. After analyzing the quantitative and qualitative data separately, the researchers compared the results to see the extent of consistency.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Analysis of Quantitative Data

The quantitative data were analyzed by the following scale measurement shown below (average weighted mean score). Thus,

- 0 to 1.59 = very low
- 1.6 to 2.59= low
- 2.60 to 3.59= moderate
- 3.60 to 4.59= high
- > 4.60 is very high

Question	5		4		3		2		1		Likert Scale (Average Mean Score)
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	
Q1	7	18.42	27	71.05	2	5.26	1	2.63	1	2.63	4.00
Q2	6	15.79	26	68.42	5	13.16	0	0.00	1	2.63	3.95
Q3	31	81.58	6	15.79	0	0.00	1	2.63	0	0.00	4.76
Q4	7	18.42	22	57.90	3	7.89	5	13.16	1	2.63	3.76
Q5	30	78.95	6	15.79	1	2.63	1	2.63	0	0.00	4.71
Q6	27	71.05	10	26.32	1	2.63	0	0.00	0	0.00	4.68
Q7	23	60.53	10	26.32	2	5.26	1	2.63	2	5.26	4.34
Q8	14	36.84	23	60.53	0	0.00	1	2.63	0	0.00	4.32
Q9	23	60.53	13	34.21	2	5.26	0	0.00	0	0.00	4.55
Q10	9	23.68	25	65.79	2	5.26	1	2.63	1	2.63	4.05
Q11	4	10.53	25	65.79	7	18.42	2	5.26	0	0.00	3.82
Q12	12	31.58	22	57.89	3	7.89	1	2.63	0	0.00	4.18
Q13	13	34.21	25	65.79	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	4.34
Q14	20	52.63	10	26.32	1	2.63	4	10.53	3	7.89	4.05
Q15	16	42.11	21	55.26	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	2.63	4.34
Q16	15	39.45	1	2.63	1	2.63	9	23.68	12	31.58	2.95
Q17	7	18.42	13	34.21	0	0.00	16	42.11	2	5.26	3.18
Q18	8	21.05	25	65.79	2	5.26	1	2.63	2	5.26	3.95
Q19	11	28.95	22	57.89	2	5.26	1	2.63	2	5.26	4.03
Q20	10	26.32	21	55.26	1	2.63	4	10.53	2	5.26	3.87
Q21	11	28.95	20	52.63	2	5.26	5	13.16	0	0.00	3.97
Q22	4	10.53	22	57.89	5	13.16	5	13.16	2	5.26	3.55
Q23	6	15.79	10	26.32	17	44.74	2	5.26	3	7.89	3.37
Q24	6	16.79	22	57.89	5	13.16	2	5.26	3	7.89	3.68
Q25	5	13.16	24	63.16	5	13.16	3	7.89	1	2.63	3.76
Q26	6	15.79	25	65.79	6	15.79	0	0.00	1	2.63	3.92

Table 1: Likert Scale Determination for Questionnaire Items (For Instructors, N=38)

Based on the results from the determination of the Likert Scale, as shown in table 1 above, the knowledge of teachers about the meaning and purpose of continuous assessment (LS=3.76, 3.79; rated high, high), teachers' witnesses about the quality of continuous assessment they provide and provision of appropriate procedures to enable their students accomplish the continuous assessments (LS = 4.24, 4.39; rated high, high), teachers' witnesses about provision of feedback and existence of challenges impeding the implementation of continuous assessment (LS= 4.18, 3.65; rated high, high). These results clearly show that there are no problems regarding the meaning, quality, procedures and purpose of continuous assessments.

Question	5		4		3		2		1		Likert Scale (Average Mean Score)
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	
Q1	35	29.17	78	65.00	0	0.00	4	3.33	3	2.50	4.15
Q2	24	20.00	77	64.17	9	7.50	7	5.83	3	2.50	3.93
Q3	14	11.67	51	42.50	38	31.67	13	10.83	4	3.33	3.48
Q4	17	14.17	41	34.17	39	32.50	20	16.67	3	2.50	3.41
Q5	28	23.33	66	55.00	14	11.67	10	8.33	2	1.67	3.9
Q6	14	11.67	42	35.00	35	29.17	25	20.83	4	3.33	3.31
Q7	22	18.33	79	65.83	9	7.50	7	5.83	3	2.50	3.92
Q8	12	10.00	55	45.83	33	27.50	17	14.17	3	2.50	3.47
Q9	19	15.83	44	36.67	35	29.17	18	15.00	4	3.33	3.47
Q10	15	12.50	50	41.67	31	25.83	21	17.50	3	2.50	3.44
Q11	17	14.17	37	30.83	44	36.67	17	14.17	5	4.17	3.37
Q12	11	9.17	38	31.67	28	23.33	24	20.00	9	7.50	3.15
Q13	19	15.83	47	39.17	36	30.00	13	10.83	5	4.17	3.52
Q14	20	16.67	71	59.17	14	11.67	11	9.17	4	3.33	3.77
Q15	18	15.00	46	38.33	38	31.67	16	13.33	2	1.67	3.52
Q16	20	16.67	37	30.83	45	37.50	13	10.83	5	4.17	3.45
Q17	33	27.50	77	64.17	3	2.50	5	4.17	2	1.67	4.12
Q18	16	13.33	44	36.67	37	30.83	14	11.67	9	7.50	3.37
Q19	24	20.00	40	33.33	30	25.00	18	15.00	8	6.67	3.45
Q20	20	16.67	39	32.50	37	30.83	17	14.17	7	5.83	3.4
Q21	12	10.00	20	16.67	35	29.17	40	33.33	13	10.83	2.82
Q22	37	30.83	70	58.33	5	4.17	4	3.33	4	3.33	4.1
Q23	19	15.83	32	26.67	27	22.50	24	20.00	18	15.00	3.08

Table 2: Likert Scale Determination for Questionnaire Items (For Students, N=120)

Based on the results shown on table 2 shown above, the knowledge of students about the meaning and purpose of continuous assessment (LS=2.82, 3.68; rated medium, high), students' witnesses about the quality of the continuous assessments and provision of appropriate procedures to enable them accomplish the continuous assessments (LS = 3.55, 3.52 ; rated medium, medium) and students' witnesses about provision of feedback and existence of challenges impeding the implementation of continuous assessment (LS= 3.15, 3.49; rated medium, medium). The results clearly show that students have some knowledge gap about the meaning of continuous assessment. Moreover, students witnessed that the continuous assessment provided by their instructors are not of good quality and appropriate procedures (allocation of enough time, information on how to do the assessments, notifications about expectations from students) for doing the assessments are not employed to some extent. Students added that some teachers are not providing timely feedback regarding how they performed on the assessments.

### 3.2. Analysis of Qualitative Data

The data collected from open ended questions and observations have shown that continuous assessment could not properly be implemented due to poor academic capacity of students, lack of understanding and poor participation of students, lack of teachers' motivation and shortage of time especially for block courses. Due to negative perception of students towards continuous assessment, group assignments are considered to be the duty of the 1 to 5 leader only. Group assignments are not helping the rest of the students improve their subject matter knowledge. Lack of student interests and non-friendly teaching approaches of some teachers are also impeding the proper implementation of continuous assessment. In general, student respondents had neutral opinions while teacher respondents agreed regarding the proper implementation of continuous assessment. The data collected from open ended questions are summarized in the table shown below.

Responses from Instructor Respondents	Responses from Students Respondents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High workload</li> <li>• Large class size</li> <li>• Lack of pedagogical center</li> <li>• Time constraint</li> <li>• Poor background and low interest of students.</li> <li>• Lack of modules/texts.</li> <li>• Imbalance between workload and payment</li> <li>• Students are not committed and responsible</li> <li>• Continuous assessment is a tiresome and time consuming activity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interruption of electric power</li> <li>• Lack of residence in the college for students</li> <li>• Some teachers do not use their time properly</li> <li>• Students do not be ready to be assessed</li> <li>• Students consider continuous assessment as a means of getting marks with least effort</li> <li>• Students like easy-life principle</li> <li>• Lack of resources like reference books, laboratories</li> <li>• Low level of understanding of some teachers about continuous assessment</li> <li>• Existence of some inefficient teachers</li> <li>• Students negative attitude about continuous assessment</li> <li>• Teachers' high workload</li> <li>• Some group assignments are overlapping because of lack of integrations between departments.</li> </ul>

Table 3: Summaries of the Responses Collected from the Open Ended Questions and Observations Made by the Researchers

### 3.3. Analysis of Secondary Data

Batch	Departments							
	Biology	Chemistry	Env. Sc.	Geology	Maths	Physics	Sport Sc.	Statistics
1 <sup>st</sup> year	2.607	2.881	2.534	2.521	2.927	2.916	2.719	2.779
2 <sup>nd</sup> year	2.726	3.258	2.682	-	2.802	2.751	2.631	2.805
3 <sup>rd</sup> year	2.761	2.909	2.763	-	2.566	2.835	2.595	2.790

Table 4: The Mean of Cumulative Grade Point Averages (CGPA)

As depicted on table 4, the mean of the cumulative grade point averages did not show regular increment from year to year indicating the lack of proper implementation of continuous assessment in the college. This verifies the results obtained from open ended questions and observations made by the researchers.

The irregularity of the grade point averages can also be seen from the figures 1 to 7 as shown below.

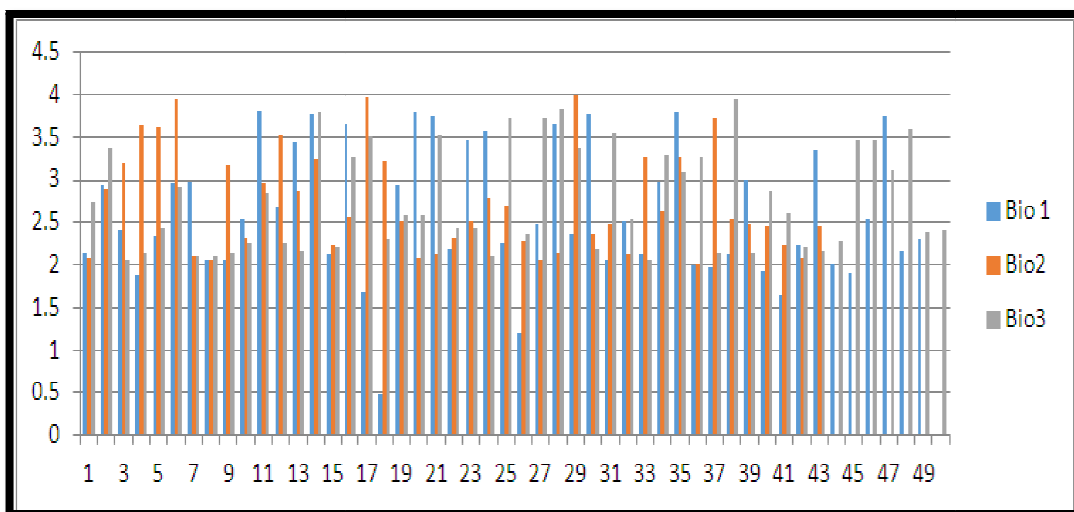


Figure 1: The Irregular Patterns of the Grade Point Averages for Students of Biology Department

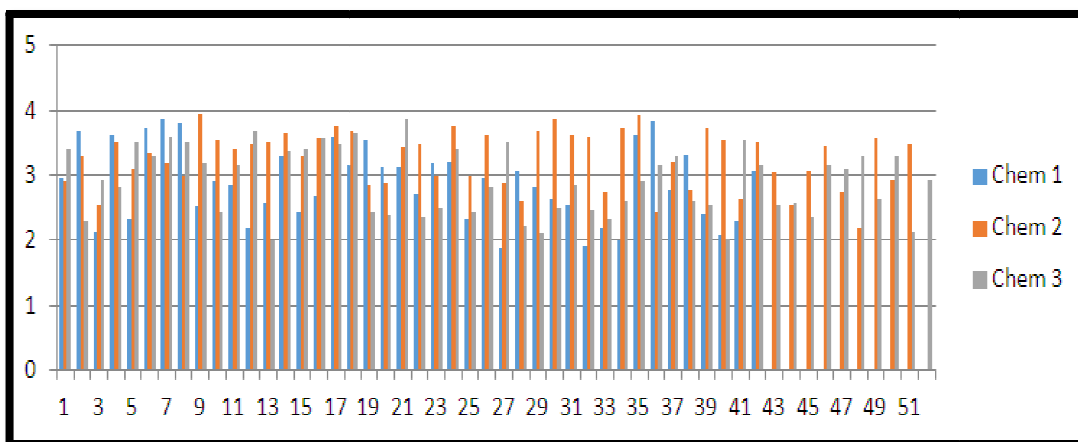


Figure 2: The Irregular Patterns of the Grade Point Averages for Students of Chemistry Department

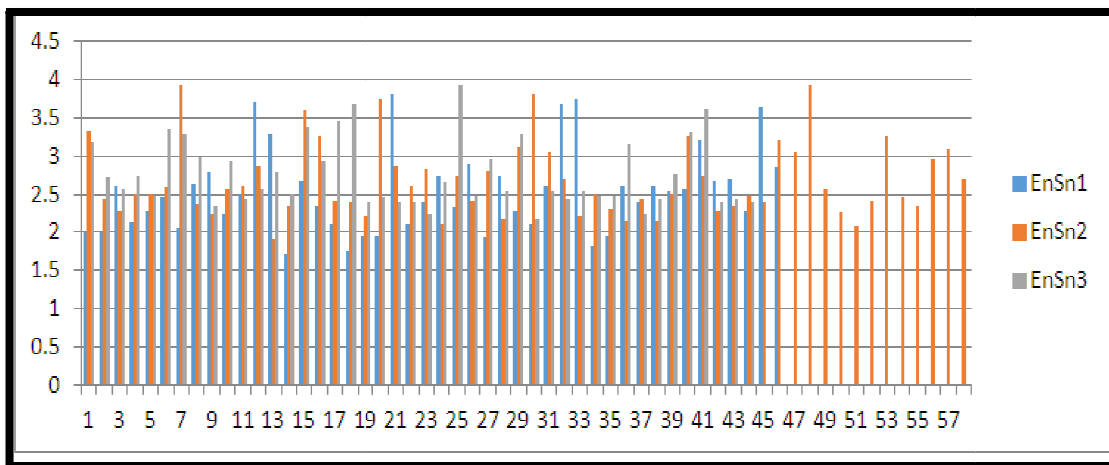


Figure 3: The Irregular Patterns of the Grade Point Averages for Students of Environmental Science Department

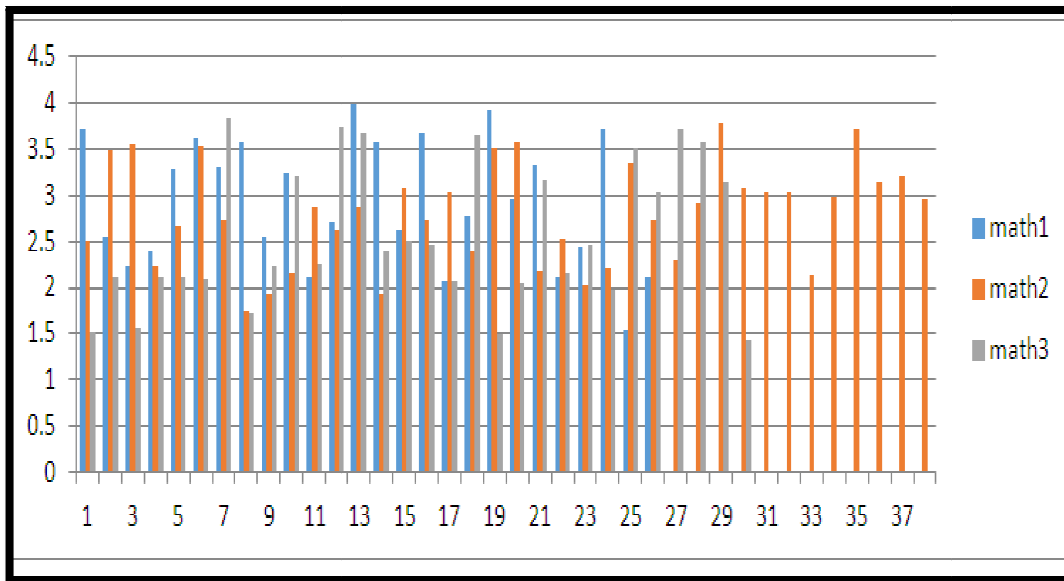


Figure 4: The Irregular Patterns of the Grade Point Averages for Students of Maths Department

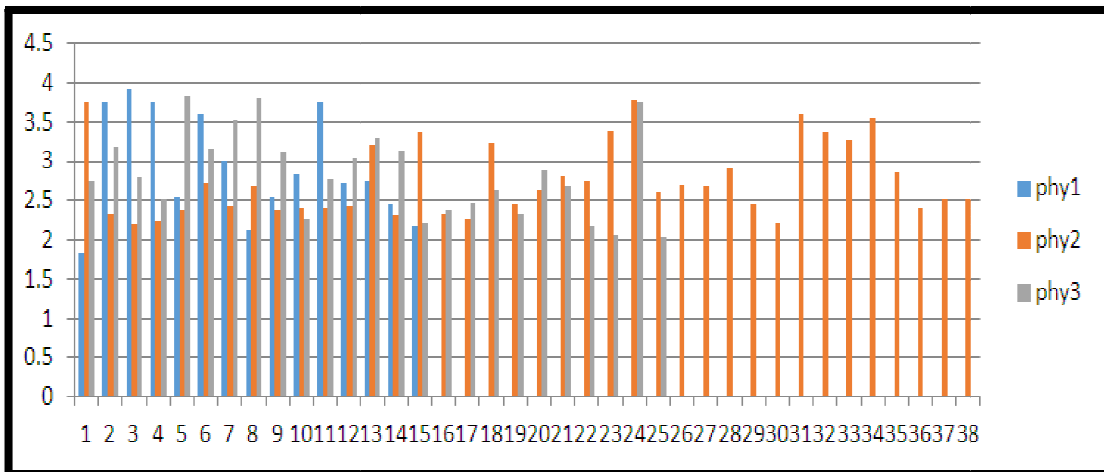


Figure 5: The Irregular Patterns of the Grade Point Averages for Students of Physics Department

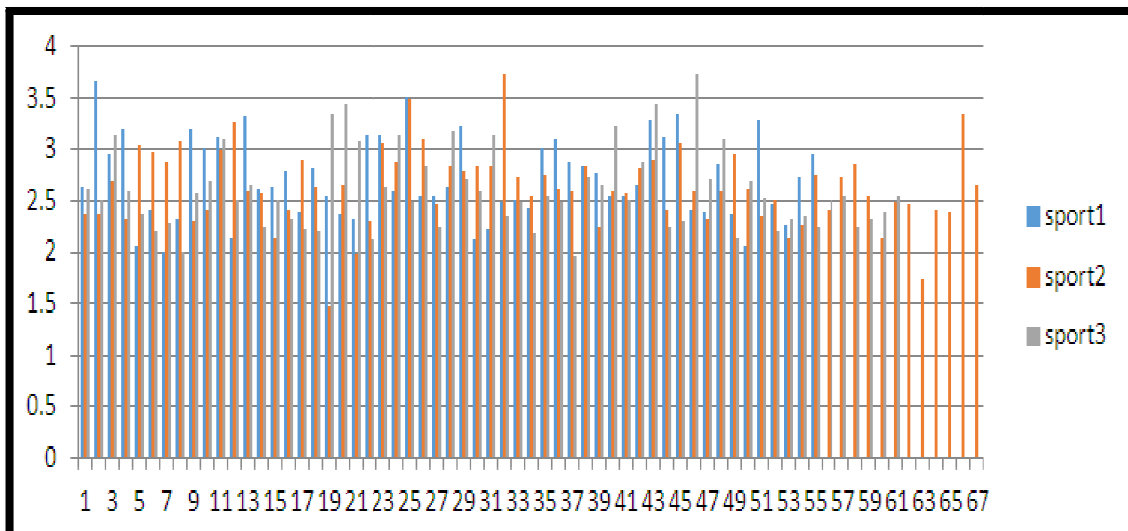


Figure 6: The Irregular Patterns of the Grade Point Averages for Students of Sport Science Department

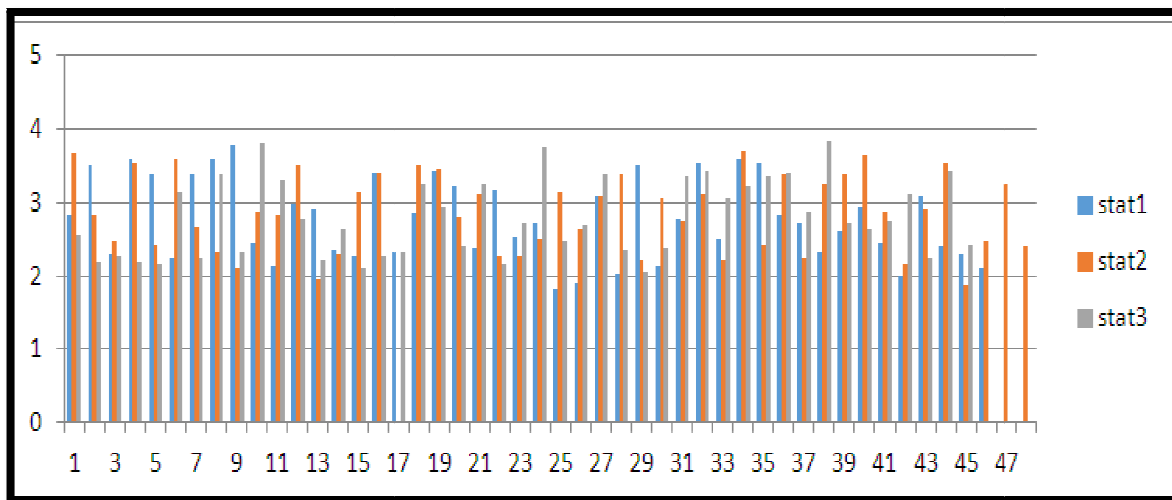


Figure 7: The Irregular Patterns of the Grade Point Averages for Students of Statistics Department

Figures 1 to 7 clearly indicate that there are some impediments that hamper the proper implementation of continuous assessment in Wolaita Sodo University, College of Natural and Computational Sciences. These impediments are summarized in table 3.

#### 4. Discussion

The results of the study depict that there are a number of impediments that are operating against the proper implementation of the continuous assessment in the college. As depicted in table 3, the problems can be put in different dimensions as: lack of teachers' motivations, lack of student awareness about continuous assessment, lack of student academic competence and interest to apply continuous assessment, logistic problems such large class size and shortage of time to apply continuous assessment especially for block courses. These problems were also verified by the analysis of the secondary data where they have shown irregular patterns from year to year as shown from figures 1 to 7. These facts were also triangulated via observations by the researchers.

#### 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

##### 5.1. Conclusions

The main purpose of this study was to assess the implementation of continuous assessment in the College of Natural and Computational Sciences, Wolaita Sodo University. Based on the findings of this study, the researchers arrived at the following conclusions.

- The awareness level of the students regarding continuous assessment was rated to be medium on the five point Likert Scale. Furthermore, some students were found to be uninterested to implement continuous assessment. This implies that concerned bodies should work in harmony to improve the awareness level of the students.
- The awareness level of instructors was rated to be high on Likert Scale but some of them were found to be less motivated (somewhat negligent) to use their time effectively and properly implement continuous assessments.
- Large class size, shortage of time especially for block courses, less academic capacity of students, negative perception of some students and lack of teacher motivation were the most notable impediments to the proper implementation of continuous assessments.
- The level of implementation of continuous assessment in Wolaita Sodo University College of Natural and Computational Sciences was rated to be medium on the Likert Scale. This fact is verified by the analysis of the mean of the grade point averages of the students in the college. The grade point averages do not show increment with academic year/ batch indicating lack of proper implementation of continuous assessment.
- Most of the instructors used to provide only six continuous assessments on average per course to their students. Moreover, final examinations, tests and group assignments were the dominant types of assessment used in the college. As continuous assessments need to be both formal and informal (unmarked ones), much more number and types of assessments should be provided per course.

##### 5.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, researchers would like to recommend the following points.

- Instructors should be motivated in some way so that they can appropriately implement continuous assessment in their classrooms.
- Continuous training should be given for existing academic staff and for newly employed instructors specifically about proper implementation of continuous assessment.



- The college of natural and computational sciences needs to work in harmony with the instructors to arouse the interests and improve the awareness level of the students regarding appropriate implementation of continuous assessment.

## 6. Acknowledgements

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