



Investigating the Teacher Readiness to Use Reformed School Assessment Practices: A Comparative Study in Selected Schools at Mitundu Cluster in Lilongwe Malawi.

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ABSTRACT

Practice of school assessment is critical to quantify student learning outcomes, guide instruction, and influence overall student achievement. This study investigates the effects of various modes of assessment and learner performance with emphasis on the importance of quality assessment practices in promoting learner development and achievement. By considering formative assessment, e.g., quizzes, peer evaluations, and self-evaluations, the study illustrates how such practice allows learners to track progress and modify learning techniques. Summative assessment, on the other hand, i.e., standard tests, presents a snapshot of students' accomplishment at any particular time. Alignment of learning goals and assessment practices is essential to creating a healthy learning environment and student engagement, but assessment bias, inadequate feedback, and pressure from high-stakes testing can potentially erode student motivation and performance. Lastly, this research intends to add to the existing debate on educational assessment and provide insights to further improve student performance across various learning environments

INTRODUCTION

Assessment practices in schools play a fundamental role in measuring student learning outcomes, guiding instruction and promoting student success. Understanding the relationship between school assessment practices and learner performance is essential for educators to support student growth and achievement. This study explores how different assessment methods and approaches impact student performance in educational settings.

Effective assessment practices can provide valuable insights into students' strengths and areas for growth, enabling educators to tailor instruction to meet individual learning needs (Black & William, 1998). Formative assessments, such as quizzes, peer assessments and self-assessments can help students track their progress and make adjustments in their learning strategies (Roediger & Karpicke, 2006). On the other hand, summative assessments, including standardized tests and exams, provide a snapshot of student achievement at a particular point in time (Koretz, 2008).

The alignment between assessment practices and learning goals is crucial for fostering a positive learning environment and enhancing student engagement (Guskey, 2010). However, challenges such as assessment bias, lack of feedback and the impact of high-stakes testing on student motivation and performance can influence the effectiveness of school assessment practices. By investigating the relationship between school assessment practices and learner performance, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on assessment in education and provide insights for improving student outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers' Knowledge About Reformed Assessment Methods

Reformed Assessment Methods in education has become a focal point of discussion internationally due to its focus on improving the teaching learning process. In fact, the extent of teachers' knowledge and ability to implement these methods varies across regions. Educational reforms dwell much on continuous and formative assessment to provide real time feedback, promote critical thinking, and enhance learning outcomes.

For example in countries like United States of America, Black & William (1998) dwell more on formative assessment that it positively impacts student learning, yet many teachers lack training in designing and implementing these assessments effectively. In addition, in United Kingdom, James & Pedder (2006), mentioned how resistance to change due to time constraints and lack of professional development remains a challenge though in Australia teachers recognize the importance of reformed assessment in education.

Another study by Klenowski (2009), concentrates on why teachers that value formative assessment often struggle with understanding and its integration into everyday classroom practices. Across Africa, the adoption of reformed assessment methods has been slower because of the challenges such as limited teacher training, inadequate resources and lack of systematic support. For instance, in South Africa, teachers lacked clarity on how to implement outcomes based education leading to ineffective use of formative assessment methods, Mogashoa (2013). According to Adu & Gyamfi et al (2018), many teachers in Ghana lack knowledge to align them with classroom instruction although the teachers were aware with continuous assessment policies.

Then in Kenya, a study by Wambugu & Changeiywo (2008), found out that while continuous assessment had been introduced teachers primarily focused on traditional testing methods due to familiarity and ease of work. The introduction of reformed assessment methods in Malawi such as continuous assessment have been introduced at various levels of education but implementation problems persist due to systemic and logistical issues. According to Chirwa (2008) he pointed out that most Malawian teachers have theoretical knowledge of active learning and formative assessment but struggle to implement them due to insufficient in-service training. On the other hand, Kunje & Stuart (1999) said that many primary school teachers in Malawi lacked practical skills in using reformed assessment methods as teacher training programs were examination oriented. However, on the same, Chikamhi (2011) spots that high stakes examinations undermine the use of formative assessment as teachers prioritize preparing students for summative test.

A study by Chimombo (2005) revealed that teachers in rural east Lilongwe have almost limited exposure to continuous assessment training because of Geographical and logistical barriers. Most of them relied heavily on summative methods because they were unaware of how to integrate formative approaches into daily teaching. On the other hand, Mwanza (2017) highlighted the impact of inadequate professional development in rural areas, showing that teachers in east Lilongwe lacked knowledge of reformed assessment tools like portfolio based assessments. He also observed that lack of workshop and seminars in rural areas contributed to this knowledge gap. However Phiri & Ngwira (2021) in their work on education quality in the same area of Lilongwe rural east noted that while some teachers understood the theoretical framework of reformed assessment, they lacked practical guidance on adapting it to large multi graded classrooms common in the area. Another problem is the limited availability of teaching aids which further complicated implementation.

Factors That Facilitate The Use Of Reformed Assessment Method

Internationally, the effective use of reformed assessment methods is facilitated by systemic support, teacher training programs and access to technological resources. On professional development, according to the study by William & Thompson (2007) argue that sustainable and high quality professional development enables teachers to understand and apply formative assessment effectively in classrooms. Stating more on this point, programs like 'Assessment for Learning' in United Kingdom have been instrumental in equipping teachers with the necessary skills. On policy support, Black & William (1998) dwell much on supportive education policies and frameworks that priorities formative assessment help integrate reformed methods into school systems.

In other countries like Finland, national policies encourage teachers to focus on continuous, individualized assessments. On the other hand, technological resources, according to Klenowski (2009) highlights that the availability of digital tools, such as online platforms for student feedback, enhances the practical implementation of reformed assessment in countries like Australia. In Africa, factors such as targeted teacher training programs, community support and donor funded projects have facilitated the adoption of reformed assessment methods. On teacher training, in South Africa, Jansen (2001) found out that teacher development initiatives focusing on outcome based education significantly improves teachers' ability to implement formative assessments. However, on community involvement, according to Adu & Gyamfi et al. (2018) noted that in Ghana, parental and community engagement in education motivated teachers to adopt continuous assessment methods, as it created accountability and support structures. Thereafter, donor support in Kenya, programs funded by organization like UNESCO provided schools with resources and training on continuous assessment, which improved implementation (Wambugu & Changeiywo, 2008). In Malawi, the implementation of reformed assessment methods has been facilitated by government initiatives, donor funded teacher training and curriculum reforms. On government initiatives, the introduction of Primary Curriculum and Assessment Reform (PCAR) in Malawi aimed to incorporate continuous assessment into schools. According to Chirwa (2008) this initiative encouraged teachers to integrate reformed methods into their teaching practices.

According to a study by Kunje & Stuart (1999), they observed that in service training programs such as the Malawi Integrated In service Teacher Education Programme (MIITEP) provides teachers with skills to adopt reformed assessment practices. To add more on Curriculum Reforms, as indicated by Meke (2013), he points out that curriculum changes aligning with formative assessment principles help to facilitate the use of reformed methods by embedding these practices into teaching guidelines. Furthermore in Lilongwe, there are some factors that facilitate the use of reformed assessment methods such as access to workshops, collaboration among teachers, and support from school leadership. In specific, Ngwira (2017) stated that urban teachers in Lilongwe benefited from periodic workshops organized by the Ministry of Education, which enhanced their ability to apply continuous assessment methods. In addition to the point on peer collaboration, Kaponda et al (2016) observed that teachers in Lilongwe often work together in professional learning communities to share strategies for implementing reformed assessment practices effectively. Furthermore, on supportive leadership, as indicated by Phiri & Ngwira (2021) they noted that school principals in rural Lilongwe played a critical role in facilitating the use of reformed assessment by providing encouragement and allocating resources to support teachers' efforts.

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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design:

A research design as defined by Akhtar (2016) is a strategy for answering your research question using empirical data. Creating a research design means making decisions about your overall research objectives and approach. Whether you'll rely on primary research or secondary research. This study will adopt a mixed-methods design.

A mixed methods research design is a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and "mixing" both quantitative and qualitative research methods in a single study to deeply understand a research problem (Creswell, 2014).

In this study, the mixed design will be dominated by the quantitative methods of data collection and analysis while qualitative techniques will be used to a lesser extent.

Quantitatively the researcher asks specific, narrow questions to collect quantifiable data from participants through the use of questionnaires. Quantitative methods will enable the researcher to conduct the inquiry in an unbiased and objective manner. Qualitatively the researcher relies on the views of participants; asking broad and general questions through interviews. Interviews will enable a broader and deeper understanding of the issues under investigation. In this study, the embedded design will enable the researcher to have a holistic review over the research and make the researcher capture a range of perspectives.

Sampling:

Sample planning according to Akhtar (2016) refers to a detailed outline of measurements to be taken:

- At what time - Decide the time when a survey is to be conducted. For example, taking people's views on newspaper outreach before launch of a new newspaper in the area.
- On Which material - Decide the material on which the survey is to be conducted. It could be an online poll or paper based checklist.
- In what manner - Decide the sampling methods, which will be used to choose people on whom the survey is to be conducted.
- By whom - Decide the person(s) who has to collect the observations.

In this study, data will be collected from 3rd February to 7th February, 2025. The materials to be used will be paper based (questionnaire to be in specific). However, this study will use a random sampling technique and the ones available during data collection will be considered till the sample size will be achieved. The researcher will personally collect the data from all the participants

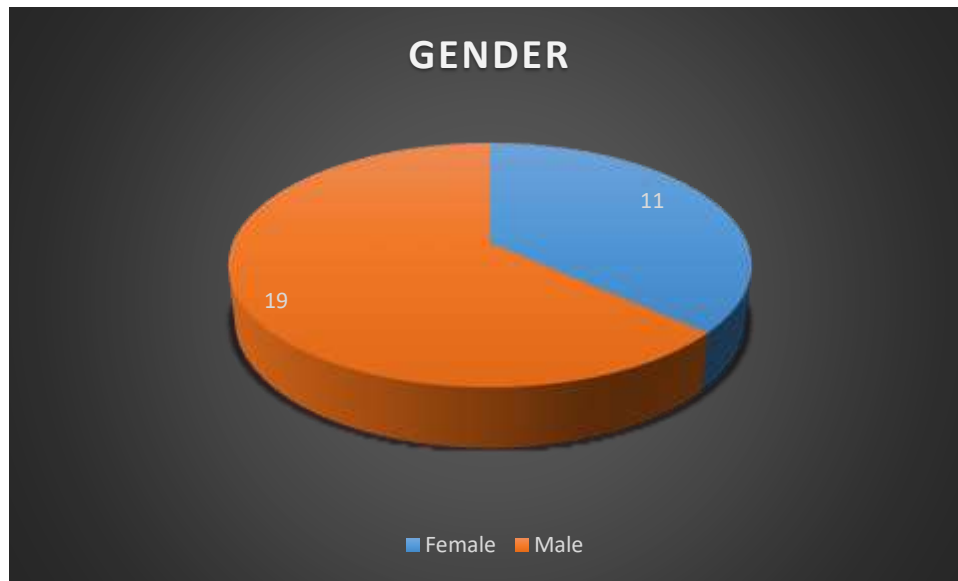
DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1.2

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

4.1.1 Respondent's Gender

Male	19
Female	14
Total	33



The study findings show that there are a lot of men participants than women participants with a representation of 58%. Still more the study did not establish if gender has an effect on the usage of Reformed Assessment Methods in teaching.

Age of Respondent's

Table 4.1.2.2

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)	ACCUMULATIVE PERCENTAGE
18 to 30 Years	11	33.3	33.3
31 to 45 Years	15	45.5	78.8
46 to 60 Years	7	21.2	100
Over 60 Years	0	0	0

Source: Researcher's work (2025)

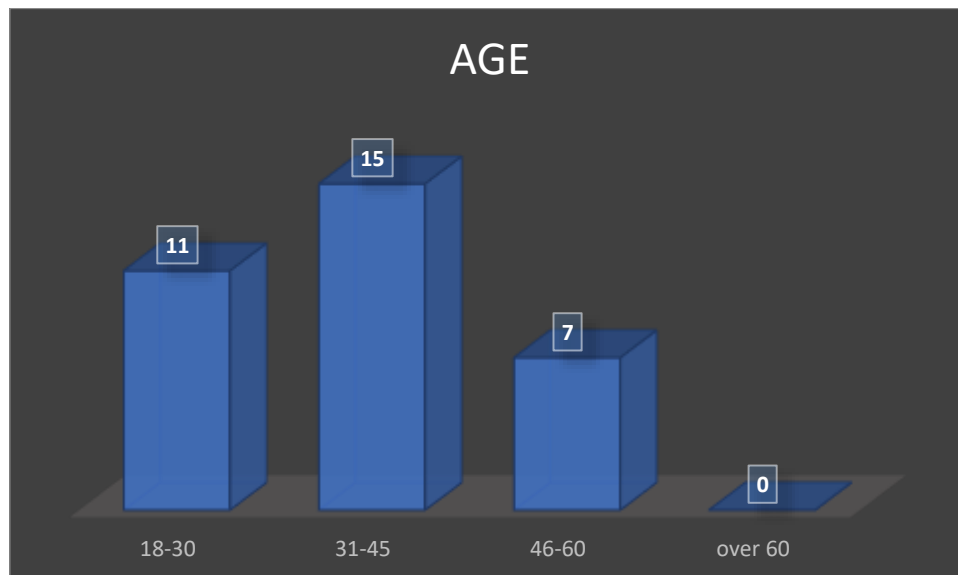


Table 4.1.2.1 shows age of respondents within the range of 18 to 60 years and over. The percentage of respondents from 18 to 30 years were 11 respondents representing 33.3% with 33.3% accumulative percentage. From 31 to 45 there were 15 respondents representing 45.5 % with accumulative percentage of 78.8. From 46 to 60 years there were 7 respondents representing 21.2% with 100% accumulative percentage and there was zero respondent from over 60 years of age representing 0. According to the number of percentages it shows that respondents from 31 to 45 years has the highest percentage rate.

The study findings concludes that there a good number of participants are aged between the ages of 31 to 45.

Academic Qualification

CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Master's Degree	1	3%
Bachelor's Degree	29	88%
Diploma	3	9%

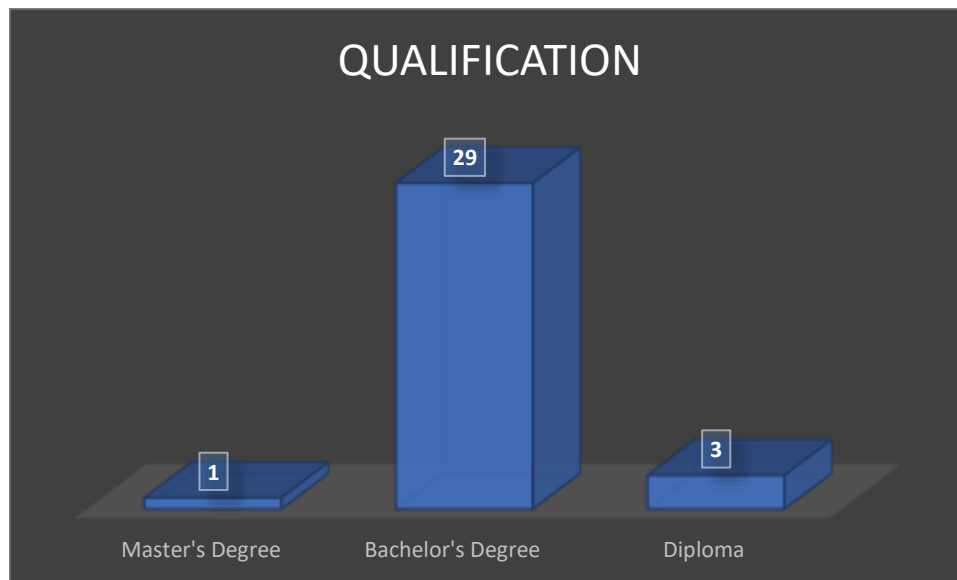


Figure 2 indicates the level of education of respondents, primary level respondents were 6 indicating 12%, the secondary level were 24 which indicates 46%, the tertiary level respondents were 21 representing 40% and the respondents who have no any education background was 1 representing 2%. Since the secondary level respondents were 46% was the highest.

On academic qualifications, the study findings shows that 88% of the respondents have Bachelor's degree as their maximum qualifications. This shows that the participants have an added advantage in understanding and usage of the Reformed Assessment methods. On the other hand, the study findings indicate that there are more teachers with vast experience in teaching with specifically those with a minimum of five years working experience

Recommendations

Implementing reformed assessment methods significantly enhances student learning by encouraging active engagement, critical thinking, and real-world application of knowledge. To effectively integrate these methods, it is crucial to shift from traditional teacher-centered approaches to student-centered ones, promoting student agency through active learning strategies. Additionally, incorporating various formative assessments can facilitate continuous feedback, allowing students to identify areas for improvement. Diversifying assessment techniques, such as using peer assessments and performance-based tasks, can accommodate diverse learning styles and capture different dimensions of student learning. Providing timely and constructive feedback is essential in guiding students toward improvement, while ensuring the validity and reliability of assessments guarantees fairness and effectiveness. Aligning assessments with learning objectives ensures meaningful data on student progress, while integrating technology can facilitate innovative assessment approaches. Engaging stakeholders, including students, parents, and community members, fosters a shared understanding of learning goals, enhancing support throughout the assessment process.

Recommendations

To effectively implement reformed assessment methods, educators should embrace student-centered approaches, ensuring that assessments prioritize student agency. Continuous professional development for teachers on designing alternative assessments is essential for equipping them with necessary skills. Regular engagement with stakeholders, including parents and community members, is recommended to maintain transparency in the assessment process. Moreover, all assessments must align with established curriculum standards and learning outcomes to ensure coherence and relevance. It is also beneficial to integrate technology solutions that enable real-time feedback and self-assessment, enhancing the overall effectiveness of the assessment strategies employed. Finally, a commitment to providing constructive feedback can significantly support students in their learning journey, while ongoing evaluation of assessment validity and reliability will uphold the integrity of the educational process.

CONCLUSION

By thoughtfully implementing these strategies, educators can create a more inclusive and effective assessment system that supports all students in achieving their full potential. Reformed assessment methods, such as performance-based assessments, project-based evaluations, and portfolios, aim to provide a more comprehensive understanding of student learning compared to traditional standardized tests. These methods emphasize real-life applications and holistic evaluation of student

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