CHALLENGES FACING FOUNDATION PHASE EDUCATORS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT

by

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DECLARATION

I, Mpho Dellynah Masipa, hereby declare that the dissertation "Challenges facing Foundation Phase educators in implementing continuous assessment" is the result of my own investigation and research and that I have not previously in part or full submitted it at any university for the purpose of a degree.

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Mpho Dellynah Masipa   06 November 2013

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the challenges facing foundation phase educators in the implementation of continuous assessment. The sample involved a total of seven (7) educators out of the intended eight (8). I used qualitative approach interspersed with interviews, observations and documents for data collection. The findings suggest that most participants command teaching experience of over sixteen (16) years in the field. Furthermore, they also confirm continuous assessment as a serious challenge to educators particularly those educators serving foundation phase.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

1.1 Introduction

Assessment is the bedrock of an effective teaching and learning environment, and regular, reliable and timely assessment is key to improving learning and enhancing the quality of education. Assessment allows those working in the education system to diagnose, monitor and assure quality of education (UNESCO, 2005).

International experiences on Outcomes Based Assessment (OBA) suggest that assessment remains a challenge in any education system. In Australia for example, research has been done on effectiveness of National Curriculum Assessment (NCA) on the improvement of the standard of education and it was found that the implementation of assessment is still a challenge (Sebba, 2003). In Hong Kong (Asia) research was done by LO Yiu Chun (2006) on challenges encountered in the implementation of school-based formative assessment approach. The study revealed that there is a need for educators to be equipped with required knowledge and skills in assessment designs. Formative assessment models require that educators be able to analyze assessment results and give immediate and constructive feedback to the learners. Since the educators adopted a small class teaching approach in the lower classes, they will succeed in interacting with individual learners and giving them oral feedback.

In Africa, the issue of assessment also received special place in government agendas. For example, the Republic of Nigeria and Botswana commissioned research projects in their education ministries to determine perceptions of classroom assessment practises by primary educators as a means of providing quality basic education (Nenty, Adedoyin, John & Mojor, 2007). In the context of South Africa, the study conducted by Botha and Hite (2002) indicate that the implementation of continuous assessment was partly researched. The Assessment Policy requires educators to apply Outcomes Based Education (OBE) approach to teaching and learning.

1.2 The problem statement

Continuous assessment has to be planned at the same time as the teaching and learning activities are planned and has to be continuous. The present state of affairs in our schools is that continuous assessment is not carried out according to the expectations and prescript of the Department of Basic Education. The current study seeks to establish the challenges that the educators encounter in the implementation of continuous assessment and also comes up with a remedy.

1.3 The aim of the study

The aim of the present study is to explore challenges faced by Foundation Phase educators in implementing continuous assessment as required by the Department of Basic Education and also to overcome those challenges.

1.3.1 Objectives of the study

- To establish the challenges facing Foundation Phase educators in implementing continuous assessment; and
- To identify strategies that can be utilised to overcome the challenges.
- To determine how the schools implement continuous assessment as a primary requirement of the Department of Basic Education.

1.4 Research questions

- What are the challenges faced by educators in implementing continuous assessment in the Foundation Phase?
- How could these challenges be overcome?

1.5 Significance of the study

Studies on assessment of learner's work in the Foundation Phase suggest that the process is inconsistent and unclear. This might be as a result of the apparent ambiguities in the execution of continuous assessment; educators are confronted with unpredictable challenges. Research conducted by Belarch (2002), Gale and Densmore (2003) reflected largely on chaos in the

implementation process of assessment in the Foundation Phase of schooling. Other studies such as those carried out by Lam and Lee (2009) on continuous assessment centred mainly on educator efficacy in the assessment processes. None of these studies underlined the challenges faced by Foundation Phase educators in implementing continuous assessment. Furthermore, the importance of the present study is that the views of Foundation Phase educators will be exposed as an effort to comprehend the fundamental challenges that they face when assessing elementary learners. This factor is non-existent in much of the literature and studies conducted on assessment at Foundation Phase of schooling.

1.6 Conclusion

Chapter one deals with all the aspects that are linked to the research problem, and furthermore, explores how the objectives of the research will be achieved, and indicates the interconnectedness of the parts to the research problem statement. In the next chapter which is literature review the researcher will explore studies carried out by other researchers internationally and nationally with regard to the topic in question.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I analyse studies explored by other researchers internationally and in South Africa on continuous assessment. I analyse studies carried out in other countries, including those in Africa as well as continuous assessment in the context of South Africa. I analyse those studies with the intention of establishing the extent to which the present topic has been researched and how best to place my study without duplicating what has already been researched.

Assessment is defined in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) Foundation Phase (2011) as a continuous planned process of identifying, gathering and interpreting information about the performance of learners, using various forms of assessment. It involves the following four steps:

- generating and collecting evidence of achievement;
- evaluating this evidence;
- recording the findings and
- using this information to understand and thereby assist the learner's development in order to improve the process of learning and teaching.

Continuous Assessment (CA) is assessment of student's progress based on work they do or tests they take through out the term or year rather than on a single examination (World English Dictionary, 2009). The Cambridge dictionary online (2010) defines continuous assessment as the system in which the quality of a student's work is judged by various pieces of work during a course and not by one final examination. International experiences on learner assessment show that countries place greater interest in this process with varying degrees of emphasis and perspectives. In addition, these perspectives reflect on assessment practices in schools with foundation phase as the central focus area.

2.2 International Perspectives on Continuous Assessment

In Australia studies were carried out on outcome based education but not on assessment specifically. According to research done by Gale & Densmore (2003), there had been extensive staff development associated with outcomes approach but while there were few examples of practical implementation, the educators were left to implement it in whatever way they can. Sessions led by syllabus writers were the main source of information and were helpful to educators but in some subjects the syllabus writers seemed to avoid assessment issues. In Australia, bureaucrats' technocrats of the education industry, probably because of the time and funds already expended, continue to justify and prop up a paradigm which experienced educators are finding increasingly loathsome (Gale & Densmore, 2003).

Outcome based education which requires that the learners be assessed on a continuous basis was found to have many flaws according to the study done as reported by the Federal Education Minister, Brendan Nelson in his interview on ABC Local Radio on the 28/09/2005. Primary school learners were found to be lagging behind their international peers in Singapore, Japan, California and England. Learners performed better on a syllabus rather than outcome based education. The Federal education Minister mentioned that Donnely (2005), in his study recommended that the Education Ministry go back to summative assessment where the learners will be assessed on a year to year basis. According to the Minister, outcome based education is an approach that lacks clearly defined end points and it is not specific or rigorous enough. It was mentioned during the interview that the department is planning something about outcome based education which the Minister used to describe as new age and a cancer.

Chun (2007) researched on practice and challenges of school-based formative assessment in Hong Kong (China). According to CDC (2001), the assessment reform policy in Hong Kong aimed to encourage the use of formative assessment in schools in order to improve students' learning skills and to promote their life-long learning abilities. Bell & Cowie (2001) proposed

two models of assessment namely, planned formative assessment and interactive formative assessment. In the process of planned formative assessment the educators use various assessment strategies to elicit information about student learning. The collected information has to be interpreted with a pre-determined set of criteria and make judgement on the achievement levels of the learners. It is mentioned in the study that the educators regarded the assessment methods used to be useful in helping their learners to improve continuously in their learning.

Challenges were met in the implementation process including the lack of professional knowledge and skills by educators in formative assessment, the inconsistencies of assessment modes adopted in different class levels and subjects, the result of heavy workload from the individual oral feedback, and the impact of Basic Competency Assessment on school-based formative assessment. Significant insights obtained from the findings are related to the professional development of educators and conditions conducive to the organisation of school-based formative assessment.

Lam and Lee (2009) also researched in China on Outcome based approach to teaching, learning and assessment and OBE was found to be improving the standard of education in China. According to Lam and Lee (2009), transformational OBE demands high expectations of learning outcomes by requiring learners to understand curriculum content much deeper than just finding the correct answer in the traditional standard tests and written examination. Teaching and learning outcomes according to the study emphasize on capacity what the students are capable of doing rather than just on content knowledge and the learning process is capacity building rather than content deliver. It is also indicated in the study that in China research is ongoing focusing the curriculum development, teaching and learning activities, educational research and total quality management of OBE.

National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) (2010) conducted research on assessment and the accountability system in Primary Schools in England. According to the study, the test and exam-based accountability system is the

impediment to quality education and the system is perceived as excessive, confused and overlapping. NAHT (2010) is not happy with the fact that the improvement process does not trust the educator's competency in assessment. If the educators become part of the process they will be motivated to do better to improve the standard of education in the country because people get motivated to perform better if they form part of the decision making process. NAHT (2010) recommends that the national curriculum tests be replaced by externally moderated educator assessment which is believed can reflect the accurate learner performance. Intensive training for educators was also recommended as it is profound for the improvement of education standard

NAHT recommended in-class assessment integrated with in-class feedback is also recommended because it will open the door to improvement. The studies indicate that feedback is the most effective way of improving learning and that educators feel that the removal of high stake tests will also ease their workload. The educators generally felt that the assessment-based accountability is being imposed on them when at the same time it does not improve the education because it is not properly done. The educators believe that the changes they suggested will benefit the entire education system while also inspiring and motivating the educators by trusting their profession.

In Chile the research on CA was not done. United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2005), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Ministry of Education of Chile (MINEDUC) held a seminar on "Perspectives for Education in Chile" at Santiago on the 22-23 January 2010. National and International experts from universities, ministries, foundations, World Bank were also attending the seminar. The challenges for education in Chile in the coming years were discussed with the aim of achieving quality education for all. One of the challenges raised was one of the educational systems centred on quality for all. Quality education is a fundamental right for all Chile citizens. According to studies, low performance and high social inequality contributed to the low quality education in Chile. Public education needs to be

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strengthened by making education mandatory and free to all (UNESCO, 20005).

In Colombia research was done on the challenges and opportunities that come with the designing of the assessment system. According to Lopez (2010), both primary and secondary schools are required to design their own assessment system as per Decree 1290 and do away with the national assessment system which was imposed on schools. According to the study, the educators, learners and administrators used to criticize the national system of assessment that system does not promote quality learning.

The researcher found that the challenges encountered include lack of teacher training on assessment. Some of the educators indicated that they do not know of other forms of assessment they can apply because they have always been using multiple-choice questions. They also indicated that there are limitations on the assessment system they are to design because it has to be in line with the standards and the tests. Educators even though they were not happy about the promotion of 95% learners irrespective of their performance, they are concerned about the impact their assessment criteria could have on the learners, educators and other stakeholders especially if many learners can be retained.

Lopez (2010) also cited opportunities that will come with the new assessment system with the first being the opportunity for educators to improve their assessment practices and it makes assessment a democratic process in schools hence the autonomy. The new education law helps educators to tailor the assessment system to suit their teaching and learning. Since there are learners with special needs in regular classes, the educators will now be able to come up with the assessment design that accommodates their needs. The new assessment system is seen on the other hand as a door to improved education in Colombia.

In Zambia, Kapambwe (2010), researched about the implementation of Continuous Assessment (CA) in Zambia and defined CA as an ongoing,

diagnostic, classroom-based process that uses a variety of assessment tools to measure learner performance. In Zambia, CA was introduced to improve the quality of teaching and learning and to collect school-based marks and add them to the final exam marks for certification and selection. The materials such as manuals, teacher's guides and other resources were dispatched to schools and training was offered to the educators and the education administrators.

Challenges such as large class sizes, low staffing level, and excessive time spent on remediation and enrichment which led to challenges such as educators not finishing the syllabus, leaner absenteeism, lack of teaching and learning resources, lack of networking by educators in different schools and inadequate monitoring by District offices were encountered in the implementation of CA. There was a perception that learner absenteeism was rife in the rural areas because learners were afraid of the challenging work and some learners even resorted to dropping out of school (Kapambwe, 2010).

Even in the face of the above mentioned challenges, the Zambian community benefited from the implementation of CA because it enabled educators to be involved in more teaching and assessment than they did before and it also provided useful feedback. The relationship between educators, learners and parents also improved because the curriculum requires parents to be involved in the education of their children. The quality of teaching and learning was improved. CA provides ways to cater for diverse learners, uniform assessment procedures in different schools, continuous in-service training for educators and officials, the need to sensitise the parents to gain their support. CA was found to be the best assessment in outcome-based education curriculum. It contributed to the improvement of quality education in the country even though there are challenges that need to be addressed by the relevant bodies to perfect teaching and learning in Zambia.

Research was also done on primary teacher's perceptions of classroom assessment practices as means of providing quality primary/basic education

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by Botswana and Nigeria. According to the study by Nenty, Adedoyin, John and Mojor (2007), primary school educators tend to lack the awareness of the place of good assessment practices in their classrooms on the achievement of quality of education at the national level. The educators rarely imagine that the way they carry out assessment in their classrooms contributes to the quality of education at national level. This situation in which teachers do not practice assessment to the extent that they themselves deem necessary for the enhancement of quality education is partly attributable to their lack of training on and understanding of the use of formative nature of classroom assessment as an effective means of achieving everyday lesson objectives. Effective assessment requires adequate resources, teachers grounded in assessment techniques and relatively small class sizes- requirements which do not fit the realities in many African countries (Nenty, Adedoyin, John and Mojor, 2007).

In Botswana again, Lekome (2007) studied professional development of primary school educators through developmental appraisal system and he mentioned the implementation of CA, Outcome Based Assessment (OBA) and inclusivity as challenges facing educators in the classrooms. Lekome (2007) further indicated that the educators, managers and administrators must have the knowledge, skills and support they need to implement CA and that support can only be given to educators if educators have been evaluated so that training needs are identified. The findings by the researcher are that teaching methods, inclusivity and record keeping for learners have improved but assessment is still a challenge.

2.3 National Perspective on Continuous Assessment

The NCS is an outcome based, integrated knowledge system based on a learner centred pedagogy that has to improve the quality of education for all in South Africa, however, the potential for OBE to enhance learning in all South African schools, given the historical and situational constraints is limited (Botha & Hite, 2002).

In South Africa, Singh (2007) undertook a study on Foundation Phase educator's understanding of assessment and according to the findings there is uncertainty among educators due to the demands of assessment and the educators feel that the workload has also increased on their side. Large classroom sizes are also mentioned as the impediment to smooth implementation of assessment. Singh (2007) indicated that even though the implementation of assessment is challenging, it does bring with it some benefits because the educators can now recognise learner's progress and they also explore the curriculum fully. The researcher's recommendations are that the Department of Education support the schools and there be regular workshops for educators and officials in the department and that parents be sensitised about assessment because they have to be involved in the education of their children.

Since the educators mentioned that record keeping is also taking too much of teaching time, electronic record keeping was suggested as an option. Lumadi (2011) researched CA in schools and according to his findings educators should develop assessment mechanisms that ensure quality in assessing and interpreting the performance of a student. Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAPS) was introduced to address this challenge. Lumadi (2011) emphasised that assessment should be an integral part of teaching and learning that help educators when they make teaching decisions because assessment guides and enhances learner learning.

2.4 Trends that emerge from the review of literature

It is evident from the studies explored that the topic am researching has not yet been researched from the angle I am approaching it. Lopez (2010), Lam and Lee (2009), NAHT (2010), UNESCO, OECD and MINEDUC (2010), Nenty et al. (2007) and Singh (2007) studied assessment but from different angles and according to their findings assessment is still a challenge in different countries. CA was studied by Kapambwe (2010) and Lumadi (2011) who also explored the subject from different angles and according to their findings the implementation of CA is still a challenge in schools. Most studies in and out of South Africa explored OBE. There is therefore a need for

challenges facing Foundation Phase educators in the implementation of CA to be explored. Assessment is the nucleus of teaching and learning and it therefore has to be carried out in a way that it will improve the quality of education in the whole country.

2.5 Continuous assessment in Foundation Phase

The nature of assessment in the Foundation Phase is guided by policy requirements and the developmental needs of the young learners. Like all teaching and learning, assessment needs to be inclusive in its approach to assessing learner's performance. Inclusivity is a central principle of the White Paper 6 (2001), and it is critical that alternative forms of assessment are planned around the different needs and learning styles displayed by learners. I realised that in most of the schools in Pietersburg circuit the educators assess individual learners the same way. Few educators have indicated that they are not trained on inclusivity.

The Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) was released for Grade R-9 in May 2002. This curriculum builds on the basic principles and vision of Curriculum 2005 (C2005), whilst at the same time streamlines and simplifies terminology and curriculum design features to make it user-friendly. RNCS was also found to be skewed and that forced the Education Ministry to go back to the drawing board again and that is when they changed it to NCS. It gives educators the information on the concepts and contents which they could teach and structures this with a clear focus on progression from phase to phase and grade to grade.

According to the Assessment Guidelines for Foundation Phase, which are now replaced by Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) documents, assessment happens naturally in the process of teaching and learning meaning it has to be continuous. Assessment has to enable the educator to pick up what the learner already know or can do and also to plan the activities in a way that they will improve the performance and meet the individual needs of learners. The assessment guidelines indicate how educators should integrate planning and teaching and learning. It makes it

easier for the educators to use different forms of assessment and tools that are regular for CA.

In NCS the teaching and learning process were informed by assessment standards but now with CAPS it is specific content focus that guides the educators on the spread of content in assessment. Continuous Assessment is done both formally and informally according to the assessment guidelines but only formal assessment records are to be recorded. The forms of assessment to be applied in the foundation phase are observation, oral, practical demonstration, written recordings and research which includes investigations, projects, etc.

2.5.1 Systemic Evaluation programme

A Systemic Evaluation (SE) programme was introduced to curb poor performance in the entire school system because of the outcry by educators, district offices, parents and other stakeholders that all the school phases contribute to the poor performance in Grade 12. A secondary analysis of the Systemic Evaluation (SE) survey data was conducted by the Department of Education in South Africa to improve learner performance in 2001 (Grade 3), 2004 (Grade 6) and 2007 (Grade 3) in the Foundation Phase. It focused on Numeracy achievement and explored the relationship between achievement and gender, age, location, home language and a number of identified equity indicators. The equity factors were explored further with a view to predict learner performance in Numeracy.

The findings of the descriptive analysis according to the report by the Department of Basic Education in 2008 showed that the overall performance in numeracy of Grade 3 learners in rural schools compared to their counterparts in urban schools was not satisfactory. From the exploratory analysis a few of the equity variables (e.g. language, funding and LTSM) were found to have an effect on learner performance in Numeracy by location of the school. Only two variables, namely Home Language (HL) and the number of books in the learner's home, selected as home background equity factors

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could be used to predict Numeracy performance in the final logistic regression model.

The variables in the final model that accounted for pedagogical equity factors were availability of computers for teaching, inadequate physical facilities, availability of facilities, availability of Numeracy reference materials, calculators and other equipments in the classroom. SE introduced new policies and curriculum changes to improve the education system in the country.

2.5.2 Foundation for Learning Campaign

The Department of Basic Education had to go back to the drawing board after it was realised that the performance in the education system is below its potential and that is when Foundation for Learning Campaign (FFLC) was launched in March 2008 with the main goal of ensuring that learners demonstrate appropriate levels of literacy and numeracy by 2011. The effect was felt by higher education institutions and it let to poor performance in Grade 12. The four year campaign was implemented from 2008 to 2011. Educators encountered various problems which include the contact time as per prescribed timetable because they didn't know whether to extend teaching hours or take time from other learning areas.

The educators indicated that FFLC was an extra burden to them because they were already struggling with the implementation of NCS and they also felt that it increased their administrative duties on the expense of teaching time. The Annual National Assessment (ANA) was also introduced by the Department of Basic Education (DBE). The learners performed poorly in ANA in 2008 and this was labelled by parents and educationists as 'a scandal' (Mail & Guardian, 2009). Meier (2011), researched on teacher perceptions of the campaign and according to her findings there was a slight improvement in literacy levels.

2.5.3 Annual National Assessment

DBE (2011) compiled a report about the Annual National Assessment (ANA) written by Grade 3 and 6 learners in the country in February 2011 as part of verification ANA, with the aim of strengthening the foundational skills in Literacy and Numeracy. The testing of Grade 1 to 6 was done in 2010 as part of universal ANA. The results of verification ANA were moderated by Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). ANA is designed to bring about better change than its predecessor Systemic Evaluation programme that was implemented in 2001, 2004 and 2007. ANA is part of the Department's goal to achieve 60% in learner performance in 2014 as stated in the Action Plan 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025.

According to DBE report (2011), the main purpose of ANA is:

- to expose educators to better assessment practices and it has been proven that ANA indeed improved educator's ways of assessing learners and it also helped the district offices to identify areas that needs support;
- to make it easier for districts to identify schools that need most assistance. This makes it easier for the district offices to plan on the support needed and provide it to where it is needed but not to all the schools. In the same breath the Department of Basic Education also knows which districts and schools needs support and the kind of support they need. There is minimisation of costs as well because the resources will be provided only where there is a need.
- to encourage schools to celebrate outstanding performance. Schools that did not perform well will as a result know which schools to learn from.
- to encourage more parent involvement in the academic improvement and this can be done by empowering parents with important information about their children's performance.

The tests were designed to accommodate learners of different levels of performance and were set in line with NCS and the achievement milestones

from FFLC. The DBE and HSRC offered training to provincial ANA coordinators who also trained district officials and school principals and then the educators according to the ANA Report (2011). The training offered included management of ANA up to reporting to parents and this type of assessment has been beneficial to the country as a whole because it made it easy to identify schools that need assistance and those that can be good examples with regard to assessment. The overall picture according to the report indicates that many schools needs attention irrespective of the socio economic challenges and this seems to be the case worldwide as indicated in the table below.

Table 1: Learners passing the low reading benchmark in 2006 in PIRLS

Participating country	% of learners
Indonesia	54
Iran	60
Kuwait	28
Morocco	26
Qatar	33
South Africa	22
United States	96

The Minister of Basic Education committed herself according to the Delivery Agreement (2010) to produce world class system of standardised national assessment. It is indicated in ANA report (2011) that it takes several years for programmes like ANA to be implemented perfectly and there are some lessons learned from ANA which includes the following:

- improved logistics in delivery of ANA materials since there were schools that administered tests at a later date due to late delivery of materials.
- more rigorous quality assurance measures in verification ANA when conducting tests and when sampling test papers. Reliable statistics have to be used and should be able to inform policy and the reliability of the whole system (ANA report, 2011).

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- standardisation within universal ANA by distribution of materials to schools at the same time and training of principals and the educators on how the scripts are to be marked.
- better data collection procedures for universal ANA by making sure there is enough human resource in the provinces to collect data.
- improvement in the design of tests as inputs from educators, organisations and experts in the industry indicated that there is room for improvement and alignment of the tests with the curriculum.

ANA has brought with it improvements in the education system. If the flaws that were discovered during the implementation of this program can be closed then the entire education system will experience major improvement.

2.5.4 Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement

According to the National Protocol on Assessment (2012), the educators have to use various forms of assessment suitable to the developmental level of the learner when collecting evidence for learner achievement. Learners have to be assessed formally (Assessment for Learning) and informally (Assessment of Learning) in the classroom and the educators should inform them about the knowledge and skills that are assessed and also provide feedback to them which will help in improving their learning.

Feedback can be given by interaction between the educator and the learner or by discussion by the whole class. Formal assessment tasks are to be recorded and will determine the progression of the learner to the next grade. The performance of learners can be monitored and enhanced through observation by the educator and interaction between the educator and the learners. Informal assessment is as important as the formal assessment and it helps in closing the learning gaps.

Foundation Phase document requires that students be assessed both formally and informally through observation, oral discussions, practical demonstrations and written recording. The Grade R learners do have to be assessed on

written work but only through oral work and practical work. The learner's progress has to be monitored daily during teaching and learning activities because assessment does not have to be done separately.

The educators are to develop the annual programme of assessment for each Learning Programme which has to be given to the parents and learners at the beginning of the year. This is a year-long plan of assessment that includes formal assessment tasks that have to be planned, executed, recorded and reported. The requirements for a Programme of Assessment are explained in the National Protocol for Assessment (2012). The intention of the protocol is to regulate how evidence of learner performance is recorded and reported, and to reduce teacher workload. The National Protocol was supposed to be implemented from 2006.

Many educators in Pietersburg Circuit are not yet aware of protocol document and they are expected to have started with its implementation. The lack of the necessary documents like this one may also impact negatively on the implementation of continuous assessment in the Foundation Phase. Some of the educators developed the Programmes of Assessment at the end of year since 2008 without a clear understanding of what that is. Those Programmes of Assessment it seems they were only developed because they had to be submitted to the circuit manager as I was told.

It is stated in the National Policy on Assessment and Qualifications for Schools in the General Education and Training Band (2007) that strategies and forms of assessment used in the classroom should be appropriate to the knowledge, skills or attitudes and the range of competencies being assessed as well as for the age and developmental needs of the learners. A task should assess a variety of skills. There is still a need for educators to acquire the relevant knowledge and skills towards meaningful curriculum implementation. According to CAPS documents, the main techniques of both formal and informal assessment are observation by the teacher, oral discussions, practical demonstrations and written recording. The Grade R learners are to be assessed through oral and practical tasks.

2.5.4.1 Informal or daily assessment

The educators can assess the learner's progress informally through observation, discussions, informal classroom interaction and practical demonstrations and this should be done during teaching and learning. This type of assessment informs planning for teaching. Learner progress can be recorded on a checklist or observation schedule. It is through informal assessment that the educator is able to monitor the performance of learners. Informal assessment is used to provide feedback to learners and to inform planning for teaching.

2.5.4.2 Formal Assessment

Formal assessment is compiled from all the tasks that make a formal programme of assessment for the year. The educator decides on the number of learners she/he wants to assess at a time and the educational media should be available. The forms of assessment used by the educator should be appropriate to the age and developmental level of the learner and there are of course certain skills that are best assessed with particular forms of assessment. Formal tasks have to be designed in a way that they cover the content in different ways. According to CAPS Maths document, assessment tasks do not have to include activities that are language based or reading dependent because this may disadvantage some of the learners. There are learners who are good in numerating but performing very poor in language activities. The educators are encouraged to use rubrics in Maths to assess problem solving skills and checklist to assess measuring. The programme of formal assessment for Maths is tabled as follows:

Table 2: Formal assessment programme for Maths in the Foundation Phase

GRADE	TERM 1	TERM 2	TERM 3	TERM 4	TOTAL
1	1	2	2	2	7
2	1	2	2	3	8
3	1	3	3	3	10

Table 3: Formal assessment programme for Home Language in the Foundation Phase

GRADE	TERM 1	TERM 2	TERM 3	TERM 4	TOTAL
1	1	2	2	2	7
2	1	2	2	2	7
3	1	3	3	2	9

In Life Skills the learners are required to write one formal assessment task per term meaning four tasks annually. In addition to these, learners write ANA at the beginning of the first term and it does not have to be used to label a learner's ability. A single task has to cover a number of topics.

The assessment methods to be followed in the foundation phase are teacher assessment, peer assessment, group assessment and self assessment. Baseline assessment should be used because it establishes what the learner already knows. Formative assessment (assessment for learning) can be used to provide feedback to learners and track their progression while diagnostic assessment will help in identifying strengths and weaknesses of the learners. Summative assessment (assessment of learning) gives the overall achievement of learners.

According to the National Policy on Assessment and Qualifications for Schools in the General Education and Training Band (2007), assessment is a continuous planned process of identifying, gathering and interpreting information about the performance of learners. It also involves generating and collecting evidence of achievement, evaluating evidence against outcomes, recording findings of this evaluation and using this information to understand and thereby assist the learner's development and improve the process of teaching and learning. I did learn from some of the educators that curriculum advisors are also not doing follow up in schools to check if educators are doing the right thing and to give guidance.

Assessment should form an integral part of planning. This will ensure the validity of the assessment. Killen (2003) argues that validity is an important characteristic of good assessment. OBE requires that learners relate what they learn in the classroom with the real world. When assessing learners, educators should apply strategies that require more than a reproduction of content. To ensure validity when assessing learners, relevant strategies to measure specific outcomes should be followed. One strategy cannot be relevant at all the times. According to Killen (2003), the reasons for learner assessment are selection, certification, classification, diagnosis, progression, programme evaluation and instructional improvement. It is clear from the above that assessment cannot be a once off activity. It has to be continuous.

2.5.5 Recording and reporting

The educator has to record the level of performance of the learners in an assessment task. According to CAPS, the records will help the educator to monitor the progress of the learner and decide on how individual learners can be assisted to improve the performance. The records also serve as evidence for promotion of learners to the next grade or for retention and should be used to verify progress made by both the educator ad the learners in teaching and learning. Reporting is a process of communicating learner performance to the learners, parents, circuit office and other stakeholders. The performance can be reported in the report cards, by phone calls, parent's meetings and many other ways and it has to be done in percentages. Educators have to follow the following table when doing recording and reporting:

Table 4: Codes and percentages for recording and reporting

RATING CODE	DESCRIPTION OF COMPETENCE	PERCANTAGE
7	Outstanding achievement	80-100
6	Meritorious achievement	70-79
5	Substantial achievement	60-69
4	Adequate achievement	50-59

3	Moderate achievement	40-49
2	Elementary achievement	30-39
I	Not achieved	0-29

Educators are required to use observation checklists and rubrics when assessing the learners and examples of those are found in CAPS documents.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter explored studies carried out by different researchers internationally and nationally. The studies I explored are about OBE, assessment and continuous assessment even though these issues were approached from different angles. The topic I am researching is relevant at this point in time because it has not yet been explored from the angle I am approaching it. I believe that the education system in South Africa will benefit from the findings of my study because after identifying the challenges encountered by the educators I will make recommendations that are likely to contribute towards addressing/resolving the challenges.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss research approaches applied in the study to explore the challenges facing Foundation Phase educators and i will also argue for choosing the qualitative research approach as an appropriate option for the study. I will indicate the target population for the study, sampling, research instruments used, methods used for analysing data, limitations of the study and ethical considerations. It is crucial to do research in the school with the educators who are in charge of imparting knowledge and skills to the learners while in the process assessing the learners on their performance.

3.2 Research Design

Research design is a blue-print for conducting a study with maximum control over factors that may interfere with the validity of the findings (Burns & Grove, 2003). Babbie and Mouton (2001) define research design as a plan that describes how, when and where data is to be collected and analysed. In the present study I ensured that data was properly collected and analysed in keeping with the recommendations of the preceding scholars

3.2.1 Types of research

The following are different types of research:

3.2.1.1 Qualitative research

Burns et al. (2003) describes qualitative research as a systematic subjective research design used to describe life experiences and situations to give the meaning. Burns et al. (2003) further states that the researcher who uses this approach adopts a person centred holistic and humanistic perspective to comprehend human experiences without focusing on the specific concepts. Woods (2006) echoes the same sentiment in stating that the qualitative approaches have a focus of natural settings; an interest in meanings, perspectives and understandings; an emphasis on process; a concern with inductive analysis and grounded theory.

Qualitative research was used in this study to explore the challenges facing Foundation Phase educators in implementing continuous assessment. Natural setting in this study was a classroom setting in which the learners are taught and their performance assessed on a continuous basis by the educators. Qualitative approach helped me to identify the meanings the educators attach to the way they assess their learners and how they interpret the assessment records as well as the educators' perspectives on educational issues. The approach allowed me to interact with educators in the selected schools in the Seshego area of Pietersburg circuit, Capricorn district.

The advantage of using qualitative approach is that it provides a means through which I can establish the challenges educators encounter when assessing learners continuously. Furthermore, the methodology enabled me to find out about the challenges of policies or practices as it allows the researcher to penetrate in depth situations, settings, relationships or people to reveal uncertainties (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

I have adopted a case study design because it allows me to collect extensive data on the individuals and programmes on which the study is focused (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2002). I have spent an extended period of time on site and interacted with the respondents. The main methods that I used in qualitative research are observation, interviews and document analysis. In this study the researcher interviewed the respondents in their workplaces, observed and analysed the documents that are used for assessment including the assessment records and tools.

3.2.1.2 Case study
According to Soy (2006), case study research excels in bringing the researchers to an understanding of a complex issue and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research. Case studies emphasise detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships. Yin (2006:196) concurs with Trochim (2006) that researchers have used the case study for many years across a variety of disciplines. Case study research is applied in

this study to find out the challenges facing the Foundation Phase educators in implementing CA.

3.2.1.3 Descriptive research

Burns et al. (2003:20) states that descriptive research is designed to provide a picture of a situation as it naturally happens. It may be used to justify current practices, to make judgement and to develop theories. In the present study, descriptive research is applied because participants provided information in the correct setting without spark of colmpulsion.

3.3 Target Population

Target population refers to the total number of people with whom the study is concerned (Babbie & Mouton, 2006:184). In this study the sample was drawn from a total of fourteen educators who are teaching in the Foundation Phase in two different schools. There are eight educators in one of the schools where each grade has two classrooms while there are six educators in the other school with two educators in two Grade R classrooms and one educator in each of the other three grades.

3.4 Sampling

Guarte and Barrios (2006:277-284) define purposive sampling as a random selection of sampling units within the segment of the population with the most information on the characteristic of interest. Barbie et al. (2006:184) defines a sample as a portion of the total population or is an approximation of the whole rather than the whole itself and the primary objective of any sampling procedure is to obtain a representative sample. Purposive sampling is prioritised and mostly preferred to all other methods of sampling as it gives the researcher an opportunity to come up with a lot of information especially in a qualitative research (Padgett, 1998).

This research adopted purposive sampling procedure for the sake of selecting two schools in the Seshego area of Pietersburg circuit, where assessment implementation seems to be failing. Two schools are enough as I will be focusing on all the Grades in the Foundation Phase. In purposive sampling,

one simply selects and studies such a social setting in detail. Four educators from one school and three educators from another school constituted my sample size which means one educator per Grade starting from Grade R to Grade 3 in one school and Grade R to Grade 2 educators in another school. The identified teachers are involved in Grade R to 3 to provide appropriate data regarding assessment in the phase.

3.5 Research instruments

Interviews, observation and document analysis are the three instruments that were used in the study to collect data. Interview data was recorded by tape recording.

3.5.1 Interviews

It is crucial for the researcher to interact with educators in their own world of discharging their professional duties as Denzin and Lincoln (2000) mention in their study that interviews are essential especially in qualitative research such as this present study. Interviews were conducted in a non-threatening setting where interviewees participated in simple and natural conversations with me and they were allowed to code switch to their home language were needed to make it easy for them to respond to the questions. Since interviews are popularly regarded as the most reliable and trusted means of collecting data, they therefore form the mainstay of this qualitative research study.

Interviewees were engaged in what Foutanella, Campos and Turatto (2006) identify as acculturation interviews through which both the interviewer and the interviewee get familiarised with the interview settings beforehand. Of disadvantage with interviews is that the researcher gets different information from different people and may not be able to make comparisons among the interviewees (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). I focused on what I was doing to be able to make comparisons among the interviewees

3.5.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

I used semi-structured interviews which also yielded information that I didn't plan to ask for. The questions were confined and I mainly introduced the

question and subsequently ask probing questions to facilitate the interviewee's expressions of feelings. The questions are structured in a way that the objectives of the study will be achieved. The principle of free association of ideas was respected throughout the interview sessions (Freud, 1958; Fontanella & Turatto, 2002). However, as the interview process continued, I put forth questions which needed clarity from the interviewees of the expressions that they make.

I interviewed seven Foundation Phase educators instead of eight educators because one educator was not available. An audiotape was used during interviews, and later transcribed verbatim. The first section of the interview questions dealt with the demographic information of the respondents: grade taught; gender and years of teaching experience. In the second part of the interview questions the respondents were asked eleven questions with regard to the implementation of continuous assessment.

3.5.2 Observation
After interviewing the respondents, the researcher observed the respondents in their classrooms as they were imparting information and assessing the learners. The researcher also observed the level of participation on the side of the learners and how the educators responded to the questions and answers from the learners.

3.5.3 Document analysis
The researcher analysed the learner portfolio files, assessment record sheets, checklists, rubrics and schedules. The educator's files were also analysed to check lesson and assessment planning and to find out if they are aligned to CAPS.

3.5.4 Data analysis
The researcher used the descriptive method to analyse the data. Welman et al. (2005) state that descriptive method is concerned with the description or summarisation of the data obtained from a group of people. The demographic information selected was categorised according to what the researcher

selected. The descriptive methods such as frequencies, percentages and pie charts were used to illustrate demographic information and responses for questions about the implementation of continuous assessment. Each table and pie chart was followed by a clear explanation. The researcher lastly draws a conclusion on the findings in a short paragraph followed by a discussion on the findings.

3.6 Validity and reliability

3.6.1 Validity

Validity of instruments is the degree to which interpretations and concepts have mutual meanings between the participants and the researcher (Mc Milan & Schumacher, 2001). The interview questions are structured in a way that they will be understood by the respondents and will yield relevant answers. The interview questions cover the domain intended to be covered and that is content validity according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000). Mc Milan and Schumacher (2001) emphasise that even though the researchers use several data collection methods to collect data there will always be one central method. In this study interviews are the central method that is used to collect data and is supplemented by observation in the classroom and document analysis.

3.6.1.1 Types of validity

Johnson (1997) defines different types of validity as follows:
- Descriptive validity refers to accuracy in reporting the facts.
- Interpretive validity refers to accurate portraying of the meaning attached by participants to what is studied by the researcher. It is about the degree to which the researcher understands the thoughts of participants and the way they are presented in the research.
- Theoretical validity refers to theoretical explanation that fits the data and it is credible and defensible.
- Internal validity refers to the degree to which the researcher is justified in concluding that an observed relationship is causal.

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- External validity refers to generalisation which is based on similarity

Welman et al. (2005) define criterion-related validity as an instrument that compares what the instrument is measuring with an external criterion made on the basis of a prediction of the instrument's ability to measure that phenomenon in the same way achieved by that external criterion.

Cronbach and Meehl (2000) state that content validity assesses the validity of the instrument on the basis of the fact that the content, i.e. questions or statements correspond with the intended aim of the research.

Face validity according to De Vos et al. (2005) refers to the extent to which the instrument appears to be measuring what it says what it says it will measure, especially when such an instrument is examined by an ordinary person who has no knowledge or understanding of the phenomenon.

According to Buckingham and Saunders (2004), construct validity is related to content and, and to some extend criterion. The instrument has construct validity if the instrument is explicitly based on one or more theoretical framework or concept so that, combined, the items in that instrument, only refer to that construct.

3.6.2 Reliability

Reliability of an instrument refers to the extent to which the same instrument consistently produces the same results under different conditions (Postlethwaite, 2009; De Vos, Strydom & Delport, 2005). Gorman and Clayton (2005) define reliability as the extent to which a measurement gives the correct answer and they link it to repeatability. The interview questions in this study will produce the same results if used several times under the same conditions.

3.6.2.1 Types of reliability

Test reliability refers to the fact that the instrument should be able to return the same results when administered to the same or similar group after a reasonable period of time.

According to Cameron et al. (2007), internal consistency reliability refers to whether two or more different items in the instrument are measuring the same variables.

3.7 Pilot study

De Vos (2001) refers to pilot study as an abbreviated version of research project in which the researcher practises or tests the procedures to be used in the subsequent full-scale project. According to New Dictionary of Social Work (2000) a pilot study is a process whereby the research design perspective survey is tested. The study was piloted to educators in the neighbourhood (Seshego) to detect any flaws in the data collection instruments. The researcher found that the instruments are appropriate to the study because the participants understood the questions. The responses from the participants affirmed the researcher's views to continue with the study.

3.8 Limitations of the study

The following are the limitations of the study:

- In the study, the clerks, principals and deputy principals were not participating.
- The study was limited to Foundation Phase educators and the findings reflect their perspective only and not that of educators in Intermediate and Senior Phases in schools.
- The findings cannot be generalised due to the limited nature of data gathered, but it will help enhance views on the inadequacy of assessment.

3.9 Elimination of bias

The study eliminated biasness by the following:

- The interview questions were constructed in such a way that they address the research objectives identified at the beginning of the study.
- The interview questions were constructed in such a way that they don't discriminate against the participants in any way.
- The researcher did not influence the responses of the participants when they were considering their options.

3.10 Ethical considerations

The following were adhered to:

- The independence of the respondents was adhered to.
- Participation in the study was voluntary.
- The researcher didn't influence the respondents in any way.
- The names of the participants were not disclosed during the interviews, observation and document analysis.

The responses by the participants were respected and treated equally and the answers reflected their independence. Furthermore, the researcher believed that the responses by the participants were not influenced by the researcher nor their colleagues. It must be noted that the participants were not done any favours to influence them to respond in a particular manner. The outcome of the study was intended to assist the Department of Basic Education to improve learner performance from the Foundation Phase in schools and to accomplish the goals of the department in question.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter describes the research design and the methodology of the study. Data was collected by means of interviews, observation in the classroom and document analysis. The next chapter focuses on the presentation and analysis of data through the use of tables and pie charts. Furthermore, the presentation and analysis are followed by explanations of what the data represents.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The results of the analysis are presented in accordance with the research questions and objectives, which guided the study. Each figure and table is labelled to make it easier to follow the discussions. Explanations follow after each figure or table presented.

Finally, the conclusion of this chapter follows, which wraps up the entire analysis in preparation for the next two chapters, which is the evaluation of research findings, conclusions and recommendations.

4.2 Data analysis

4.2.1   Demographic information of respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
Grade taught by educator		
R	2	29%
1	2	28%
2	2	29%
3	1	14%
Gender		
Male	2	29%
Female	5	71%
Years of teaching experience		
0-5 years	0	
6-10 years	1	14%
11-15 years	2	29%
16 years and above	4	57%

Table 4.1   Demographic information of respondents in frequencies and percentages

4.2.2 Grade taught by educator
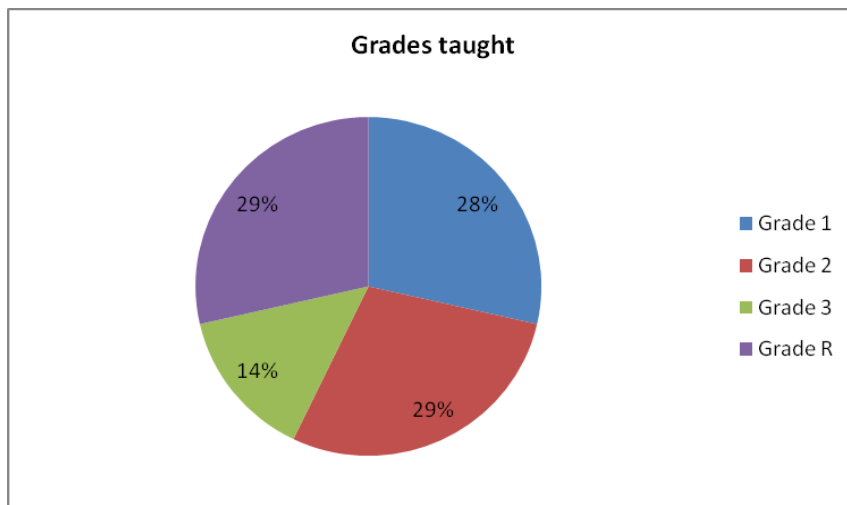
Figure 4.1 Grade taught by educator

Figure 4.1 shows that the respondents are two Grade R educators, two Grade 1 educators, two Grade 2 educators and one Grade 3 educator. All the seven educators are teaching in the Foundation Phase.

4.2.3 Gender of respondents
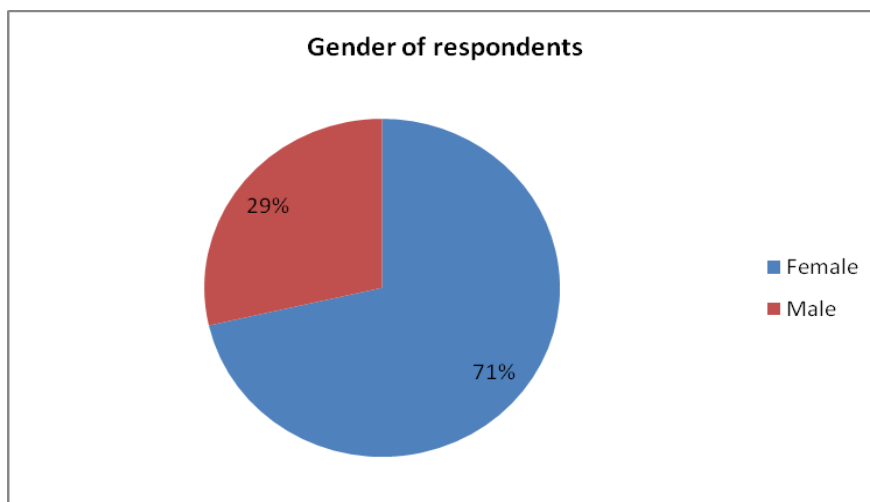
Figure 4.2 Gender

Figure 4.2 shows that the participants were 2 males (29%) and 5 females (71%) respectively. Primary schools generally appoint more female educators

than male educators in the Foundation Phase because young children accept female educators more than male educators. Female educators are more like mother figures to the younger learners. Du Toitm and Kruger (1993) indicate that the majority of educators in primary schools are females. According to Schnetler (1993), female educators are good in taking care of learners in the foundation phase in schools.

4.2.4 Respondents' years of teaching experience
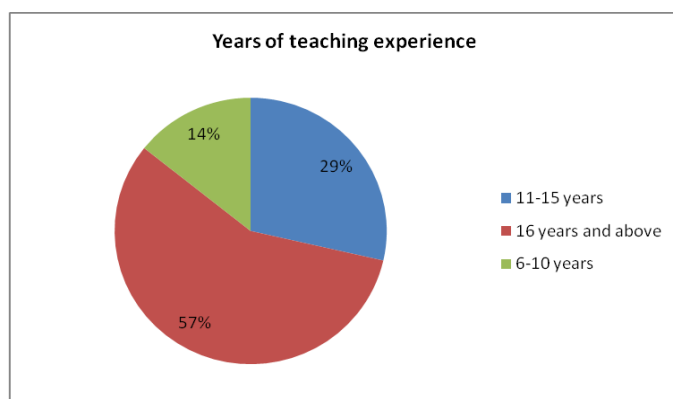
Figure 4.3   Teaching experience

Figure 4.3 shows that there is only one respondent (14%) with 6-10 years of teaching experience, 2 respondents (29%) with 11-15 years of teaching experience. Furthermore, the majority of respondents (57%) have a teaching experience of 16 years and above. Educators with a many years of teaching experience have acquired more expertise and confidence. According to Anderson (1989), experience and regular professional development enable educators to cope with the new changes in their work, the advancement of technology and the increasing demands that are imposed upon educators.

4.3   Responses by the respondents to interview questions

4.3.1 Respondents' responses on, do you have CAPS documents for all the learning areas?
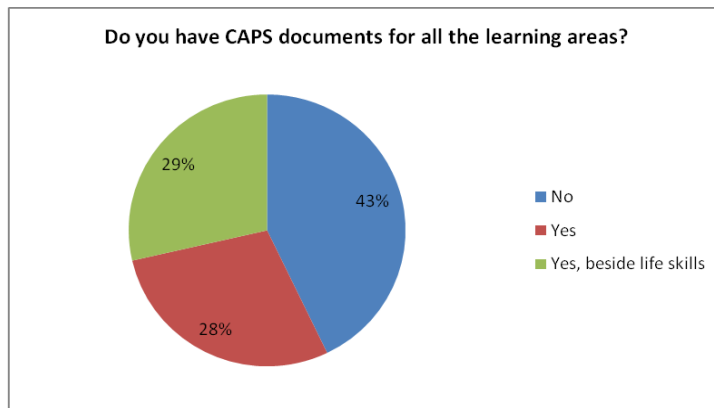
Figure 4.4   Do you have CAPS documents for all the learning areas you are teaching?

Figure 4.4 show that 43% of the respondents responded that they do not have CAPS documents for all the learning areas, while 28% responded that they have CAPS documents for all the learning areas. Nearly 30% of the respondents indicated that they have other CAPS documents besides the Life Skills documents.

4.3.2 Respondents' responses on, what other documents do you use for assessment of learners?
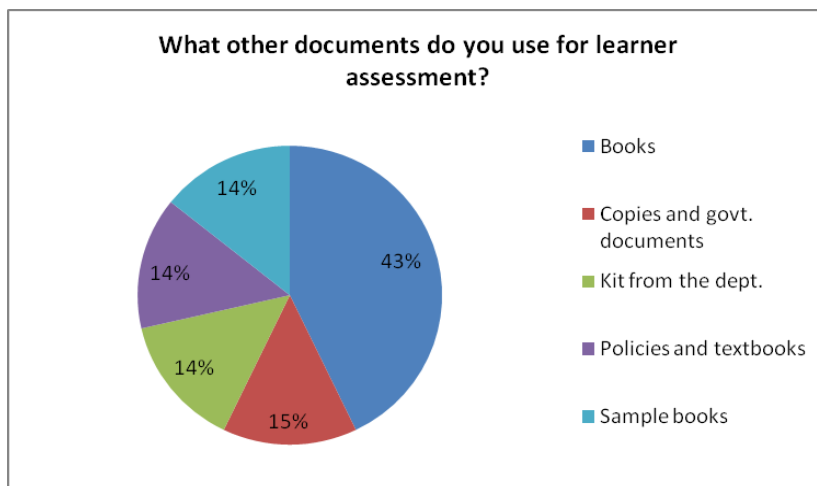
Figure 4.5   What other documents do you use for assessment of learners?

Figure 4.5 indicates that the majority of the respondents which makes 43% of the total number of respondents use books to supplement CAPS material, while 15% of the respondents use copies and government documents. Less than 15% of the respondents use sample books; another 14 % use policies

and textbooks and the last 14% use a kit from the Department of Basic Education.

4.3.3 Respondents' responses on, do you incorporate continuous assessment in lesson planning?
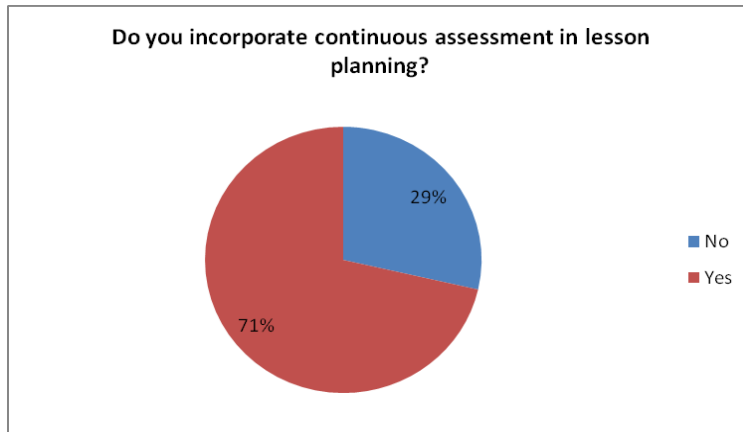
Figure 4.6 Do you incorporate continuous assessment in lesson planning?

Figure 4.6 indicates that 71% of the respondents incorporate continuous assessment in lesson planning while 29% of the respondents do not. Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning and it therefore needs to be planned. Assessment is a tool that is used to monitor the performance and the progress of learners (Simmons & Resnick, 1993). Van den Horst and McDonald (1997), indicate that continuous assessment should not be separated from daily teaching and learning but be a part of it.

4.3.4 Respondents' responses on, do you implement continuous assessment according to CAPS?
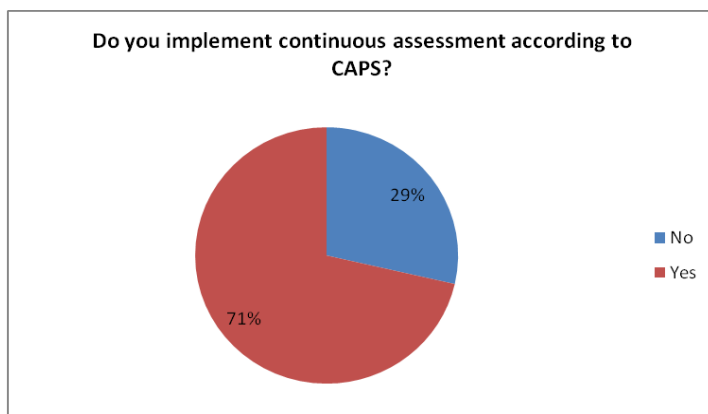
Figure 4.7   Do you implement continuous assessment according to CAPS?

Figure 4.7 shows that 71% of the respondents implement continuous assessment according to CAPS while 29% of the respondents do not.

4.3.5 Respondents' responses on, how do you find the implementation of continuous assessment?
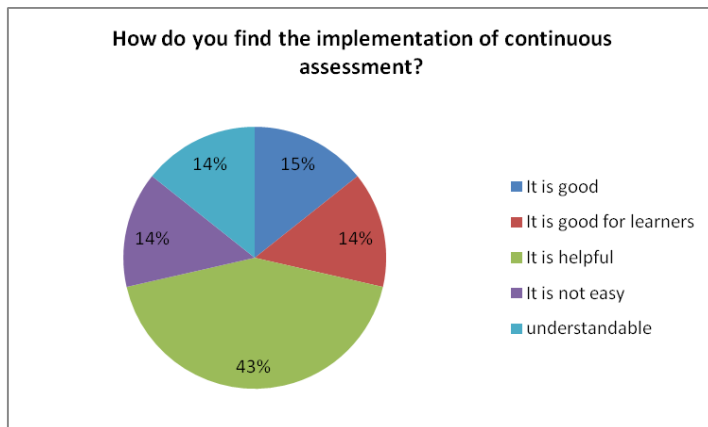
Figure 4.8 how do you find the implementation of continuous assessment?

Figure 4.8 indicates that most of the respondents approve of continuous assessment with 15% of the respondents indicating that the implementation of continuous assessment is good while 14% of the respondents indicate that continuous assessment is good for learners. Less than 50% of the respondents indicate that continuous assessment is helpful in the classroom situation. Another 14% of the respondents indicate that continuous assessment is understandable while the last 14% of the respondents indicate that continuous assessment is not easy to implement.

4.3.6 Respondents' responses on, to what extent does continuous assessment improve learner performance?
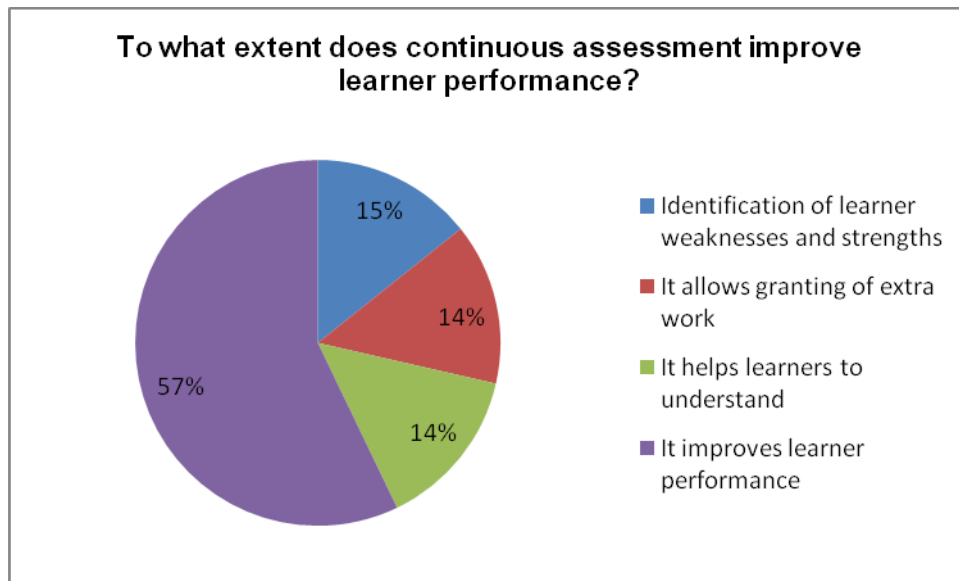
Figure 4.9 To what extent does continuous assessment improve learner performance?

Figure 4.9 shows that generally all the respondents agree that continuous assessment improves learner performance to some extent although they differ in the ways in which they see it improving the performance. Nearly 60% of the respondents indicate that continuous assessment improves learner performance. Less than 15% of the respondents indicate that continuous assessment allows them to grant the learners extra work because if they were assessing learners quarterly only, they would not notice the need to administer remedial work. Only 15% of the respondents indicate that continuous assessment helps them to identify weaknesses and strengths in the learners and provide ample opportunities to weaker learners to improve their performance. Another 14% indicate that this kind of assessment helps learners to comprehend the content easily.

4.3.7 Respondents' responses on, how do you find continuous assessment as compared to the old method of assessing learners?
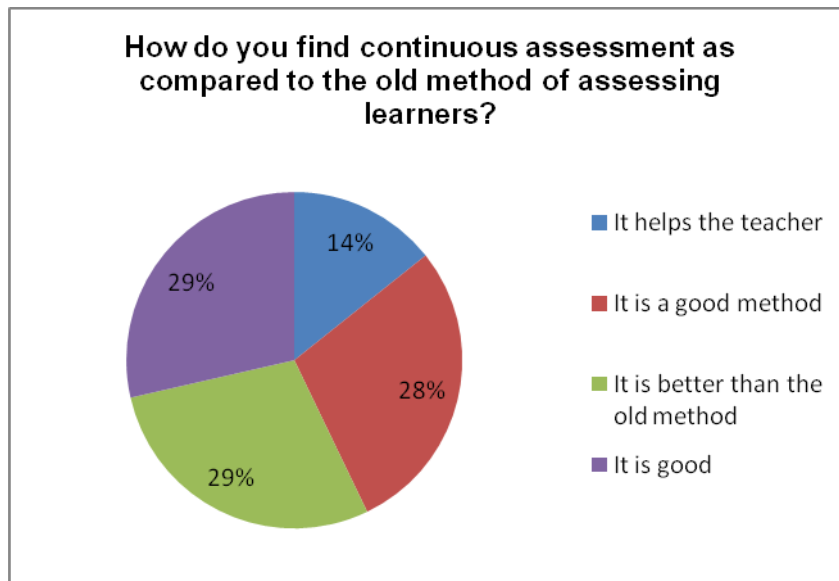
Figure 4.10 How do you find continuous assessment as compared to the old method of assessing learners?

Figure 4.10 shows that all the respondents indicate that continuous assessment is better than the old method of assessing learners. Nearly 30% of the respondents indicate that continuous assessment is better than the old method while 14% indicate that continuous assessment helps the educator to achieve the set outcomes. Another 29% indicate that it is a good method for assessing learners. Further more, 28% of the respondents indicate that it is better than the old method of assessing learners. In continuous assessment the educators use various assessment methods to assess learners on an ongoing basis. Learners are also assessed informally and this helps the slow learners to progress in their studies. Torrance (1995) states that continuous assessment considers a learner's cognitive ability, skills and attitudes.

4.3.8 Respondents' responses on, what kind of support do you get from the Department of Basic Education with regard to assessment of learners?
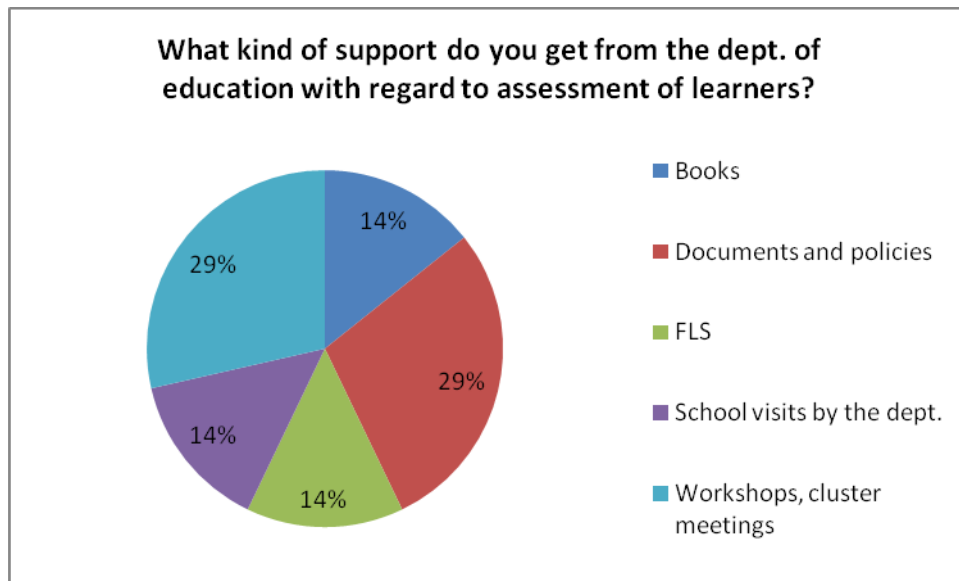
Figure 4.11 What kind of support do you get from the Department of Basic Education with regard to assessment of learners?

Figure 4.11 shows that the educators get support from the Department of Basic Education. 29% of the respondents indicate that the department of education provides documents and policies that guide the on how to implement continuous assessment. 14% of the respondents indicate that the Department of Basic Education and Training (DET) has introduced FLS which helps in the assessment of learners. Another 14% indicate that the departmental officials visit them at schools to offer support with regard to assessment. Furthermore, 29% indicate that the department is offering workshops and it has also introduced regular cluster meetings to help the educators to understand the assessment. The last 14% of the respondent indicate that the department provided books which guide them on the implementation of assessment.

4.3.9 Respondents' responses on, do you keep learner assessment records and how?
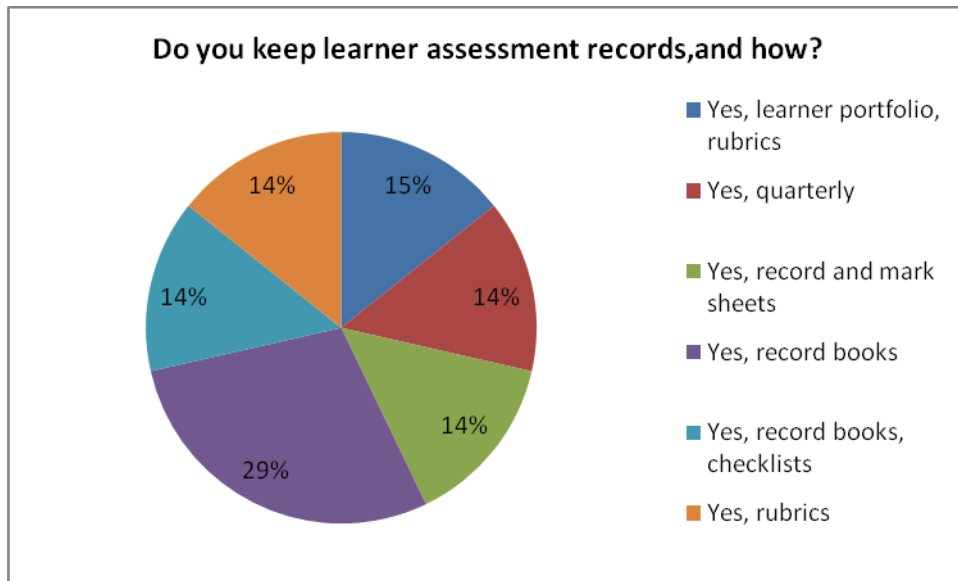
Figure 4.12 Do you keep learner assessment records and how?

Figure 4.12 shows that all the respondents keep learner assessment records. Less than 20% of the respondents indicate that they are using rubrics and learner portfolios to record assessment while 14% of the respondents indicate that they keep assessment records quarterly. However, another 14% of the respondents indicate that they use record sheets and mark sheets and 29% of the respondents indicate that they use record books. Less than 15% of the respondents indicate that they use record books and checklists. Another 14% of the respondents indicate that they use rubrics to keep assessment records

4.3.10 Respondents' responses on, did you attend assessment training?
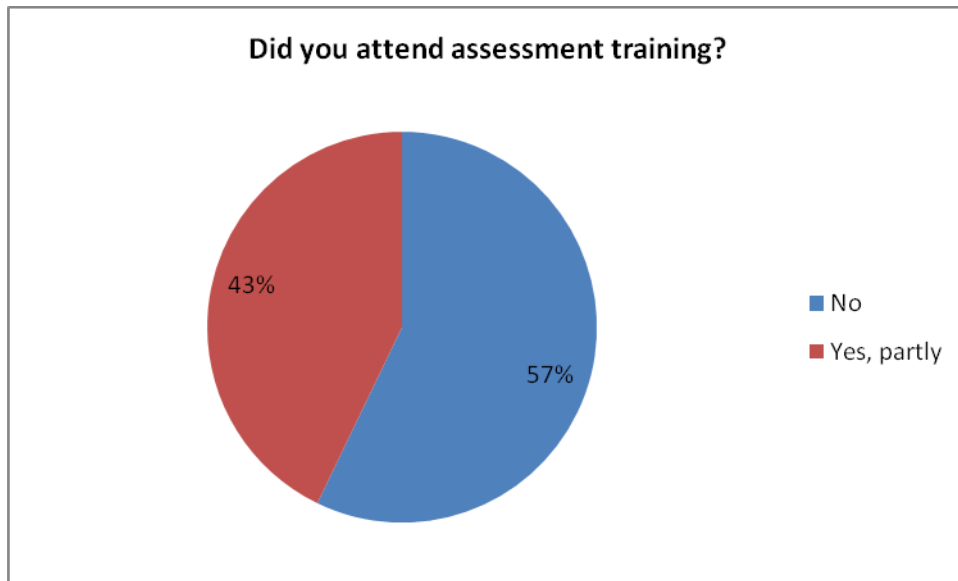
Figure 4.13 Did you attend assessment training?

Figure 4.13 shows that 57% of respondents attended assessment training partly. They attended Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) and National Curriculum Statement (NCS) workshops where assessment was done partly. They never attended adequate assessment training. Of all the respondents, 43% indicate that they never attended assessment training.

4.3.11 Respondents' responses on, did you find the training beneficial?
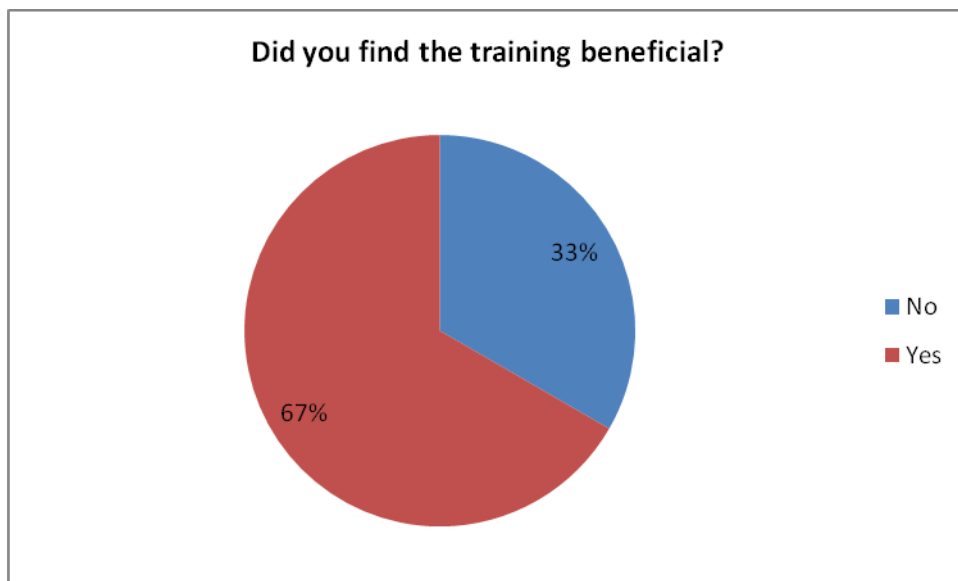
Figure 4.14 Did you find the training beneficial?

Figure 4.14 shows that 33% of the respondents found the training beneficial even thought it was not comprehensive. Sixty-seven percent of the respondents indicate that the training was not beneficial based on the fact that the facilitators instructed the educators to discuss in groups ways in which they can assess the learners. The facilitators didn't show them how learners are assessed continuously.

4.4 Observation carried out by the researcher in different classrooms

Item	Grades	Conducive	Not conducive	Being upgraded
1. Classroom condition	**School A**			
	Grade R	√		
	Grade 1	√		
	Grade 2	√		
	School B			
	Grade R	√		
	Grade 1	√		
	Grade 2	√		
	Grade 3	√		
	Grades	**1-20 learners**	**21-40 learners**	**41-60 learners**
2. Number of learners	**School A**			
	Grade R			√
	Grade 1			√
	Grade 2			√
	School B			

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	Grades			
	Grade R		√	
	Grade 1		√	
	Grade 2		√	
	Grade 3		√	

	Grades	Individually	In pairs	In groups
	School A			
	Grade R			√
	Grade 1			√
3. Seating arrangement	Grade 2			√
	School B			
	Grade R			√
	Grade 1			√
	Grade 2			√
	Grade 3			√
	Grades	**High**	**Medium**	**Low**
	School A			
	Grade R	√		
	Grade 1	√		
4. Level of learner participation	Grade 2	√		
	School B			
	Grade R	√		
	Grade 1	√		
	Grade 2	√		

5. Assessment methods used	Grade 3	√		
	Grades	**Oral**	**Practical/Writing**	**Observation**
	School A			
	Grade R	√		
	Grade 1	√		√
	Grade 2	√		√

	School B			
	Grade R	√		√
	Grade 1	√		√
	Grade 2		√	√
	Grade 3		√	√
	Grades	**Good**	**Better**	**Best**
	School A			
	Grade R			√
	Grade 1			√
6. Learner conduct	Grade 2			√
	School B			
	Grade R			√
	Grade 1			√
	Grade 2			√
	Grade 3			√
	Grades	**Verbal**	**Physical**	**No discipline**
	School A			

7. Discipline enforcement during lessons	Grade R	√		
	Grade 1	√		
	Grade 2	√		
	School B			
	Grade R	√		
	Grade 1	√		
	Grade 2	√		
	Grade 3	√		

	Grades	**Autocratic**	**Authoritative**	**Permissive**
	School A			
	Grade R	√		
	Grade 1	√		
8. Classroom management style	Grade 2	√		
	School B			
	Grade R	√		
	Grade 1	√		
	Grade 2	√		
	Grade 3	√		
	Grades	**Good**	**Better**	**Best**
	School A			
	Grade R			√
9. Handling of learners' questions and responses by the educator	Grade 1			√
	Grade 2			√
	School B			

	Grade R			√
	Grade 1			√
	Grade 2			√
	Grade 3			√

	Grade	**Reading/Writing**	**Oral work**	**Practical work**
10. Lesson conclusion	**School A**			
	Grade R		√	
	Grade 1			√
	Grade 2	√		
	School B			
	Grade R	√		
	Grade 1		√	
	Grade 2	√		
	Grade 3			√

Table 4.2   Classroom observation

4.5 Analysis of table 4.2 about observation carried out by the researcher in different classrooms.

4.5.1 Whether or not the classroom is conducive for teaching and learning or not

All the classrooms in both school A and B are conducive for learning. There are brick-walled classrooms which are also spacious to allow easy flow of teaching and learning activities. The classroom walls are talking to every person who enters the classrooms and the desks and tables have been

arranged in a way that allows for the easy flow of activities. The building in School A is very old but the educators managed to turn it into a good teaching and learning environment.

4.5.2 The number of learners in a classroom

Three classrooms have 21-40 learners while four classrooms have 41-60 learners. Grade R to Grade 2 in School A have more learners than the same grades in School B. Only Grade 3 in School B has a class enrolment of 41-60.

4.5.3 How the learners are seated

In all the seven classrooms the learners are seated in groups although the sizes of the group differ depending on the total number of learners per classroom. The learners are moved from one group to another depending on the activity that is being carried out at the moment. When the researcher arrived in Grade R of School B, 9 learners were seated in a group on the carpet while the rest of the learners were seated on their desks in groups. The educator explained that the learners on the carpet were doing a different activity from the rest of the group. The educator explained that the learners are grouped by the educator depending on the subject matter to be imparted but sometimes the learners are allowed to group themselves.

4.5.4 The level of learner participation during teaching and learning

In all the grades in both schools learner participation was high. The learners listened attentively to the educator and when asked questions they responded irrespective of whether the answer was right or wrong. Sometimes the educators will direct the question to the learner who is not raising a hand and the learner will respond in a positive way. Learners become aware of their weaknesses and strengths when they are assessed on a continuous basis and then become motivated to participate actively in learning in order to improve their performances.

4.5.5 Assessment methods used

In all the grades that the researcher observed, the educators use observation, practical, writing and oral work as methods of assessment. The kind of method which the educator uses for assessment depends on the outcomes that the educator wants to achieve at the end. In Grade R in both schools the learners were assessed orally because at the beginning of the year they cannot start writing.

4.5.6 Learner conduct during lessons

The learners displayed their best behaviour during the lessons. They cooperated with the educators and they participated fully during the lessons.

4.5.7 How does the educator enforce discipline during lessons?

All educators called learners to order verbally. There was no single instance where the educator disciplined the learner physically hence the abolishment of corporal punishment in the schools.

4.5.8 Educator's classroom management style

The educators use different management style but during the visit by the researcher all educators were using authoritative management style. In Grade R of School B the educator was using diagnostic style to get pre-knowledge a learner already has. The educators can apply different methods in one lesson depending on that lesson.

4.5.9 How does the educator handle learners' questions and responses?

All the educators that were observed by the researcher in the classrooms responded to learners' questions in a fair way. The educators were tactful in responding to the questions by the learners. No single educator ignored a question from the learner irrespective of the content of the question. The

learners' responses were handled well. In Grade 2 of School B, one learner gave the wrong answer and the educators corrected the learner without making the learner feel bad about the wrong answer.

4.5.10 How does the educator conclude the lesson in relation to continuous assessment?

The educators conclude the lessons differently depending on what they want to achieve. On the day of observation, two educators ended their lessons by giving the learners work to write in their workbooks and one educator requested that the learners read individually to assess their reading. In two classrooms the educators asked learners some questions about the subject matter to assess their understanding of the matter. Two educators gave the learners practical work to do and they assessed the work.

4.6 Document analysis

Item	Grades	√/x	Comment
	School A		
	Grade R	√	The educator has not yet attended CAPS training.
	Grade 1	√	
	Grade 2	√	
1. Whether or not assessment is being done according to CAPS.	**School B**		
	Grade R	x	The educator has not yet attended CAPS training.
	Grade 1	√	
	Grade 2	x	
	Grade 3	√	
	Grades	**√/x**	**Comment**

	School A		
	Grade R	√	
	Grade 1	√	
2. Whether or not formal assessment tasks speak to content area, topic and criteria.	Grade 2	√	
	School B		
	Grade R	**x**	
	Grade 1	**x**	
	Grade 2	**x**	
	Grade 3	√	

Item	Grades	√/x	Comment
	School A		
	Grade R	√	
	Grade 1	√	
3. Whether or not continuous assessment has been incorporated in lesson planning.	Grade 2	√	
	School B		
	Grade R	**x**	
	Grade 1	**x**	
	Grade 2	**x**	
	Grade 3	√	
	Grades	**√/x**	**Comment**
	School A		
	Grade R	√	

	Grade 1	√	
4. Whether or not there is evidence of assessing learners on a continuous basis.	Grade 2	√	
	School B		
	Grade R	√	
	Grade 1	√	
	Grade 2	**x**	
	Grade 3	√	

4.6.1 Table 4.3: Document analysis

4.6.1 Analysis of table 4.3 about documents analysed by the researcher

4.6.1.1 Whether or not continuous assessment is being done according to CAPS

The researcher analysed lesson planning and assessment records in all the grades that the researcher visited. The Grade R educators in both schools have not yet attended CAPS training but the Grade R educator in School A is assessing the learners according to CAPS while the Grade R educator in School B is not assessing the learners according to CAPS. The above statement proves that there is no uniformity in Grade R classes of the same circuit. The assessment of learners according to CAPS while the educator has not undergone training raises questions with regard to the quality of assessment being carried out. The Grade 2 educators in both schools have undergone CAPS training but the educator in School A assesses the learners the CAPS way while the educator in School B does not. There is no uniformity in the Foundation Phase in School B because the Grade 1 and 3 educators assess learners the CAPS way while the Grade R and 2 educators do not assess the learners according to CAPS.

4.6.1.2 Whether or not formal assessment tasks speak to content area, topic and criteria

In all the grades in School A the formal assessment tasks speak to content area, topic and criteria while in School B same happens in Grade 3 only. In Grades R TO 3 in School B, the formal assessment tasks do not speak to content area, topic and criteria. There is lack of uniformity with the compilation of assessment tasks in the schools under the same circuit and within School B alone.

4.6.1.3 Whether or not continuous assessment has been incorporated in lesson planning

The educators in all Grades R to 3 in School A incorporate continuous assessment in lesson planning while in School B it is only in Grade 3 where continuous assessment is incorporated in lesson planning. In Grades R to 2 there is no incorporation of continuous assessment in lesson planning.

4.6.1.4 Whether or not there is evidence of assessing learners on a continuous basis

Learners are assessed on a continuous basis in all the grades in School A. However, in School B there is evidence of continuous assessment of learners in Grades R, 1 and 3 except in Grade 2.

4.7 Conclusion

The results reveal that the implementation of continuous assessment by educators in the Foundation Phase is a serious challenge that needs to be addressed. The study reveals some degree of inconsistency among educators in learner assessment. The next chapter focuses on a full discussion of the results, and they are linked to the literature review, while addressing the questions and objectives of the study.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the findings of the study and it is linked to the findings of other researchers as discussed in the literature review. The discussion in this chapter follows a sequence of the interviews that were carried out, observation that was done by the researcher in the classrooms and document analysis.

5.2 Findings of the study

This study investigated two questions which are as follows: What are the challenges facing Foundation Phase educators in implementing continuous assessment, and furthermore, how could these challenges be overcome?

It was revealed in the study that the majority of educators in the Foundation Phase are females with a large number of educators having a teaching experience of 16 years and above. The grades which were in the study that was carried out are Grade R, Grade 1, Grade 2 and Grade 3. It is a fact that younger children see a female educator as a mother figure and these female educators are patient enough to handle younger children.

Furthermore, the study reveals that 43% of educators do not have CAPS documents with 29% indicating that they have other CAPS documents except the Life Skills document. These documents are to be read and implemented by educators in their classrooms since they do not get appropriate training every time a new curriculum is introduced in the department. The educators have indicated that they have to find out from CAPS documents how continuous assessment has to be done because the workshop by the department does not offer much. The workshop is usually run in few days and that leaves large parts of the documents uncovered. The educators need these documents in order for them to assess the learners the right way. Effective assessment requires adequate resources and educators who are grounded in assessment mechanisms.

Figure 4.5 indicates that different educators improvise for the lack of CAPS documents and use different materials they lay their hands on like the sample books from the publishers and other documents that they receive from the department. The department provided a kit that should be used in Grade R and included in the kit is the lesson plans and assessment guidelines. Some of the educators read books to expand their understanding of continuous assessment. In both School A and B the educators do not have documents like the National Protocol for Assessments, Grade R-12 (2012) and others, which should be read in conjunction with CAPS documents for proper implementation of continuous assessment.

According to figure 4.6, 71%, a large number of educators include assessment in their planning while 29% do not. Assessment should form an integral part of planning according to CAPS, Maths document, Grade R-3 (2011). The learners need to be assessed on an ongoing, planned way. Educators will in no way get continuous assessment right if assessment is not included in lesson planning.

The majority of educators in figure 4.7 indicate that they implement continuous assessment according to CAPS while 29% indicate that they do not follow CAPS when assessing learners. Some of the educators have indicated that they have not yet attended CAPS training and therefore they cannot attempt to assess the learners the CAPS way. In School B, a female Grade R educator has indicated that she assesses the learners on a continuous basis not according to CAPS but according to the kit that was provided by the department. The educator explained that they do not assess the learners on a daily basis but when they finish each of the topics that are given as part of the kit.

The majority of educators approve of continuous assessment in figure 4.8 in that it helps in improving the performance of learners who lag behind. The educators get to notice the learners' strengths and weaknesses and work on them. Some of the educators indicate that continuous assessment is easy to understand while some indicate that they find it difficult to understand

because they were never properly trained for it, yet they are compelled to implement it.

A large number of educators in figure 4.9 indicate that continuous assessment helps in improving learners' performance because the learner is assessed holistically. If a learner does not understand the subject matter the educator will pay individual attention to that learner and use different methods of assessment and grant extra work until the learner grasps the subject matter.

All the respondents indicate that continuous assessment is better than the old method of assessing learners because previously the learners were assessed once per term in tests only and that is not a true reflection of the learner's performance. With continuous assessment the educator is able to track and monitor the learner's performance throughout the term.

The responses by respondents in figure 4.11 indicate that the department is not giving the educators enough support with regard to the implementation of the new curriculum which compels educators to assess the learners on a continuous basis. Continuous assessment was introduced in schools long before the introduction of CAPS but even today the educators cannot implement it the right way. This questions the inclusion of training in the planning of the new curriculum by the national department. The respondents indicate that the department provides policies, books and other documents but they do not say anything about the departmental officials taking them through those documents. Some of the respondents indicate that they are having cluster meetings which the researcher questions their value because the schools in the same cluster are not assessing the learners in a uniform way. It is further indicated that the department offer support by visiting the schools but yet the visits yields no improvement in mastering assessment.

According to figure 4.12 all the respondents are keeping learner assessment records but in different documents. In School A there is no uniformity in the Foundation Phase with regard to record keeping because one educator keeps the assessment records on a record sheet while another educator uses a

rubric for same. Same applies in School B where three respondents are using record books while one respondent uses portfolio files. The way the learners are assessed in Foundation Phase contributes to the quality of education at national level.

The responses in figure 4.13 indicate that the respondents never attended assessment training. Those who indicate that they attended assessment training partly explained that they were given the basics about assessment when they were attending curriculum workshops like the RNCS, NCS and CAPS workshop. This kind of workshops will run for three to five days the longest and then the educators will be told to go and implement and read the issued policies for better understanding and implementation. In workshops where assessment was summarised the respondents indicate that the training was not beneficial (figure 4.14) because the facilitators give nothing new even though the curriculum is new. The facilitators seem to some of the respondents not to be sure of what they are to impart because they actually request the educators to explain how they for example assess the learners continuously and then discuss the given suggestions without being firm about their correctness and wrongness. The educators many times get out of the workshops without having gained anything of value to the learners.

5.3 Conclusion

Different researchers have revealed that the implementation of continuous assessment is a challenge. The study affirms that the Foundation Phase educators are experiencing a number of challenges with regard to the implementation of continuous assessment. The following chapter focuses on the conclusions and recommendations that can help the Department of Basic Education and the conclusion of the entire study.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the conclusions and recommendations of the study. It furthermore justifies the findings of the study in line with the literature review.

6.2 Statement of findings

The study reveals that the Foundation Phase educators are encountering challenges in the implementation of continuous assessment as revealed in figure 4.1 to 4.14 and table 4.3.

6.3 Conclusions

The study reveals that continuous assessment is not being implemented properly by the educators in the foundation phase. It emerged from the study that the educators never received adequate training in assessment. The study further reveals that there is no uniformity within the Foundation Phase of individual schools and also in the schools that are under the same circuit with regard to assessment of learners due to lack of adequate training. In School B there is no evidence of implementation of continuous assessment in Grade 2 while there is evidence of implementation of same in Grades R, 1 and 3. This then reveals that there is no proper monitoring and moderation by the head of departments in different schools and the Department of Basic Education.

In their school visits the departmental officials would have picked up that educators in the same school and same phase are not assessing the learners in a uniform way and then provide the support needed. The fact that the educators attended three to five days workshops without understanding how they should go about assessment proves that the facilitators themselves did not undergo adequate training yet they go and workshop the educators on something they do not understand themselves. The bug then is stuck with the national department because it seems that proper planning about training of officials in the provincial offices was not done.

Continuous assessment does not start now with CAPS, it was introduced many years back when Outcome Based Education (OBE) was introduced but even now the educators do not understand how to go about it, yet they have been to few workshops. The study revealed that the Department of Basic Education failed to provide the educators with the curriculum policies, books and other resources that will guide them in the implementation of the new curriculum since there is no proper training, hence the textbook saga in Limpopo province. It has also been revealed in the study that the educators do not include assessment in lesson planning meaning that the educators assess the learners randomly. According to the study, educators who implement continuous assessment are the ones to read the policies for guidance while some of the educators do not bother reading the curriculum policies and implement by them. A large number of learners in a classroom is another factor that contributes negatively to the quality of education at national level.

6.4 Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings and conclusions of the study.

- It emerged from the findings that Foundation Phase educators need adequate training for the successful implementation of continuous assessment. Educators need to be equipped with the necessary skills to manage continuous assessment.
- The Department of Basic Education needs to review its planning because the study reveals that it did not succeed in cascading training to the grass-root level on the implementation of continuous assessment.
- Assessment needs to be integrated in lesson planning.
- The Department of Basic Education needs to supply schools with curriculum policies, books and other required resources that will enable effective teaching and learning and successful implementation of continuous assessment.

- There should be the same way of assessing learners on a continuous basis within the same school and in schools under the same circuit.

- Schools should have internal workshops and invite experts for support.

- Educators should undergo ongoing in-service support programmes to have clear understanding of continuous assessment.

- The Department of Basic Education has to give schools regular support and also do monitoring. In the absence of support the educators can be demotivated and not accept change in curriculum positively.

- Institutions that train educators must include a module on continuous assessment.

- Experts should be available for educators to consult when they need help with regard to continuous assessment.

6.5 Conclusion

The study reveals that the challenges that the educators are experiencing in the implementation of continuous assessment are as a result of lack of adequate training by the department and lack of required policies. The department can resolve these challenges by providing adequate training to the departmental officials and the educators and also by providing the necessary policies that will guide the educators with the implementation of continuous assessment.

6.6 Further research

The effective implementation of continuous assessment requires the involvement of all stakeholders including the national Department of Basic Education. The educators are battling with the transition from the old method of assessing learners to the new method of assessing learners on a continuous basis. Further studies on various aspects of continuous assessment could be conducted to improve the state of education in our country.

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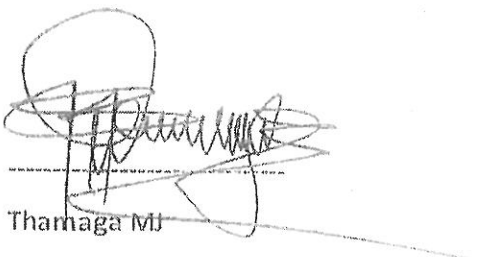
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APPENDIX A

Enquiries: Dr. Makola MC, Te. No: 015 290 94 13. E-mail: MakolaMC @edu.limpopo.gov.za.

RE: Request for permission to Conduct Research

1. The above bears reference.

2. The Department wishes to inform you that your request to conduct a research has been approved. Title: CHALLENGES FACED BY FOUNDATION PHASE EDUCATORS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT. i.e. Petersburg Circuit .

3. The following conditions should be considered

   3.1 The research should not have any financial implications for Limpopo Department of Education.

   3.2 Arrangements should be made with both the Circuit Offices and the schools concerned.

   3.3 The conduct of research should not anyhow disrupt the academic programs at the schools.

   3.4 The research should not be conducted during the time of Examinations especially the forth term.

   3.5 During the study, the research ethics should be practiced, in particular the principle of voluntary participation (the people involved should be respected).

   3.6 Upon completion of research study, the researcher shall share the final product of the research with the Department.

4. Furthermore, you are expected to produce this letter at Schools/ Offices where you intend conducting your research as an evidence that you are permitted to conduct the research.

5. The department appreciates the contribution that you wish to make and wishes you success in your investigation.

Best wishes.

Thamaga MJ

Head of Department

2012/12/13

Date

Semi-structured interview schedule

Educator profile

Grade taught by teacher	R	1	2	3
Gender	Male		Female	
Teaching experience				

Implementation of continuous assessment

1. Do you have CAPS documents for all the Learning Areas you are teaching?

2. What other documents do you use for assessment of learners?

3. Do you incorporate continuous assessment in lesson planning?

4. Do you implement continuous assessment in your classroom according to CAPS?

5. How do you find the implementation of continuous assessment?

6. To what extend does continuous assessment improve learner performance?

7. How do you find continuous assessment as compared to the old method of assessing learners?

8. What kind of support do you get from the Department of Education with regard to assessment of learners?

9. Do you keep learner assessment records and how?

10. Did you attend assessment training, and if so what was the duration of the training?

11. Did you find the training beneficial? Give a reason.

APPENDIX C

Observation

The following will be observed

1. Whether or not the classroom is conducive for learning.
2. The number of learners in a classroom.
3. How the learners are seated.
4. The level of learner participation during teaching and learning.
5. Assessment methods used.
6. Learner conduct during lessons.
7. How does the educator enforce discipline during lessons?
8. Educator's classroom management style.
9. How does the educator handle learners' questions and responses?
10. How does the educator conclude the lessons in relation to continuous assessment?

Document analysis

In the documents the following will be checked.

	√/x	Comment
Whether or not assessment is being done according to CAPS.		
Whether or not formal assessment tasks speak to content area, topic and criteria.		
Whether or not continuous assessment has been incorporated in lesson planning.		
Whether or not there is evidence of assessing learners on a continuous basis.		