# AN INVESTIGATION OF TEACHERS' ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AT ZENON HIGH SCHOOL IN LESOTHO.

# THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION

BY

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# DECLARATION

I declare that "An Investigation of Teachers' Assessment Practices at Zenon High School in Lesotho" is my own work and that all the sources used have been acknowledged by means of references.

Signed

Date

This Dissertation is submitted with/without my approval

Signed

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# DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my father who, though he was not educated he was determined to educate his children. I do believe that there in heaven where he is, he is so happy to see his daughter achieving her goal.

U sebelitse phoka, robala ka khotso.

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To my mother, brothers and sisters I say thank you for your endless support, more especially that time when I was in the midst of frustration and wanted to give up, you used to encourage me by saying, "you will make it, pray to our heavenly father to help you."

I wish to communicate my appreciation to library staff, especially inter-loan section for making it possible for me to access those sources of information like books which were not available at UKZN libraries.

# ABSTRACT

The literature has shown that the traditional way of assessment which is paper-pencil tests and/or examinations has always been the most dominant and trusted form of assessment. This study investigated assessment practices of Zenon high school teachers in Lesotho. Assessment practices investigated by this study are of teachers from all subjects taught at the above-mentioned school. The study has been based on formative and summative assessment concepts. To answer one overarching research question, a case study approach has been used. Questionnaires were administered to 28 teachers in one school. Teachers' assessment documents and learners' exercise books were analyzed. The data collected were analyzed by means of tables and graphs. The findings from 14 teachers revealed that teachers use various assessment techniques to assess learners, but the most dominant form of assessment employed by teachers in all nine subjects is traditional paper-pencil tests/examinations. Teachers use traditional tests/examinations because they are convinced that it is the best way through which they can discover how learners have acquired what they have been taught. Alternative assessments or assessment techniques that require time to complete like practical projects etc are rarely used by teachers.

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# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.0 Background to the Study

Prior 1915, Galton studied human behaviour and discovered that humans differ not only in physical features, but also in the ways in which they find answers to intellectual problems and their emotional response to life. It is this understanding that led him into designing tests that reflected individual differences and he also developed numerical procedures to explain those tests. In other words, Galton developed methods through which people were tested, measured and evaluated. Roughly, from 1915 to 1930, a great number of testing tools were invented to test everything from fundamental skills to content knowledge and intelligence (Bertrand & Cebula, 1980). It is not surprising, therefore, that since 1980 testing has been the most dominating mode or form of assessment. This claim has been verified in the literature.

In one survey conducted in Yorkshire by Sumner (1985) on the methods that were used in middle and secondary schools for assessing pupils aged 11 to 14, end of year written examinations appeared to be the most dominating form of assessment employed for assessing the learners. The second most essential form of assessment from the point of view of class teachers was continuous assessment. The survey further revealed that the practice of continuous assessment was based on objective-type of tests as well as diagnostic tests. The results from a case study by Kahn (2000), conducted at Conant high school (Canada) to assess students learning and instructional effectiveness, showed that traditional approaches to testing (tests, quiz) were predominantly employed. The same results were reported in a survey conducted by Lubisi (2000) on South African lower secondary mathematics teachers' perceptions and their classroom practices and also in the survey conducted by Ndalichako (2004) on assessment practices of primary school science teachers in Tanzania.

Most African countries which were once British colonies seem to have adopted a system of educational assessment similar to that of their colonial master. Lesotho is no exception, as it was once a British colony. It has used this system since its colonial

days. Kelleghan (1990 cited in Broadfoot et al., 1990: 100) has expressed similar views in this regard as systems in countries which were once British colonies

> [were] heavily influenced by traditional British examination procedures…[their] examinations were formal, terminal, subject-based and external to the school, being administered by either the ministry of Education or an Examination Council closely related to the ministry. In the examinations, the emphasis was on written work rather than on the assessment of practical, oral or coursework.

This educational assessment history in Lesotho has been described by Sebatane (1985:269-277) in his article "Perspectives of Educational Assessment in Lesotho." Sebatane started by giving the formal education structure in Lesotho. He pointed out that primary education follows a seven-year cycle and at the end of the seventh year, learners sit for final examination, which opens the doors for them into secondary education. Secondary education runs for three years and at the end of this junior cycle of secondary education (Form C), an examination is given. It is in this phase that a learner is awarded a junior certificate (JC) after passing an examination. The examination given in this phase takes the learner into a high school. High schooling (Form E or matric) takes two years to complete and at the end of second year of this cycle, the learner sits for Cambridge Overseas examination, after which the learner is awarded a Cambridge Overseas School Certificates (COSC). Sebatane has been supported by Kelleghan (1990 cited in Broadfoot et al., 1990), who stated that external examinations in Lesotho are conducted at the end of primary schooling, secondary schooling and high schooling.

Sebatane went further to show that primary the curriculum is developed by the ministry of education through National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC). As for the secondary curriculum, it is developed by subject panels in collaboration with Examinations Council of Lesotho (ECOL), which is a para-state body responsible for the running of public examinations. It is worth noting that subject panels comprise educators who are specialists in their own areas, but not necessarily in educational assessment. The high school/senior education curriculum is designed by the Cambridge Examination Syndicate and its examination is administered in Britain under the auspices of ECOL. However, the marking of Form E (COSC) is now done in Lesotho and this has been the case since 1987. This has been confirmed by

Kelleghan (1990 cited in Broadfoot et al., 1990) as well as the Ministry of Education and Training (2005), which further indicated that preparations for the localisation of all school curricular and examinations, especially the one for senior education (COSC) has started. As a way of speeding up this process of localisation, an agreement has been reached between ECOL and the Scottish Qualification Authority that ECOL staff will get training, have regular visits and be supported towards developing a reliable assessment that will improve the quality of teaching and learning unlike the one in practice.

Examinations in these phases of schooling are used for selection and certification purposes (Sebatane, 1985; Ministry of Education and Training, 2005). In addition, the Ministry went further to demonstrate that end-of-year examinations are used for all internal standard grades for promotion purposes. These Junior Certificate (JC) examinations have been strongly criticised in the Task Force Report (1982 cited in Sebatane, 1985) for not relating to crucial curriculum objectives and also that grading of learners/candidates entails standardisation of marks (Ralise, 1983 cited in Sebatane, 1985). They are further criticised for failing to show the competences of learners (Sebatane, 1985). The Task Force Report (1982 cited in Sebatane, 1985:127) went a step further to criticise ECOL for not providing schools with "feedback on how [teachers] might help pupils to improve performances." Grading by an examination system makes it hard to have productive feedback as the marks do not show the degree of competence on the part of the learner; instead they reflect how the learner has performed in comparison with others. Moreover, examiners' reports are always too sketchy to provide necessary feedback to both teachers and learners (Sebatane, 1985).

Standardisation of examination marks is practiced for both primary and secondary education. According to Sebatane (1985:27) "The marking and reporting of examinations at both pr imary school (PS) and JC are based on norm-referenced measures." He continued to point out that marks are converted into standard scores; the performance of a candidate in every subject is determined by how other candidates have performed. Sebatane also criticised this way of assessment on the grounds that it gives a false picture of the learner's competence. Furthermore, as examinations level keeps on changing annually, this means the candidates who got

first class (class1) in one year might be more or less competent than those of another year. Somerset (1982 cited in Sebatane, 1985) condemned the use of standard scores on account that they fail to reflect candidates' achievement of certain skills, their levels of attainment in specific subjects and again they are misleading in the sense that they are higher than the actual/raw marks. Somerset (1982 cited in Sebatane, 1985:273) summarised his argument by saying,

> Standard scores are essential when the results from different papers must be combined to give an overall total, and they are useful for comparing the relative performance of a candidate or group of candidates from subject to subject or from year to year. But for planning and evaluation purposes standard scores are quite inadequate.

The Task Force Report (1982 cited in Sebatane, 1985:274) too criticised the use of standard scores in these words:

> Perhaps the most important observation concerns the method of grading the papers. It is an inappropriate technology which has at once disguised actual performance and contributed to the decline of education quality. The public believes that the grades of PSLE (primary school leaving examinations) are awarded for standards of actual competence; that they indicate whether pupils can add and divide, spell, reason, organize information and express themselves. The public does not know that in fact the grades are derived from "normalization" of the pupils' actual scores. The pupils are not measured against specific competences, but against each other....

Some kind of continuous assessment has been practised in Lesotho primary and secondary schools. It is usually done in the form of quarterly tests. Nonetheless, it has never been evenly applied so that comparison can be made across schools. It is worth noting that the test results for continuous assessment (CA) are not utilised for making promotions, certification or even for instructional remedial purposes. External or end-of-year examinations are only the ones that are meant for promotions and certification (Sebatane, 1985). According to Sebatane (1985), continuous assessment was formally and legally introduced in 1980. This form of assessment was introduced to replace automatic promotion system which had been in use officially in 1970s. This automatic promotion system was legally removed due to public protest against it (Sebatane & Baholo, 1980 cited in Sebatane, 1985). The main complaint levelled

against it was that teachers were no longer doing their duty of teaching with the intention of pushing on learners into the next grade (Sebatane, 1985).

Sebatane continued this argument of CA by giving out some of the reasons that contributed to the failure of CA in Lesotho. He asserted that initially, the system was never correctly planned; it was introduced haphazardly; the concept continuous assessment was never explained to the implementers. There was no monitoring, control measures and benchmark implementation for the system. Inspectors, managers and head teachers were never orientated on the usage of correct assessment techniques. There was no standard layout for keeping accumulated records of learners' performance.

Guiding principles in the implementation of CA, according to Sebatane & Baholo (1980 cited in Sebatane, 1985), are: decisions ought to be made on the number of times the assessment can be conducted; the degree of centralisation of the system need to be determined; decisions has to be made whether the system can be used to assess non-cognitive areas too and finally, the ratio of continuous assessment to that of the final examination have to be specified in the syllabi and also in the form of marks. All the above issues were/are not taken into consideration in the implementation of CA in Lesotho (Sebatane, 1985). Sebatane's concluding remark regarding this form of assessment was that Lesotho must be given a credit for making CA compulsory for both primary and secondary schools and what remains be to done is only to develop suitable logistics for implementation.

## 1.1 Context of the School

Zenon high school is a Catholic grant- aided school founded in 1979, the proprietor of the school is the Roman Catholic Church but its teachers are paid by Lesotho government through Teaching Service Department (TSD). The school is located at Sefikeng in the Berea District (Lesotho). It is made up of mixed sex learners and teachers. For three years the school had been operating as a secondary school until 1982 when it became a high school. When it was still a secondary school, it offered a few subjects at junior level, because teachers were few as were the learners. The

school now has grown, with 28 qualified teachers and 780 learners on the role. The learner-teacher ratio is currently 60:1.

Now the school is offering several subjects at both secondary (from grade 8-10) and high school (from 11-12) levels. Subjects that are offered at secondary level are: English language and literature combined, Mathematics, Sesotho, Agriculture, Science, Business Education, Religious Education and Computer literacy although it is a non-examinable subject. The ones offered at high school level are: English language, Mathematics, Principles of Accounts, Sesotho, Agriculture, Geography and Physical Science which is Physics combined with Chemistry, Religious Education and Biology. Just like in any other school in Lesotho assessment here is done internally at classroom level and externally by Examination Council of Lesotho (ECOL).

## 1.2 Statement of the Purpose

In the light of what has been said in the literature about educational assessment in Lesotho, it can be concluded that Lesotho teachers rely heavily on traditional methods of assessment such as formal standard tests and examinations. External or end-of-year examinations and high stakes tests (traditional assessment) seem to be the most trusted form of assessment employed for making promotions, selection and certification, as it has been indicated. In other words, the kind of assessment practised in Lesotho serves an administrative purpose and as a result, the professional purpose of assessment, which is that of giving feedback on instruction and learning is suffering. Even continuous assessment that Sebatane (1985) is claiming to be compulsory and official seems to be unsuccessful and it has been applied unevenly, as we have seen,

> there is no evidence to suggest that continuous assessment is being practiced any differently from the unsatisfactory, conventional way [and] it has never been uniformly applied so that one could make comparisons among teachers of the same subjects within or across schools (Sebatane, 1985: 274-275).

Most studies conducted on assessment practices at international level were limited because they were conducted in countries other than Lesotho, (i.e. Yorkshire; Canada;

Tanzania and South Africa). Those studies were huge surveys, while mine is a case study. Assessment practices reported in their studies were done from primary to secondary school levels, whereas the ones investigated by this study are of both secondary and high school levels. None of those studies investigated assessment in all subjects; for example, one investigated assessment practices in English; the other one investigated mathematics and the last one investigated science in primary schools.

Even those studies conducted in Lesotho are limited in the sense that although Sebatane has researched on, and reported, assessment status in Lesotho, this study is worth doing because Sebatane's study was conducted 21 years ago, and there may be some sort of transformation in assessment practices or system. Moreover, Sebatane was looking at assessment in a national level and in all three external streams, (i.e. Standard/grade 7, Form C and E while my study focuses on how assessment is done in one high school from Form A-E). My study seeks to find out whether this school is experiencing traditional assessment or whether there are some signs of changing into new ways of assessment like continuous assessment, coursework and performance/authentic assessment.

It is also worth noting that by the time Sebatane's study was done, Lesotho was already under a certain regime which had its own way of managing and organising education system, but now it has a new government with its new educational policies which are different from the old ones. Kelleghan (1990 cited in Broadfoot, 1990), in his article "Examination Systems in Africa," reported on how examinations were carried out in five African countries that happened to be British colonies. He is brief when reporting about assessment practices in Lesotho. Furthermore, his article focused on reporting about only examination form of assessment. This study is worth doing even after the one by Moseme (2004) because Moseme's study is limited in the sense that assessment practices that were investigated and reported by her study were those of the subject called 'Principles of Accounts' only, while mine is investigating assessment practices in nine subjects including 'Principles of Accounts.' Although she conducted her study in three high schools in Maseru, her sample was small, as she interviewed only six teachers, whereas mine collected data from fourteen teachers.

## 1.3 Purpose of the Study

The problem is clear from the literature that the most favoured and employed form of assessment is end-of-year examination or high stakes tests (traditional assessment) in most countries, including Lesotho for the reasons that have been given in the literature. As a result, continuous and performance assessments (new assessment/constructivist assessment) are neglected. This study, therefore, investigates assessment practices of Zenon high school teachers in Lesotho. More specifically, the study seeks information on the ways in which assessment is carried out by teachers in all subjects.

## 1.4 Research Question

This study is guided by and/or addresses one overarching question:
How do Zenon high school teachers assess across the curriculum?

## 1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is conducted with an intention to contribute to the construction of an understanding of how teachers at Zenon high school conduct assessment. It is therefore hoped that the study will sensitise the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) about how teachers assess so as to provide guidelines on how assessment ought to be conducted internal or at school level and to re-introduce continuous assessment, this time with the full responsibility of monitoring and even making it successful. On the other hand, the results of the study will inform teachers about their reflections on their practices, and hence improve their ways of assessment.

## 1.6 Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Assessment performs two main functions: it informs as well as to sum up learning. Both formative and summative assessment concepts, which are sometimes referred to as assessment for and of learning, are crucial ingredients and pillars of assessment and this has been observed by Freeman & Lewis (1998:33), who asserted that "in practice, assessments are often both formative and summative." Assessment is grounded on these concepts to show this strong connection between assessment and these two forms of assessment; Lambert & Lines (2000:5) refer to them as "two cultures of assessment." Stiggins (2002) further indicated the importance and necessity of these two forms of assessment. He argued that balance between

assessment of learning, which was currently in practice and assessment for learning, which was not, are essential to maximize the learner's achievement.

Formative assessment develops or moulds a learner and is considered to be part of teaching and learning. This kind of feedback provided by this type of assessment informs teaching and learning so that proper planning can be done. It also informs learners of the standards they have reached/attained. Furthermore, formative assessment shows learners what they have to do to improve; that is, it feeds forwards learning. Since formative assessment does not focus much on marks/grades, it motivates both learners and teachers. This form of assessment allows for constructive learning. It also diagnoses teaching and learning by identifying those parts of teaching and learning that seem weak so that remediation can be provided immediately. Directly or indirectly, it evaluates the whole curriculum.

Summative assessment, on the other hand, sums up learning. This type of assessment is most useful for providing information needed for selection and placement. It is good in setting or maintaining educational standards, standards which schools, teachers and learners are expected to achieve. Unlike formative assessment, which does not concentrate much on allocation of marks or grades, summative assessment is trusted for awarding marks/grades to learners. This assessment is an instrument through which education stake holders evaluate the workability of school policies, procedures etc. In other words, it checks on school accountability. The most central function of summative assessment is to provide learners with certificates showing the highest qualifications they have obtained. Invisibly, summative assessment controls both the society and curriculum. Detailed discussion of these concepts is given in chapter two.

## 1.7 Literature Sources and Limitations

The information used in this study came about as a comprehensive search from textbooks, curriculum magazines, electronic databases such as Proquest, which is a database that contains bibliographic, citations and abstracts for doctoral dissertations and master' theses. Education Resource Information Centre (ERIC), which is an international database containing reports and journal articles in education, has been used. Also HRSC database of current and completed projects and theses (Nexus) was

one of the databases utilised. Another piece of information has been drawn from electronic journal like African journal, published by AJOL, journals published by South Africa publications, Taylor & Francis, electronic journal service (EBSCO). Manual search has been made in the library on curriculum and Education journals, Education Reviews, doctoral dissertations and master' theses.

However, there are limitations to these sources of information namely; that most books are out-dated and, therefore, provide out-dated information. It has been hard for some databases like Nexus to access it as it requires one to be familiar with its password; furthermore, it has been very difficult to access even abstract from its theses. As for electronic journals published by Taylor & Francis, it has never been easy to locate them and I had to search for them via interloan libraries which is a long and delaying process.

Since this study is a case study and its sample has been selected purposefully, its findings will not be generalised. Due to time constraints, the researcher failed to observe teachers of the concerned school when assessing learners. Furthermore, the researcher did not take the results to the participants for confirmation.

## 1.8 Preview of the Study

The research report is organised in five chapters. Chapter one deals with background to the research problem. The statement of the problem; the rationale/motivation for the study, which are reasons for conducting the study have all been dealt with in this chapter. The purpose of the study and the research question which is the question to be answered by this research are given in this chapter. The significance of the study which reflects the importance of the study in this field of education has been included in this chapter. Conceptual framework, which is a framework of concepts grounding this study, is given. Literature sources and limitations to the study have been spelled out.

Chapter two presents review of the related literature. Here both conceptual and research literature have been analysed critically. Chapter three is a methodology chapter. Here the philosophical and epistemological status of the research has been explained and the paradigm in which the research is located has been shown. Also a

detailed description of the research design, methods and instruments that were used to collect data and also reasons for their selection have been provided. How the data were analysed has been indicated. Issues of credibility, dependability and transferability have been discussed as well. Ethical issues were shown. Finally, limitations of a case study have been given.

Chapter four is a data analysis chapter and this is where the presentation, interpretation and discussion of the data are done. In chapter five, the conclusion and recommendations have been given. In a conclusion section, the state ment of the problem, the purpose of the study, the findings or results of the study and the methods that were used in the investigation of the study were revisited. Conclusion has been drawn. The conclusion looked at whether the study answered the research question. The study ended by suggesting a topic for further investigation.

# CHAPTER TWO

# A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

## 2.0 Introduction

Assessment is an important sphere of interest and contention in education and among educationists (Broadfoot et al, 1990). This chapter, therefore, presents this debate on the definitions and theoretical aspect of assessment.

## 2.1 Definitions of Assessment

Authors have different perceptions on the concept 'assessment.' For example, Deale (1975; Airasian, 1991) viewed assessment as the state through which some parts of pupils' learning are measured or gauged. It should be noted that in this definition of Deale, the emphasis is on the measurement aspect of assessment. Similar to Deale's is Page and Thomas's (1975) definition, which looked at assessment as measurement of pupil's learning. However, Page and Thomas went further to show that it is not only pupil's learning that is gauged, but also the teaching process. They also showed that the measurement is done by various assessment techniques. On the other hand, Rowntree (1981) refers to assessment as a process by which a teacher or examiner tries to find out about the knowledge, attitudes or skills a learner has by means of observing and/or using other assessment techniques. Part of Rowntree's definition resembles that given by those authors who wrote in the 1970s in the sense that they regarded the teacher as the only assessor; however, he differs from them because for him, the teacher does not measure, test nor judge the learner's performance, but seeks information about the learner.

Rowntree (1987) goes on to show assessment as something emerging whenever there is a direct or indirect interaction or communication between two people. During that communication, one person is aware of getting and interpreting information about the knowledge and understanding, abilities and attitudes of the other. He further argued that it can be thought of as an effort one takes to know the other person. Moreover, he

said it can be seen as a human discovery and in education, it is the teacher discovering about his/her students; students finding about other students and about the teacher. In short, Rowntree has shifted from that understanding of assessment as a one way communication between the teacher and the student to that of a three way communication process (teacher to student, student to student and student to teacher).

Gipps & Stobart (1993) define assessment as tests, examinations and all other methods of gauging or measuring learner's learning; as can be seen, their understanding of assessment is not different from that of those authors who take assessment to be the measurement of learner's learning. Sieborger and Macintosh (1998) too regarded assessment as the measurement of a degree of learning one has acquired, while Blake & Hanley (1995) thought of it as the judgement of the learner's learning and that judgement can be made from the learner's paper-pencil work, projects and performance. What is conceived as assessment, in the Australian Primary School Assessment Project (1988 cited in Broadfoot et al., 1990), is not different from Blake & Hanley's understanding of the concept as they see it as incorporating all those methods that are employed to judge the performance and the degree of progress the learner possesses. Herbert (1997 cited in Cullingford, 1997) shares Hanley's opinion that assessment is an estimation of the amount of learning the student has accomplished.

Assessment has been thought of as meaning any method that can be used to provide information on the exact understanding that the student has (Dietel et al, 1991). South African Assessment Policy (1998) has its own way of defining assessment; assessment here is taken to be a way of identifying, accumulating and interpreting information about the learner's attainment as measured against nationally agreed outcomes. This definition of assessment is not different from that one of Rowntree, although this South African assessment policy is based more on criterion assessment. Assessment is perceived as the way of gathering, explaining and recording information about the learner's work (Lambert & Lines, 2000). Some writers go as far as showing that the gathering, interpretation and arrangement of the information

assist teachers and/or people to make decisions about the learner's work (Le Grange and Reddy, 1998).

The literature on the meaning of the concept assessment revealed assessment as a multifaceted concept, one aspect of which is that of measurement. The other aspects include testing, evaluation/judgement and the interpretation of the learner's learning. However, the meaning of assessment that will be used throughout this study is that of collection and interpretation of information about the progress of the learning of the learner because it is all encompassing.

## 2.2 Theoretical aspects of Assessment

"Assessment for what?" This is an important question to be considered when deciding which form of assessment is to be used (Gipps, 1994:3). Assessment is done for a number of different reasons: for instructional use, diagnostic purpose, selection and social control, placement, certification, accountability, curriculum evaluation and control. It is also done to provide feedback to teachers, learners, schools and the public. It is worth mentioning that it is done to raise and/or maintain standards, monitor and guide, inform as well as sum up learning (Pennycuick, 1990 cited in Broadfoot et al., 1990; Frith and Macintosh, 1984; Sumner, 1987; Gipps & Stobart, 1993; Lubisi, 1999; King and Van den Berg, 1992; Tanner and Jones, 2003; Freeman and Lewis, 1998; Wood, 1987; Rowtree, 1987; Stiggins, 2002; Gipps, 1994).

Norm-referenced assessment is carried out when the performance of the learner is measured against his/her classmates (Satterly, 1989; Sumner, 1987; Freeman & Lewis, 1998; Lubisi, 1999; Rowntree, 1987; Frith & Macintosh, 1984; Seiborger & Macintosh, 1998; Harris & Bell, 1986; Wood, 1987; Bertrand & Cebula, 1980; Gipps, 1994). The comparison nature of this type of assessment promotes a competitive spirit among learners and that in itself kills the morale, especially of those students who failed to do well against their peers. Competition does not only demotivate losers, but also makes them feel less able as a result they may loose self-esteem. It

again destroys that spirit of collaboration among learners and, tends to separate them into higher and lower achievers (Gipps, 1994).

However, Wood (1987) contended that human beings have that inherent need to compare. This necessity of the idea 'norm' was further extended by Williams (1998 cited in Moseme, 2004: 20), who said, "as human beings, we require a sense of the norm of achievement within activities in order to get a perspective on the relative of our own performance." Williams made an example of a learner in a swimming activity and said that if that person did not have a picture of how long other swimmers can swim, he/she might have that inflated idea about his/her ability, simply because he/she was able to swim one width of a pool. All what Williams said about norm-referenced assessment can be summarised as follows:

> There is nothing inherently objectionable in the notion of norms and they have nothing to do with facilitating the hegemony of the powerful within the society. Unfortunately our ambitions tend to exceed our abilities and assessment provides us with an indication of the relationship between our abilities and the abilities of others (Williams, 1998 cited in Moseme, 2004:20).

The question that is normally answered by this type of assessment about the learner's achievement is how many learners in the group are better than and/or worse than a certain learner (Heaton, 1990). Criterion-referenced assessment; on the other hand, answers the 'how well' question which is to be discussed later in this chapter (Bertrand & Cebula, 1980; Wood, 1987; Gipps, 1994). The 'how many' question of norm-referenced assessment implies comparison. This type of assessment puts emphasis on the awarding of grades to learners and this has been criticised more by Wood (1987) on the grounds that grades do not communicate anything about the strength and weakness of the work of the learner, as he says these grades only promote global judgement. Thus, grading does not provide valuable information for the learner to build upon. This grading system of norm-referenced assessment means the ranking of learners.

This ranking of learners into higher and lower achievers highlights achievement difference between or among students and this alone promotes discrimination between the able and unable learners. Ranking does not only segregate learners, but it also humiliates low achievers (Bond, 1996; Wood, 1987). These undesirable effects of norm-referenced assessment have been summarised by Crook (1988 quoted in Gipps, 1994:39) when he pointed out that:

> Normative grading with the social comparison and competition between students… lower[s] levels of intrinsic motivation, increase[s] anxiety, which hinders the learning process, attributions for ability that undermine pupil effort, lowered self-efficacy for learning in poorer students and poorer social relationship among pupils

This form of assessment is identified with the selection aspect of testing, and selection has to do with sorting. Sorting or selection emphasises discrimination, which means no more is learned about the learners' understanding than the fact that they can be ranked into top and poor achievers, and learners too do not learn anything important about their work, as is the case in criterion-referenced assessment. In short, this selection function of norm-referenced assessment is administrative and it does not benefit a teaching-learning activity (Wood, 1987). This subsequent ranking of learners in comparison with their peers enables tertiary institutions and employers to select those whom they regard to have performed better. Arguing in favour of sorting or classification role of norm-referenced assessment, Bond (1996) has stated that this type of assessment places the learners, especially the week ones, into appropriate remedial or gifted programmes. This assessment is once again criticised for being unfair in that it measures the learners' performance against that of his or her peers without taking into consideration the fact that learners have different abilities and are sometimes not exposed to the same kind of learning environment (Lambert & Lines, 2000).

Norm-referenced assessment is more linked to a traditional way of assessment; for example, most standardised tests are classified as norm-referenced assessment. This has been shown by Sebatane (1985), as he pointed out that marking and reporting of

examinations at primary school leaving stream (grade 7), as well as in grade 10 (Form C/ JC), are grounded on norm-referenced measures. This connection has been further noticed by Lubisi (2000), who reported that testing practices by South African lower secondary mathematics teachers have a strong aspect of norm-referenced approach.

The growing interest in criterion-referenced assessment came as a result of dissatisfaction with norm-referenced assessment (Wood, 1987). Unlike in the situation of norm-referenced assessment, where the learner's performance is compared to that of his/her peers, criterion-referenced assessment measures the learner's achievement against the pre-set standards/criteria or objectives, thus the learner's achievement is looked at in relation to him/herself rather than to others ( Freeman & Lewis, 1998; Lubisi, 1999; Rowntree, 1987; Frith & Macintosh, 1984; 1998; Harris & Bell, 1986; Wood, 1987; Bertrand & Cebula, 1980; Gipps, 1994; Le Grange & Reddy,1998). Lambert & Lines (2000) took the argument further by indicating that this notion of measuring learners against a specific criterion makes criterion-referencing fair in the sense that learners are assessed against one and the same objective. In other words, learners are given the same and equal opportunities to achieve. On the other hand, this pre-set criterion appears to be problematic because it remains fixed for learners of different abilities (Dreckmeyer & Fraser, 1991).

This form of assessment assesses competence rather than intelligence. It seeks the best rather than classical performances and it constructs the learner instead of punishing him/her as it is the case with norm-referencing (Gipps, 1994). Moreover, it reports 'how well' learners are doing in relation to the set educational goals, and it provides feedback relative to learning targets. Objectives, both in the form of goals, as well as instructional objectives, are essential components of any teaching-learning activity and they compel teachers to plan their teaching in order to achieve them. Objectives are used as yardsticks by which teachers can find out 'how much and how well' learners have learned. Suffice it to say, educational goals give birth to instructional objectives of a single or more lessons and these instructional objectives

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act as important ingredients of criterion referenced assessment (Bertrand & Cebula, 1980).

Nonetheless, Satterly (1989:43) viewed educational objectives as behaviouristic, as he said:

> The use of education objectives which are stated in terms of pupil's observable behaviour can be traced back to the principles of behaviourist psychology and represents a conscious extension of precepts into educational practice. In behaviourist theory learning is studied only at its observable level and all other terminology or interpretation in terms of hidden entities or mental processes is denied. Early behaviourism was influenced by positivism which dismissed as meaningless all statements which were not empirically verifiable....

Criterion-referenced assessment assesses both mastery and non-mastery objective; mastery refers to what the learner can do, while non-mastery is what he/she is unable to do. In other words, users of this mode of assessment are interested in knowing what the learner can do, not how he/she stands in comparison to his/her peers. For instance, if a teacher gives learners a problem solving task, he/she is expecting each learner to display certain skills in solving that problem, not how he or she can perform in comparison with his/her classmates. In a similar way, a dog owner who wants to keep his dog in a backyard may not compare it with other dogs; instead, he/she will give it a fence-jumping test, so that he/she can find out how high it can jump so that the owner can buy a fence high enough to keep the dog in the yard (Popham & Husek, 1969).

The using of objectives in this assessment makes it closely connected to the behaviourist theory. Those people who object to mastery of learning would argue that it suggests a closed model of teaching and learning, a pattern which all aught to follow, and this kills that enthusiasm and discovery within learners (Satterly, 1989). This kind of assessment is more informative than norm-referenced assessment, because it informs the teacher about the strengths and weaknesses of the learner so that appropriate remediation can be provided immediately. Furthermore, this

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assessment acts as a tool whereby teachers keep track and develop their teaching (Satterly, 1989; Freeman & Lewis, 1998; Bertrand & Cebula, 1980).

In criterion-referenced assessment, learners are assessed on similar tasks or questions, using the same standards. While this can become another form of competition, there is that likelihood of having all learners meeting the stated passing standards. In addition, those repeated chances granted to a learner to achieve the required standards minimize the competitiveness of this type of assessment. This very nature of criterion-referenced assessment of individualising the learner's progress and learning; of reducing competition among learners; of promoting the spirit of collaboration amongst learners; of ascribing attainment and failure to hard work rather than ability/capability, makes this assessment an instrument that brings about intrinsic motivation to learners (Gipps,1994).

The main aim of assessment is professional; that is, it is meant to support teaching and learning activity and this idea has been further supported by Glaser (1990 cited in Gipps,1994), where he indicated that assessment ought to support learning. When assessment serves the purpose of supporting teaching and learning, rather than to show present and/or past achievement, it is said to be formative. This informing function of formative assessment has led to its being referred to as assessment for learning (Stiggins, 2002; Lambert & Lewis, 1998). Formative assessment entails using assessment data to feedback into teaching-learning activity (Gipps, 1994). This feedback aspect of formative assessment has been confirmed by Sadler (1989 cited in Gipps, 1994) when he pointed that formative assessment is concerned with how decisions/judgements about the quality of learners' responses can be utilised to shape and improve their capability. Intending to show that link between formative assessment and feedback, he went further to demonstrate the role played by feedback to teaching and learning activities by saying:

> Teachers use feedback to make programmatic decisions with respect to readiness, diagnosis and remediation. Students use it to monitor the strengths and weakness of their performance, so that aspects associated with success or high quality can be recognised and reinforced and unsatisfactory aspects modified or improved (Gipps, 1994:120).

Not every feedback contributes to the improvement of teaching and learning, as the one which is considered more helpful is the qualitative one, where the teacher will tell in detail what the learner ought to do to improve. However, the giving of grades (e.g. 10/20) is not productive formative feedback, since it does not contribute to the improvement of learning. Sadler's model does not regard grading as feedback (Sadler, 1989). Feedback, for a very long time, has been regarded as an important feature of the teaching-learning activity. For example, one model by Bloom (1976 cited in Gipps, 1994), contains feedback, correctives and reinforcements as vital components of the instructional process. In Bennett's (1982 cited in Gipps, 1994) model, teacher's feedback mirrors the learner's involvement, understanding and achievement.

In teaching terms, teachers employ information about pupil's knowledge or understanding of facts and skills to feedback into their own teaching. In short, feedback diagnoses their teaching, thus it reflects the strengths and weakness of teaching so that whatever decisions that will be taken by the teacher will be based or grounded on the feedback. The decisions to be taken by the teacher may be to re-explain the task, go on to the next step or give more practice or sometimes even to restructure the whole lesson (Gipps, 1990). At this juncture, it can be said that feedback guides the decisions about future teaching and learning, and it also provides an advice to both the learner and the teacher about their work (Glaser, 1990 quoted in Gipps, 1994). The corrective nature or purpose of feedback has long been emphasised in the literature

> [Feedback] confirms correct responses, telling the students how well the content is being understood, and it identifies and corrects errors or allows the learner to correct them. This correction function is probably the most important aspect of feedback.... (Kulhavy, 1977:229 cited in Gipps, 1994:130).

Feedback of learners' attainments brings about motivation, confidence into learners and even encourages them to strive for more. Unlike summative assessment, which regards teachers as judges, formative assessment looks upon the teachers as facilitators. As facilitators, they assist and support the learners to cross Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Torrance, 1993 cited in Gipps, 1994). This zone of proximal development is a theory propounded by Vygotsky, and it refers to that gap between the actual development level as reflected by the learner's performance under the auspices of an adult and/or in cooperation with more peers. What is implied by Torrance is that the teacher will provide that assistance that the learner needs from an adult and together they will collaborate to produce the best performance for the learner.

Torrance (1993 cited in Gipps, 1994) further linked formative assessment with constructivist approaches to learning. Constructivist theory of learning states that the learner learns better by actively creating meaning out of new knowledge and also by linking that new knowledge to her/his existing knowledge or understanding (Resnick, 1989 cited in Gipps, 1994). Pollard (1990 cited in Gipps, 1994) extended on this notion of the social-constructivist model by showing that in this model, the teacher assumes the role of a "reflective agent." In this position, the teacher provides sensible and suitable help and expansion of cognitive structuring and skill development coming from the learner's prior knowledge or experiences.

Lambert & Lines (2000) too expounded on this connection between formative assessment and constructivist perspective of learning by pointing out that constructivist perspective of learning views educational experiences as interactive in the sense that both the teacher and learners come with information and ideas. Therefore, the quality of teaching and learning relies on communication grounded on shared understanding. The teacher is not only content with the recognition of objectives and assessing how well they are achieved, but also with attempting to discover what the learner can achieve with help. Thus, assessment is an important

component of teaching and learning, and its prime aim is to look forward and assist learners to be aware of their learning capability through self-knowledge. Research literature has confirmed that improved formative assessment is capable of benefiting low achievers more than other learners and this, therefore, minimised the range of attainment whilst increasing achievement. This is evident in a study conducted by Black & William (1998) on classroom assessment work for low achieving students and students with learning disabilities.

Government, taxpayers, parents and all stakeholders need to know the educational status and how individual schools are performing and the only way in which their information needs in this regard can be responded to is by means of summative assessment in the form of tests and/or examinations. Summative assessment is good in supplying proof of achievement for public reporting so as to initiate decision-making (Gipps, 1994). This argument has been attested by Lambert & Lines (2000: 191-2), who pointed out that:

> External summative assessment is driven by the bureaucratic needs for the system which requires that students are graded for various reasons, including selection. It is also used to provide data for those who judge the effectiveness of teachers, schools and the system at large, at least in part, by the use of output measures. It therefore carries a high stake to it and partly as a result of this, is characterised by elaborate processes to safeguard the reliability of the scores obtained.

From the above quotation of Lambert and Lines, it is clear that summative assessment is used for grading or allocating marks for learners and the negative effects of grading in learning have been discussed at length in norm-referenced assessment as it is much connected with summative assessment. This assessment too emphasises selection of learners and selection addresses these questions "who is to be admitted or excluded, employed or rejected?" and these questions confirm the discriminative aspect of selection (Wood, 1987:133). The very notion of summative assessment of judging or evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and learning is one way of education system of holding teachers, learners and schools to account.

In addition to this function of holding schools, learners and teachers accountable, summative assessment is answerable for certificating learners. This certification of learners does not benefit learners academically because it is much connected outside classroom situation; rather it perpetuates the existing social control and inequality that has been brought about by selection. Furthermore, certificate acts as a gatekeeper that closes and opens for ones future life opportunities. This has been attested by Broadfoot (1996:32), as he said:

> Certificates is indeed the epitome of the overtly meritocratic basis of our society since in theory, it allows free competition based on academic ability and industry and thus is regarded as the fairest basis for the allocation of opportunities for high status or remunerative careers.

According to Satterly (1989), summative assessment is the stage at which assessment turned to be competitive and comparative among learners and also judgemental in the sense that it provides a kind of approval or disapproval on the learners work. He went on to argue that this competitiveness, comparativeness together with judgemental features of summative assessment have a negative impact on the learner's self-esteem. Assessment of learning, as it is sometimes called because of its function of gauging how much content the learner has acquired in the form of an examination or a test, is claimed to be fair, objective, accurate and reliable. Although examinations or tests are said to be reliable, "the higher the stakes, the greater the emphasis on reliability" (Lambert & Lines, 2000:91) and fair, they do not communicate anything about the value of what has been learned. This argument has been proved to be right by one journalist who, in his article about schooling for the future, wrote that:

> We will certainly have to reconsider the notion of qualification. When I work as an executive at the BBC, interviewing hundreds of job applicants every year, I stopped looking at the formal qualification on their CVs. They told me virtually nothing that I need to know about the person sitting in front of me, and they certainly didn't argue anything useful about the quality of their ideas. That I could discover only by asking the right questions (Aaronovitch, 1999 quoted in Lambert & Lines, 2000: 5).

Rising of standards in education is everybody's concern; therefore, examinations are means through which standards are raised and maintained (Wood, 1987). This has

been confirmed by Davis (1998) when he stated that some people believe there is a connection between high standards in education and traditional written examinations. He further claimed that the phrase per se has the implication of traditional written examinations. To confirm this argument, Lambert & Lines (2000:192) stated that "In recent years, successive British governments have been unable to resist the temptation to use external summative tests in an attempt to raise standards." Lambert & Lines (2000) went further to indicate that external examinations/tests are benchmarks or standards against which schools and teachers should achieve. In simpler terms, examinations or tests are used as indicators of educational standards attained.

However, this raising of standards by examinations or high stakes tests has been strongly criticised on the grounds that it puts forth intense psychological pressure on defenceless learners. These high standards that learners have to meet make slow learners to be discouraged, as they may think that they will never be good enough to achieve them and, therefore, this puts them in a similar stress that employees get from their employers (New Democracy Newsletter, 2000 cited in Montgomery et al., 2003). For a long time, examinations have been viewed as having motivating potential, for they encourage learners to work harder (Riding & Butterfield, 1990). Those who are in support of this contention would say:

> A national examination and certification system will pressuri[ze] schools to improve; entice students to put forth more effort; and thereby raise student achievement. These changes in turn will lead to a more skilled, productive and competitive workforce; and ultimately guarantee the quality of life for us and the future generations (Oakes, 1991 cited in Gipps, 1994:44).

Placement or streaming of learners by their abilities for instruction has a long history in education and it is achievable through testing or examinations. This incident has been verified by Wood (1987) and also Oakes (1992:250) in his research "Can Tracking Research informs Practice?" where he stated that,

> Schools assign elementary students using formal assessments (usually tests) of students' aptitudes... and past achievement and teachers' informal observations of classroom performance....

Although this placement practice of a test or examination is regarded as fair by some people, others consider it to be discriminatory and competitive. It is discriminatory in the sense that learners are not placed in those streams where they have access to equitable learning opportunities. For example, Oakes reported that his study revealed that each stream/track had its own curriculum which was different from that of the other. He further pointed out that courses in a lower track/grade offered less demanding topics and skills, whereas high track was engaged in more intellectual and problem-solving tasks. The competitive aspect of placement is reflected mostly at the time when learners will be striving for places in a new stream and it is a well- known fact that both competition and discrimination are enemies of good learning.

Traditional assessment is a powerful instrument of social organisation or arrangement (Riding & Butterfield, 1990). What is meant is that examination determines the position that one will occupy in a society; that is to say, success in examination opens doors for a learner in an institution of higher learning, as it has been shown earlier on in this chapter. The kind of education the learner possesses after completion or the passing of examinations of tertiary education locates one in a specific job opportunity. The type of job that one occupies fits him/her in a particular class within the society. Satterly (1989:16) too is of the feeling that:

> Assessment [examination] is a part of the apparatus by which schools perpetuate the existing hierarchical structure of society, for it results in the application of labels which determine children's opportunities in further education and life itself, their social status, privilege and power and even their worth.

One of the criticisms levelled against external examinations/high stakes tests is that they narrow, control and mould schools' curricular (Satterly, 1987; Dietel et al., 1991; Gipps, 1993). High standards of the public or terminal examination force teachers to take much of their time and energy teaching all those skills that are to be assessed, so as to make learners better test- takers. The negative effect of this teaching "to the test" practice is that as it concentrates on those skills that are to be tested, some of the most important skills in education are neglected (Gipps, 1993 & 1994; Davis, 1998;

Lambert & Lines, 2000). This teaching to the test seems to be harmful also to learning in the sense that it promotes superficial learning, which, according to Davis (1998), ignores proper knowledge and understanding in the learners. Teaching to the test does not only bring about surface learning, but it also narrows the curriculum to the selected topics to be measured. The practice indirectly dictates what to be taught and finally, the subject-matter will end up following the tastes of examiners, not of the curriculum designers. This backwash of traditional assessment on teaching is normally referred to as "putting the cart before the horse or letting the tail wag the dog" (Little, 1990 cited in Broadfoot, et al., 1990:11).

Besides holding schools, teachers and learners accountable, examinations are instruments through which different governments control or regulate social mobility. This point has been neatly verified by Weiss (1987 cited in Gipps, 1993:14) when saying, "standardised …exams have become our nation's cradle to grave arbiter of social mobility." This type of assessment is justifiable in this situation because it carries with it competition and competition is most helpful here as people will compete to have access to scarce resources like tertiary institutions and jobs. Only those who will prove to be good in competition by passing will be the ones to have access to these resources. Madaus (1992 cited in Gipps, 1994:147) too is one of those people who support the idea that "High-stakes tests are necessary, since they are most appropriate way of allocating scarce resources and for providing information about the performance of publicly-funded institutions."

This argument has been proved to be true by Davis (1998:5) as he stated that "examination system may be thought of as a way of filtering candidates, so that only the right kind of people get through to university and prestige professional jobs." Examinations or high-stake tests have been criticised for encouraging recall or rote learning, which is the lower level of cognitive domain. This traditional way of assessment has an indirect effect of bringing about transmission teaching. In this teaching model, the teacher takes the role of a transmitter and she/he impacts knowledge through talking, dictating and/or writing on the chalkboard, while a

learner is a passive recipient, who writes, recalls and reproduces that information. This assessment, therefore, puts more emphasis on the recall of facts (Riding & Butterfield, 1990). The kind of knowledge measured in this model of teaching is what Davis (1998) calls "declarative knowledge or knowing what," which is factual knowledge and which, according to him, is part of what he refers to as rich or proper knowledge, that is, understood knowledge.

Traditional written tests are criticised for failing to differentiate between candidates who memorise factual materials to reproduce them in an examination room in order to gain recognition and those candidates who are in search of proper knowledge (Davis, 1998). The selection function of external examinations has been revealed by a number of scholars. To name but one scholar, Sebatane (1985) indicated that end-of-year examination for primary leaving stream (class 7) is used as a selection instrument into a secondary school. He further pointed out that the one given at the end of secondary education (grade 10) is used for selection into high school (grade 12), which is normally referred to as Cambridge Overseas Certificate (COSC). The one undergone in grade 12 is meant for selection into tertiary institutions such as the National University of Lesotho and other similar tertiary institutions.

The perception on present knowledge implies that what the learner knows keeps on changing and that means measurements about the learner's achievement ought to be compared over a period of time (Dietel et al., 1991). This judgement of the learner's achievement over time enhances the validity of the learner's results (Pennycuick, 1990 cited in Broadfoot, 1990). Since traditional tests timed and given only once or twice fail to gauge learners' ability over time, emphasis has been given to the form of assessment that is capable of measuring learners' attainment over a period of time, which is continuous assessment. Continuous assessment (CA) through coursework informs teaching and learning and it also provides feedback on curricular effectiveness, but continuous assessment in the form of accumulated tests serves the purpose of summative assessment (Gipps, 1993 & 1994; Wiggins, 1990 cited in Creagh & McHaney, 1997; Pennycuick, 1990 cited in Broadfoot et al., 1990).

Continuous assessment does not only measure learners' performance at different stages in their programmes, but it also acts as,

> a possible device for the nation to have objective data about the level of achievement of students at different levels of the educational system and a systematic accumulation of evidence on the standard attained within the system (Nigeria, 1985 quoted in Broadfoot et al., 1990:110).

It can be argued further that CA minimizes unwanted effects of external examination by allowing learners to show their abilities in different subjects. Continuous assessment in the form of projects, essays, oral tests, practical tests, portfolios and assignments is intended to deal with a much wider array of skills which, due to time limit, timed traditional written examinations fail to measure. These skills are in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains and the skills reflected in the cognitive domain in this case are of higher-order level, such as application, analysis and synthesis as opposed to those written traditional examinations, where the emphasis is put on the knowledge level or lower level of cognitive domain. This lower level of cognitive domain is characterised by recall of factual information. Furthermore, CA increases the number of educational objectives to be assessed, which traditional assessment is unable to cover because of time constraint (Pennycuick, 1990 cited in Broadfoot, 1990).

It is argued that one-shot formal examination is not enough to assess the learner's achievement. This argument has been supported by Stiggins (2002) where he demonstrated that learner's achievement suffers due to these once-a-year tests which are unable to provide teachers with moment-to-moment and day-to-day feedback about the learner's attainment that teachers want in order to make important instructional decisions. Montgomery et al (2003) went further to question the level of validity and reliability of these once-a-year tests/examinations to be used as the only basis for making far-reaching decisions about passing from one grade to the next. According to him, we should not draw conclusions from one test that is irrevocable. "No one test tells you everything you need to know" (Montgomery et al., 2003:6).

Timed examinations are unable to measure many of the qualities, skills and processes which learners are developing, ought to develop and have identified as valuable. For example:

> Examinations in mathematics which consist only of timed written papers cannot by their nature assess ability to undertake practical and investigated work or ability to carry out work of an extended nature. They cannot assess skills of mental computation or ability to discuss mathematics nor, other than in very limited ways, qualities of perseverance and inventiveness. Work and qualities of this kind can only be assessed in the classroom and such assessment needs to be made over an extended period (Riding & Butterfield, 1990:8).

Coursework is one form of internal or school-based assessment which is capable of measuring skills that are not easily and/or reliably assessed in a timed final examination (Riding & Butterfied, 1990). Moreover, coursework "allows candidates who do not perform well under examination conditions to demonstrate their true ability in a more relaxed atmosphere" (Mkandawire, 1984 cited in Broadfoot et al., 1990). Assessment is gradually shifting

> from its controlling nature to learner empowerment and motivation, from requiring learners to select responses, from predetermined options to requiring learners to develop and evaluate multiple responses and from testing isolated facts to developing higher order thinking skills such as comprehension, application of concepts and understandings, analysis and evaluation (Lioyd-Jones & Bray,1986 cited in Moseme, 2004:7).

This change in the learners' assessment is fuelled by the global economy that demands new knowledge and abilities from the learners. The new knowledge and abilities are achievable through understanding of the basics, critical thinking, analysis and the making inferences by learners. So, in order to help learners to develop these skills, changes in assessment at the school and classroom levels, as well as new approaches to large-scale high-stakes assessment, are required (Bond et al., 1994). This argument has been corroborated by Eisner (1999) when he claimed that most jobs, especially the most desirable ones in the competitive industrial economy, no longer require the use of routine skills and rote memory but

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...need employees who can communicate and listen, make flexible and intelligent use of their knowledge and skills, work effectively with others and who are suitably motivated. These qualities cannot be tested by examinations (Davis, 1999 cited in Lambert & Lines, 2000:193).

It is not only economic demands that have brought about transition into new forms of assessment, but also higher educational standards have and this is what Torrance and Pryor (1998: cited in Moseme, 2004:28), as they have said that:

Higher standards require more demanding task to be undertaken in schools. In turn, those more demanding tasks must be underpinned by more sophisticated forms of assessment. We need to move beyond paper and pencil tests of the recall and memorization of knowledge towards more extended and open ended forms of assessment, i.e. assignments, projects and practical activities in order both validly to assess new curriculum goals and to reinforce the pursuit of those goals.

Performance-based/authentic assessments are the forms of assessment that are most appropriate to respond positively to this global economy demands. These assessments provide opportunities for learners to reveal their thinking capacity through tasks that motivate them to "give their very best" (Willis, 1996 cited in Creagh & McHaney, 1997). Performance assessments do not only assess the usage of higher order thinking skills, but also critical reasoning used to reach solutions (Creagh & McHaney, 1997). It can be said, therefore, that these forms of assessment support teaching in the sense that teachers are forced to teach concepts and higher order skills in-depth and prepare for an assessment.

Authentic/alternative assessments are much more concerned with constructive theory of learning, because they require the learner to give out constructed responses out of constructed knowledge or meanings that they have created from their everyday instruction. This constructed knowledge or understanding that is assessed by these new assessments is referred to as "rich knowledge" and this rich knowledge has been neatly defined as "knowledge appropriately connected to other knowledge in the mind of the knower" (Davis, 2006:3). It can be further contended that this new way of assessment assesses knowledge in its constructive use. In other words, these skills and

knowledge are being measured where they have been applied, which is in real learning and problem-solving activities. This argument has been proved factual by Moseme (2004) as she pointed out that within this assessment system, learners do apply what they have gained or learned from the instruction.

These authentic assessments measure the learner's performance over time or continuously, and by so doing, they reveal "assistance, experiences and forms of practice required by learners as they move towards more competent performance" (Glaser, 1990 cited in Gipps, 1994:10). The kind of assessment that Glaser had in mind was portfolio assessment. Assessment of this nature enables the learner to self-assess his/her development as a scholar and also to identify his/her strengths and weaknesses, interests and the prospective field of work (Creagh & McHaney, 1997).

Advocates of new assessments contend that these assessments are more engaging than traditional assessments (Wiggins, 1990 cited in Creagh & McHaney, 1997). This has been observed by one teacher in Moseme (2004), who asserted that these new assessments make learners to be more engaged than traditional ones. He/she went further and claimed that this involvement seems to excite learners, and hence their understanding is enhanced. These new forms of assessment motivate learners because they reflect real-life challenges for learners to work on or rather, it can be said they model real learning goals (Creagh & McHaney, 1997). Other educationists would simply argue that they give learners experience of the practical situations as opposed to the traditional ones, which are more theoretical (Moseme, 2004).

What has been observed in these new ways of assessment is that it allows for diversity in the answering of questions. Contrary to what is happening in the traditional assessments where responses are objective, in alternative assessments, learners are at liberty to respond in their subjective way provided that they support their responses (Moseme, 2004). This point has been further emphasised by Desforges (1989) and Wiggins (1989 cited in Creagh & McHaney, 1997), as they show that new assessments allow for learners' differences in style and interests.

Written examination or test does not effectively assess the learner's capabilities, so authentic assessment is an excellent assessment that is able to evaluate the learner's collective abilities. This is what Anastasi (1988, cited in Moseme, 2004:10) has to say in this regard:

> [This] new assessment focuses on learner's analytical skills, ability to integrate what they learn, creativity, ability to work collaboratively, written and oral expression skills. It evaluates the learning process as much the finished product.

Assessment is not only limited to tests or examinations and alternative/ performance assessment, but it can be an ongoing activity through personal communication, primarily in the form of oral questioning, observations and discussions. These classroom interactions provide immediate feedback about the learner's understanding and communication skills.

It can, therefore, be concluded that this intense debate on assessment revolves around formative and summative assessment concepts. The literature reflects that assessment has two features: it informs and sums up learning. In the next chapter various methods and instruments that were used to collect and analyse data for this study have been described in detail.

# CHAPTER THREE

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the philosophical and epistemological positions of the study and also shows how these link with the research paradigm through which the inquiry is approached. It is again in this section that the design of this study will be explained in depth or that is where the type of study that has been used to answer the research questions or problem will be described. Reasons why the selected design is the most appropriate for the study in question will be given together with its limitations. Research methodology, which deals with the description of sources of data, data collection and analysis methods and the tools that have been used to collect data, will be dealt with at length. Methodology does not only concern itself with the description of those sources, methods and instruments it also addresses the importance of using such sources, methods and tools and it also justifies the selection of those procedures and tools. Measurement issues such as reliability, validity and generalisability are important issues to be addressed in this chapter. Sample size and how it has been selected will be given. Finally, ethical issues and the limitations of the methodology are going to be reported.

The term paradigm refers to "[the] way of thinking, perceiving or approaching work" (http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki). Denzin & Lincoln (2000:157) defined paradigm as "a basic set of beliefs that guide action." They took the argument further, showing that the paradigm comprises ethics, epistemology, ontology and methodology.

This research is located in an interpretive paradigm, which is a paradigm that has been born by qualitative approach (Henning et al., 2005). A positivist paradigm is concerned with objective/hard reality which is detached or independent from the observer and its knowledge is grounded only on sense experiences. Thus knowledge is based on five senses, not on meaning/interpretation (Cohen et al., 2000; Neuman, 1997). An interpretive paradigm's reality (ontology) is socially defined or constructed, hence there

are multiple realities. Its knowledge (epistemology) is soft, subjective, build from experiences and interpretations or meanings, that is to say, knowledge is constructed in the mind of an individual (Neuman, 1997). In short, interpretivists assume that knowledge and meaning are acts of interpretation that is why there is no objective knowledge independent of thinking and reasoning.

Although the paradigm employs both qualitative and quantitative techniques, it favours qualitative methods of data collection and analysis more than those of quantitative and it also offers "rich/thick" description of a phenomenon, situation, activity in order for one to understand the subjective world of human experience (Neuman, 1997).

An interpretive research paradigm is the most appropriate paradigm for this study, as this study is seeking the reality on the ways in which assessment is employed by teachers in a certain high school in Lesotho, that reality is or has been defined by teachers and, therefore, I received many or multiple truths about the ways in which assessment is done. Furthermore, the knowledge to be gained about teachers' assessment practices is subjective and has been developed from or founded on teachers' experiences and their interpretations, as well as the interpretations of the researcher. Moreover, the nature of my research question "how" calls for thick or rich description of assessment practices used by teachers, so this research question too makes an interpretive paradigm to be the most suitable paradigm for this study.

## 3.1 Research Design

At this juncture, it is important to introduce the reader to the type of research design that is to be followed to answer the research problem/question. Before stating the research design which is most suitable for this study, it is worth defining the term "design" because there seems to be some misunderstanding between research design and research methodology. The term design, as conceptualised by Mouton (2001:55) and Wiktionary-free dictionary, means "plan or blueprint of how [one] intends conducting the research." Merriam (1988) went further to show that this plan assembles, organises, integrates information and it results in a certain end product (research results). Research design is

not only to be taken as a mere plan, but a logical structure of an inquiry that is aimed at answering the research questions (http://www.nyu.edu/classes/bkg/methods).

As for research methodology, it is neatly defined by Henning et al. (2004:36) as

> the coherent group of methods that complement one another and that have the goodness of fit to deliver data and findings that will reflect the research question and suit the research purpose.

Methodology does not only deal with a group of methods, but it addresses the question of why those methods have been chosen and used. To illustrate this distinction between a research design and research methodology, Mouton (2001) summarised the difference between the two thus: He looked at the research design as something that concentrates on the end product, which, in other words, is the type of study that has been planned and it also reveals the kind of results that have been aimed at. By contrast, research methodology is more concerned with a research process and the kind of instruments and methods to be used. The research design starts with a research problem or question and again looks at the logic of the research, which, according to him, is the information necessary to answer the research question satisfactorily, whereas, methodology begins with sampling or data collection and finally, it concentrates on an individual series of procedures to be utilised in a research process.

Rubin and Babbie (2001 cited in De Vos et al., 2002) revealed their understanding of the research design. According to them, the term has two implications: in the first place, it implies an orderly arrangement to be chosen (experiment research design and correlation research design).The second connotation has to do with the act of designing the study in its widest way. This refers to that situation where the planning of the study is done yet, the concentration will not only be on the design or type of research but it will also be on the sampling, sources of data, methods of data collection and analysis to be employed and measurement issues (reliability, validity) or methodological issues (Henning et al., 2004).

This perception of Rubin & Babbie about research design tallies with Mouton's metaphor for research design where he equated the research design with the plan of a

house. In that analogy of his, he showed that before the house is build, the owner must have an idea of the shape, size, number of rooms and style. This idea is transformed into a plan and the plan will comprise systematic methods that will be used during the construction process. For this reason, the working definition of research design for this study will be that provided by Rubin & Babbie together with Mouton's because it is all inclusive and it also embraces the concept of methodology.

This contention among authors over the concept 'research design' is the point of departure for the research design that has been used in this study which is a case study. Case study research design is such an ambiguous term, for it means different things to different authors or people. Some people take it to be a method, while others understand it to be a methodology. On the other hand, other people consider it to be a plan or strategy. The last group defines case study as a unit of analysis.

### 3.1.1 Case study Research Design

Case study is defined as "the study of an instance in action" (Adelman et al., 1980 cited in Cohen et al., 2000:181). However, most authors understand case study to be the examination of a phenomenon (Macdonald & Walker, 1977 cited in Merriam, 1988 and also in Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Abercrombie et al., 2000 cited in Thomas, 2004; Denny, 1978 cited in Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Merriam (1988) and Neuman (2006) went a step further and gave examples of phenomena, which may be programmes, events, persons etc. and these, according to some authors, are units of analysis. On the one hand, Creswell (1998 cited in De Vos, 2002) looked at case study as a thorough analysis or an investigation of a single or many cases. Expanding on Creswell's definition, Sax (1968) demonstrated that a case study does not only analyse the case, but it also describes it extensively.

However, Picciano (2004) adopted the descriptive argument of the case study and added the interpretation component. Sometimes, the case study is perceived as "an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed" (Feagin, Orum and Sjoberg, 1999 cited in Tellis, 1997:1). Bromley (1990 cited in Zucker, 2001) regarded

case study as an orderly inquiry into an incident, which aims at describing and explaining the phenomenon of interest. This definition of case study, according to Bromley, had been expanded by Yin (1981 cited in Anderson, 1990:158) who indicated that it is,

> an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.

Few authors viewed case study as a plan/blueprint or strategy for doing research (Wisker, 2001; Thomas, 2004). Thomas (2004: 127) further clarifies that case study examines as single or few cases of the "units of interests." He continued to give examples of what he called units of interest and those were individuals, factories etc. However, Henning et al (2004:3) see it as a "format for design."

Case study as the research design used in this study has all the characteristics that match the definition of a research design according to Mouton (2001) and Rubin & Babbie (2001 cited in De Vos et al., 2002). According to Mouton (2001), research starts with the research problem/question and so does a case study. It asks the questions: 'what, how and why,' depending on the type of case study. The type of research is an important aspect in the planning of the study, according to Rubin & Babbie (2001 cited in De Vos et al., 2002; Mouton, 2001). In response to this Yin (1993 cited in Tellis, 1997) came up with three types of case studies which are: exploratory, explanatory and descriptive. Rubin and Babbie further argued that sampling is necessary in a research design. In the case of a case study strategy, sampling is not employed, rather units of analysis are selected (Yin, 1994 cited in Tellis, 1997).

Another part that is included in the design is what is normally referred to as methodology, which, according to Rubin & Babbie (2001 cited in De Vos et al., 2002) comprises sources of data, all methods for data collection and analysis. Case study draws its information from documents (official school records, students' transcripts etc), interviews, observation and physical artifacts (Yin, 1994 cited in Tellis, 1997; Anderson, 1990). Although case study is known for its heavy reliance on qualitative techniques for

data collection and analysis, it also accommodates quantitative techniques as well like a questionnaire and school database (Picciano, 2004; Merriam, 1988; Anderson, 1990). More often, most case studies integrate the two techniques (Piccian, 2004). In a case where qualitative methods of data collection have been used, Yin(1994 cited in Tellis, 1997) and Miles & Huberman (1984 cited in Tellis, 1997) recommend the use of these analytical methods: tabulation of events, graphic data display, chronological or time series analysis, pattern-matching, explanation building, thematic review, categorisation or coding. On the other hand, data collected by means of quantitative techniques is analysed quantitatively by using statistical package of social science (SPSS) and it can further be presented by means of frequency distributions, contingency tables and graphs (Picciano, 2004).

Triangulation in research may occur with data, investigators, theories and methodologies (Feagin et al, 1991 cited in Tellis, 1997; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Case study research strategy is capable of triangulating data, investigators, theories and methodologies (Feagin et al., 1991 cited in Tellis, 1997). However, this study has employed two types of triangulation, which are data triangulation and methodology triangulation. I have triangulated data from the questionnaire with the data from documents and I have also triangulated documentary data method with questionnaire data method.

Measurement issues such as reliability, validity and generalisability are of great importance in a research design (Rubin & Babbie, 2001 cited in De vos et al., 2002). Case study as a form of qualitative research has its own way of judging or measuring the trustworthiness of the research. In a case study, qualitative terminology such as credibility, dependability, transferability and conformability replaces traditional positivist terminology of reliability, internal validity, external validity/generalisability and objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000 also cited in Hoepfl, 1997).

Case study is ever criticised for lacking scientific rigor, for having limited generalisation and /or not allowing generalisation and also for producing large quantities of data which

are hard to analyse (Mattern, 2005; Zucker, 2000; Anderson, 1990; Merriam, 1988; Picciano, 2004; Thomas, 2004; Mouton, 2001). Looking at what has been said about case study, it can be concluded that it is often seen as a prime or main example of qualitative research which adopts an interpretive approach to data. It studies phenomena within their contexts and considers the subjective meaning that people bring to their situations (http://www.nyu.edu/classes/bkg/methods).

I have already indicated that the research design adopted in this study is a case study. According to Merriam (1988:6), "the selection of a particular design is determined by how the problem is shaped, by the question it raises, and by the type of end product desired." My choice of the research design has been to a large extent influenced by this selection criteria suggested by Merriam. What makes case study to be the research design for this study is the research question that this study asks, which is "how do teachers in a certain high school in Lesotho assess across the curriculum." The 'how and why' questions are suitable for or are answered by a case study according to Yin (1984 cited in Merriam, 1988:9) and Walliman (2001). In addition to what Yin and Walliman had said about the 'how' question, 'how' is also regarded as a descriptive question (www.nyu.edu/classes/bkg/methods), which means whenever it is asked description is required. It is again this question that makes this study to be a descriptive case study not an exploratory case study or an explanatory case study.

When looking at the nature of the research question for this study together with what has been said about the 'how' question, it is obvious that a lot of description is going to be made, describing the ways in which assessment is done by high school teachers in Lesotho. 'Thick or rich' description, therefore, is the desired end product for this study if I can refer to what has been said by Merriam in her explanation of the factors that determine the selection of a research design. This descriptive nature of the case study is evident in some of the definitions that were given earlier on in this chapter. It has been further confirmed by Merriam (1988) as she demonstrated that thick or rich description characterises a complete case or phenomenon under investigation.

## 3.2 Methodology

To answer this over-arching research question "how do teachers in a certain high school in Lesotho assess across curriculum," both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis have been employed. The integration of these two methods has been done because I was convinced by Picciano (2004) that when dealing with case study, there is no harm in combining these two methods. Data has been collected by means of a questionnaire and documentary analysis. Questionnaires were distributed to 28 teachers of both secondary and high school levels. Teachers and the school were selected purposefully or conveniently. Purposive/judgemental/convenience sampling, as described by Henning et al (2004) and Neuman (1997), is a non-probability sampling which does not represent the population, and as a result, the findings generated from it are not generalisable to the entire population. The documents that were analysed were teachers' lesson plans, scheme and record books, teachers' assessment record books and test questionnaires.

### 3.2.1 Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Questionnaires were used as the prime source of data, as they assisted me in getting a fast and large number of responses from all teachers in different subjects on their assessment practices. I am supported by Wisker (2001) and Mitchell & Jolley (2004), who pointed out that the questionnaire is a method of collecting huge amount of responses. In addition to what was said about the questionnaire, Van Dalen (1962); Lovell & Lawson (1970); Koul (1988) further argue that this instrument can be utilised in educational research to collect information about contemporary conditions and practices. The questionnaire comprised both close/restricted questions and open/unrestricted questions. Close questions sought objective responses and this has been attested by Lovell and Lawson (1970) where they showed that close questions keep a participant on the subject matter or focused. On the contrary, open questions were intended to obtain intensive subjective responses on the ways in which assessment is carried out by teachers.

The questionnaire is made up of four parts: introduction (which will be dealt with at length in the part about ethical issues), background information, short questions on

assessment methods and the questions that required detailed responses. My interest in wanting to know about the ages of the respondents lies in the fact that there may be difference in the degree to which the task of assessment is carried out by teachers of different age groups. The question about gender seems to be important for the researcher as it will show which sex seems to be engaged in assessment more than the other. As for qualifications, experience has taught me that since not all teachers have a teaching qualification, it is possible that they may lack teaching and assessment skills.

The question about the years of experience a teacher has is a crucial question because studies have revealed that the more the teacher is engaged in teaching is the more he/she becomes knowledgeable in teaching and assessment techniques. This has been verified by Bol et al (1998) in their study " Influence of Experience, Grade level and Teachers' Assessment Practices" where their results revealed that most experienced teachers (about 20 years and more) used alternative methods of assessment more than the least experienced teachers of about 6 years and less. It is worth knowing in which subjects the teachers have been trained to teach because in most cases it happens that the teacher has been trained to teach a certain subject; for example, he/she may have been trained to teach English language but find himself/herself having to teach English literature. The problem in this situation is that teacher has been provided with the skills of how to teach and assess literature, not language so if she/he has to teach English language it is understandable that he/she will fail to apply all the skills that an English language teacher is expected to show.

The third part of the questionnaire is where the researcher wanted to find out ways in which assessment is carried out by teachers of different subjects. A list of possible assessment techniques has been attached in each questionnaire so as to enable the teacher to choose the ones that he/she uses. The other part is where teachers have been asked to justify their use of various assessment techniques. The last question is very open and inviting teachers to show their understanding of assessment. The questionnaire has been developed by me and it was reviewed by my supervisor, the research proposal skills and training module coordinator and it was also looked at by the ethical clearance committee.

The  piloting of the questionnaire is a practice that is recommended by many authors as the best way of anticipating problems of ambiguity, understanding, confusion and errors that may arise from it (Walliman, 2001; Wisker, 2001; De Vos et al., 2002; Thomas, 2004; Mouton, 2001; Cohen et al., 2000). For this reason, the questionnaire was piloted as those authors suggested on student teachers at Edgewood Campus.

The questionnaire was self-administered, which gave me an opportunity to establish rapport with my participants and even to clarify some of the questions which seemed to be not so clear to them. Nevertheless, my contribution was limited because I did not want to influence the results. To ascertain the use of assessment methods and techniques by teachers, I triangulated the questionnaire with documentation analysis. The documents that were to be analysed were one lesson plan from each teacher, scheme and record book of each teacher; one assessment record book from every teacher, one pupil's questionnaire from every subject and  one marked exercise book from each subject. Lesson plans of teachers were examined in order to find out whether teachers include the part about assessment in their daily lesson plans.

The importance of inclusion of assessment in a lesson plan has been emphasised by Campbell & Evans (2000) who pointed out that pre-service teachers were asked to show in their lesson plan how they planned to evaluate their pupils' achievement. As for the scheme and record books, they were audited so as to see if teachers when scheming include assessment. The idea was also to see if, when recording the work done, they reveal the assessment that was carried out during the course of the week. Teachers assessment record book were going to show how often learners are assessed. Exercise books too would give me the picture of how regularly the learners were given tasks to do. The questionnaire on the one hand represented high stake testing.

Among analytical strategies recommended by Miles & Huberman (1984 cited in Tellis, 1997) I found frequency tables as the most suitable one for this study since most of the data has been collected by means of the questionnaire. Another analytical strategy that has been employed in this study is the one suggested by Cohen et al (2000; Hawe et al,

1990 cited in www.nt.gov.au/health/healthdev/promotion/bushbook/volume1/analyse)
which is that of tallying responses. As has been previously stated, case study is not a
sampling strategy, but a selecting strategy.

## 3.3 Ethical Issues

I started by sending consent letters to all gatekeepers (school management board and the
department of education), including the participants-teachers (see appendices A, B, C, D
and E for copies of an ethical clearance letter, the questionnaire, the letter to the
educational officer, the letter to the participants and the letter to the principal,
respectively). In those letters, I did not deceive nor hide the purpose of my study, so that
they would allow me to conduct my study in their school knowing fully what I was
looking for. In other words, I indicated the purpose of my study so as to allay their fears
about the study and also not to raise their hopes and/or to have misconceptions about my
study. Letters to the participants further assured them that the information they were
going to provide would remain confidential and after the completion of the thesis it will
be destroyed. I was once again honest with my participants in those letters as I did not
promise them anything like rewards or money in exchange for the information that I was
going to obtain from them. Anonymity was guaranteed in an introductory part of the
questionnaire and also in their letters. The participants were once more allowed freedom
to withdraw from the study at any stage for any reason. Finally, participants were
provided with ethical declaration forms to put their signatures thereon after reading and
understanding the contents of the letters.

## 3.4 Methodological Issues

What is the criterion that has been used to judge the quality of this study? According to
Healy and Perry (2000 cited in Golafshani, 2003) the quality of a study in each paradigm
ought to be judged by its paradigm' terminology. Positivist research will use reliability,
validity, generalisability and objectivity to measure its rigor; while naturalistic or
interpretive research will employ credibility, dependability, transferability and
confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 cited Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This criterion
suggested by Lincoln and Guba is the one that is most appropriate for this study as

opposed to the conventional one of reliability, validity and generalisability. It is worth knowing why these positivist terms are not applicable for this study. By definition, reliability is

> ...The extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research in instrument is considered to be reliable (Joppe, 2000 cited in Golafshani, 2003:598).

The notion of replicability and repeatability of results is embedded in the above citation. This consistency of results is achieved by test-retest method at two diverse times (Charles, 1995 cited in Golafshani, 2003). However, Joppe (2000) noticed a problem with the test-retest method, which, according to her, can cause an instrument to be unreliable. She asserted that this method to a certain extent may sensitize a respondent about the content, thus influencing the responses given. On the other hand, consistency in qualitative research like the one in question is not achieved by means of replication as in positivist tradition; rather it is measured from the process and the product of the research during the process of "inquiry audit[ing]" by reviewers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:317). Although a questionnaire falls under quantitative tools, due to the nature of the questions asked in it, it is bound to use qualitative canons to judge its reliability. My supervisor is the first person to audit my data collection tools and also the data produced by them. In other words, he is the first person to review my research methodology and the results to see if there is any consistency in them and also if they are dependable.

The research instrument can be reliable but the same instrument may not be valid (Golafshani, 2003). However, Lincoln & Guba (1985 cited in Hoepfl, 1997) believed that validity cannot exist without reliability, whereas Kvale (1996 cited in Henning et al (2005) referred to these positivist terms as "scientific holy trinity." All these statements from these authors show that there is that interdependence among these terms. Validity too is one of the canons used in the positivist tradition to judge the quality of research. This has been well explained by Hoepf (1997) as the extent to which the results correctly describe reality. Then Joppe (2000) went a step further to argue that research instrument

is to be valid if it brings about the required results. However, validity is not the right term for a qualitative researcher who is looking for multiple truths/realities and attempting to present these multiple truths satisfactorily (Hoepfl, 1997). Since validity is not applicable in qualitative research like the one at hand, credibility is the most suitable term to be used in this study.

Credibility relies entirely on the thickness of data collected and on the analytical capability of the researcher (Patton, 1990). Furthermore, it is enhanced by triangulation (Cohen et al., 2000; Thomas, 2004; Stake, 1995 cited in Tellis, 1997). Since an interpretive researcher describes and/or interprets the phenomenon of interest from the participant's eyes, that very participant is the one who is capable of declaring the credibility of the results "member checks" according to Lincoln and Guba (1985 cited in Hoepfl, 1997). Credibility can also be achieved by allowing part of the raw information to be analysed by other people other than the investigator (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 cited in Hoepfl, 1997). Triangulation for a long time has been entrusted to improve validity, reliability and evaluate and/or control biasness in research (Mathison, 1988 cited in Golafshani, 2003; Golafshani, 2003; Stake, 1995 cited in Tellis, 1997; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Therefore, the credibility of this study has been enhanced by triangulating a questionnaire with documentary analysis and also their data; in other words, I have done what Patton (1990) and Denzin & Lincoln (2000) would call method triangulation and data triangulation. Besides triangulation, member checks will be employed to improve credibility of this study. However, the member check to be adopted in this study will not be one of taking results to the participants to corroborate them but it will be the one used by anthropologists and sociologists of inviting an outsider to read their field-notes and interviews transcripts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Nevertheless, in my case it will be my supervisor reviewing the raw data. The problems associated with that kind of member checks whereby the researcher takes the findings to participants to verify is that sometimes, the participant has left or migrated from that

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place where the study was conducted and therefore it becomes difficult to locate her/him. On other occasions, respondents refuse or become reluctant to be part of member checks and they will not be coerced to participate, as that will be unethical, since we have to conform to ethical principles (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Neuman (1997) furthered the argument of Denzin & Lincoln by saying, if participants agree to take part in member checks activity they are likely to have conflicting perspectives with the researcher because the results may portray them in an unfavourable way and also the descriptions do not tally with their expectations, and as a result, they might object to those results. Another canon utilised by positivist tradition to evaluate the soundness of its research is generalisation or external validity. External validity refers to the extent to which the findings/results can be generalised or applied across different settings or to a large population (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 cited in Hoepfl, 1997; Cohen et al, 2000; Picciano, 2004). Nonetheless, external validity is conceptualised by interpretivists as transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 cited in Hoepfl, 1997), while a naturalistic researcher would call it naturalistic generalization (Stake, 1978 cited in Tellis, 1997), Whereas Yin (1984 cited in Zucker, 2001) regards it to be theoretical generalization

Although generalisabilty and transferability have to do with the transfer of results from one context to other contexts, on the one hand, generalisabilty depends on or is determined by the sample size. The larger the sample, the easier it is for its results to be applied to a larger population. On the other hand, transferability is enhanced by thick descriptions of the research context by the researcher. Rich description is done to enable the reader to see the appropriateness of applying those results to a new context or setting of the same nature like the one under investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 cited in Hoepfl, 1997; De Vos et al., 2002; Cohen et al, 2000). Conventional principle of generalisabilty is not suitable for this qualitative case study whose units of analysis have been selected purposefully. What is most applicable for this study is transferability or naturalistic generalisation in the sense that the researcher has to provide a detailed description of the ways of assessment as they were given by teachers for the readers to

see their relevance to their contexts or situations and thereafter can apply them in their situations.

## 3.5 Methodological Limitations

Due to time constraints, the researcher failed to observe teachers when they assess learners formally, informally and authentically. Out of 28 questionnaires that were distributed only 14 questionnaires were returned and this is a threat to the credibility of the study. Some questions were left unanswered in some of the returned questionnaires and I could not coerce participants to answer all questions as that would be against ethical principles which I had to comply with. Some of the documents that I managed to get hold of contained information other than that of assessment, as they were not intended for investigation purposes.

## 3.6 Conclusion

The philosophical debate underpinning the inquiry has been dealt with at length. Definitions of key concepts embedded in paradigms, research design and methodology were given in this chapter. The distinction between research design and research methodology has been emphasised. The research design of this study has been spelled out extensively in this chapter. Methodological aspect of this research has been described in detail. Positivist 'trinity' reliability, validity and generalisability were replaced by interpretive terminology credibility, dependability and transferability and furthermore, their suitability in this study has been shown. The chapter ended with methodological limitations.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## RESULTS PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the research on how assessment is done by teachers teaching different subjects at Zenon high school in Lesotho. These results are made up of the data from a questionnaire and teachers' documents. Out of 28 teachers that were given questionnaires, only 14 teachers whose details are depicted in Table 4.1 returned them completed. Therefore, the results presented in this chapter have been drawn from 14 questionnaires, 14 lesson plans, 14 scheme and record books, 11 assessment record books and 9 learners' marked exercise books.

The fourteen teachers who participated are teaching these subjects: maths, physics, principles of accounts, business education, English language and literature, Sesotho, geography, agriculture, science and biology, all of which are taught in this school (see Table 4.1). Mathematics is taught by two teachers, one of whom teaches the subject from Form A-C (grades 8-10) and she also teaches physics in Forms D-E (grades 11-12) while the other teacher takes maths from Form D-E. Business education of junior/ secondary level (from Form A-C) and principles of accounts of high school level (from Form D-E) are taught by one teacher. Secondary English, which is English language and literature, is taught by four teachers whilst high school English which is only English language is taught by three teachers. One of these four teachers who teach English at secondary level also teaches Sesotho.

In addition to that one teacher who teaches English and Sesotho, two more teachers teach Sesotho. One takes it in all levels from secondary to high school level whereas the other one takes it at secondary level and she combines it with high school geography. Home economics is offered only at junior level and it is taught by one teacher. Two teachers teach religious education from Form A-E. Agriculture is taught by two teachers, and one teacher takes it at secondary level and combines it with high school biology while the

other teacher teaches it at high school level and he combines it with secondary science. This information has been summarized and/or clarified more in Table 4.1 below.

**Table 4:1 Sample Characteristics**

| Teacher | Age | Sex | Qualifications | Teaching Experience | Subjects Trained to Teach | Subjects Assigned to Teach |
|---------|-----|-----|----------------|---------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | 38 | M | BSC.AGRIC | 9 years | Agric | Agric + Science |
| 2 | 34 | M | BA + PGCE | 8 years | Ses + Eng Lit | Ses + Eng. Lit |
| 3 | 50 | F | BSC. AGRIC | 27 years | Agric | Agri + Bio |
| 4 | 43 | F | BED | 10 years | Accounting | Accounts + Bus Ed |
| 5 | - | F | BA | 5 years | Eng. Lang + Rel.Ed | Eng Lang + Rel Ed |
| 6 | 40 | M | BED | 9 years | Eng, DS + His | Eng Lang + Lit |
| 7 | 39 | M | BA.ED | 13 years | Eng + Geo | Eng Lang + Lit |
| 8 | - | F | BA.ED | 13 years | Ses + Geo | Ses + Geo |
| 9 | 37 | F | BA.ED | 11 years | DS + Ses | Ses |
| 10 | 44 | F | DIP.HE | 9 years | H. Econ | Home Scie |
| 11 | 28 | M | DIP.ED | 2 years | Rel Ed + Ses | Rel Ed |
| 12 | 35 | F | BA + PGDE | 5 years | Eng Lit + Rel Ed | Rel Ed |
| 13 | 40 | F | BSC.ED | 15 years | Physics + Geo | Physics + Maths |
| 14 | 48 | M | BSC. HONS | 20 years | Maths + Physics | Maths |

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## 4.1 How is the data for this study analyzed?

As I have indicated in chapter three, the analytical strategy that has been used in this study is the one suggested by Cohen et al (2000) and Hawe et al (1990 cited in www.nt.gov.au/health/healthdev/promotion/bushbook/volume/analyse) which is that of tallying responses. These tallied responses were organised in terms of major issues investigated in this study. These major issues are: assessment methods used by teachers, educational measurement utilized by teachers, assessment techniques employed in different subject areas, the nature and forms of feedback given by teachers and the reasons put forward by teachers for their use of various assessment techniques. Graphs and frequency tables too have been used to analysed data as recommended by Miles & Huberman (1984 cited Tellis, 1997). Content analysis has been made on teachers' lesson plans, scheme and record books, assessment record books and learners' marked exercise books. In short, the data have been analysed quantitatively by tallying responses and also qualitatively by reviewing teachers' documents.

Background information of the sample may be of help as I have stated in the methodology chapter. These teachers' profiles were explored to see whether or not there are any differences between male and female teachers in terms of the way they use assessment techniques, also whether teachers' qualifications and experiences have an influence on the way they assess. However, results from this study do not reveal any differences in the way males and females use assessment and the ways in which teachers assess are not so much influenced by their qualifications and experiences like the ones in Green & Stager's study (1987) where males were reported to be more positive towards all aspects of testing than females and also in Bol et al's study (1998) where experienced teachers (20 years and more) were reported to have been using alternative methods of assessment more often than the least experienced teachers (6 years and less).

## 4.2 Assessment Methods/modes employed by Teachers

The findings of this study reveal that all 14 teachers from various subjects assess formally. These results were expected given the fact that formal assessment in the form of tests and/or examinations is trusted for ensuring that the assessed task is indeed that of

a learner. It is done for the sole purpose of getting information about the learner; knowledge of the results is recorded and they determine the passing or failing of a learner. Teachers use it because it is easy to administer and its results can be instantaneous for both the teacher and the learner. Similarly, informal assessment appears to be used by all teachers in different subjects only because it is taken as part of everyday instruction; it is casual or spontaneous; thus, it does not need thorough planning and no credit is allocated to it. Nevertheless, predominance of informal assessment is discouraged on the grounds that it does not assess learners' learning effectively (Green & Mantz, 2002).

Continuous assessment is another form of assessment that seems to be used by teachers; however, the kind of continuous assessment practised is in the form of quarterly tests. These findings on continuous assessment are further confirmed by the way assessment record books that are used for recording learners' marks are formatted, for they are constructed in such a way that they reflect four quarters of the year. These results on continuous assessment verify what Sebatane's report (1985) that the kind of continuous assessment practised in Lesotho is by means of quarterly tests. It is this type of cumulative continuous assessment which is considered to be serving summative purpose rather than a formative one (Sadler, 1989 cited in Gipps, 1994). In addition to continuous assessment (CA) done on quarterly tests, other teachers also practise CA in their own times and this is illustrated in figure 4.1 in page 52.

**Fig 4:1 Different Periods of Continuous Assessment by 14 Teachers**
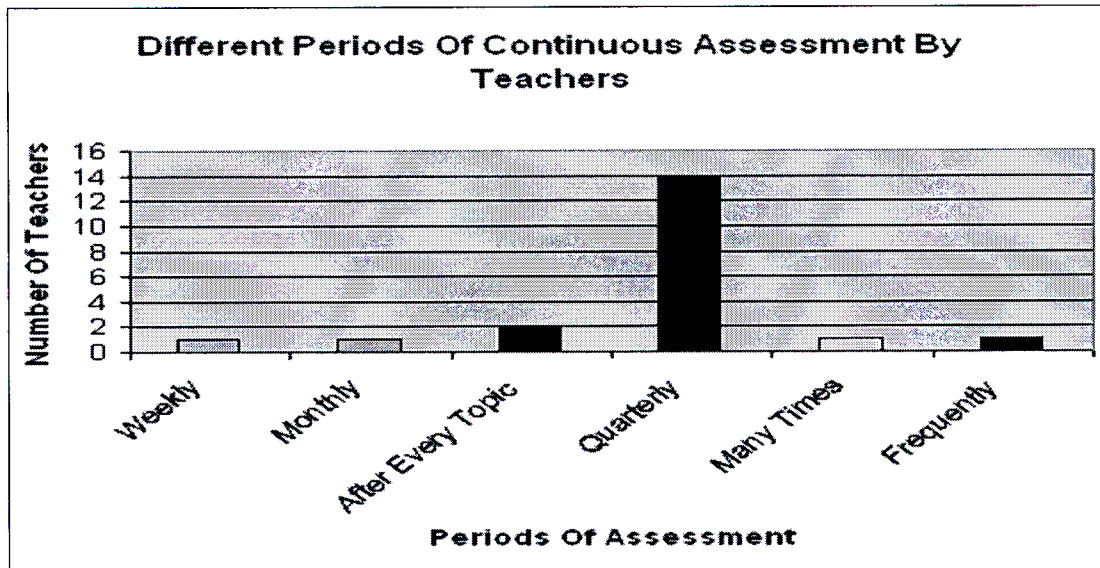


This kind of situation revealed by the findings (fig 4.1) on the usage of CA is what Sebatane (1985) referred to as lack of clarity of the concept continuous assessment by implementers and it is this kind of situation that stimulates decisions to be made on the acceptable frequency of assessment (Sebatane & Baholo, 1980 cited in Sebatane, 1985).

Apparently, a reasonable number (8) of teachers claimed to use self assessment as one of their classroom assessment practices. On the other hand, 6 teachers feel that there is no need for them to practice this form of assessment. Some of the reasons that they have put forward for not incorporating this form of assessment in their classroom assessment practices are: they are teaching large classes and, therefore, it is difficult to have feedback from each learner (3 teachers); two teachers indicated that they do not trust that learners can be honest with themselves and this reason is similar to the one that was given by one teacher in Nooman & Duncan's study (2005) who pointed out that learners are not always trustful in their assessment; they cannot be honest with themselves.

One teacher said that he does not practise self assessment because he does not understand it. These results suggest that a fairly large proportion of teachers use self assessment to develop their learners' abilities to think critically. That is one way in which they empower their learners to carry out assessment about themselves and also that is how they make them accountable for their own learning. These results are similar to the ones of Noonan & Duncan (2005) where they found that a large proportion of high school teachers used peer assessment and self assessment as part of their classroom practices. Nonetheless, these results are direct opposite of what Sumner (1985) found in his survey, where only six of the 97 schools practised learners' self-assessment.

Another mostly used assessment method, as revealed by the findings, is peer assessment. Thirteen teachers from all subjects are reported to be using it with the exception of one teacher, who regards it not good for weak learners because they normally feel exposed to their peers. Generally, teachers use this type of assessment casually to assess group projects, presentations, class exercises and small assignments because learners are not trusted to carry out that assessment whose grade determines the success of other learners. These results are possible, especially because peer assessment is identified as an integral part of formative assessment. Peer assessment is the way teachers increase learners' involvement in an instruction, increase social interactions and trust among learners. That is how teachers empower learners to carry out the task of assessment over other learners.

Group assessment appeared to be done by the majority of teachers (14) in all subjects. Teachers employ this assessment method for teaching interactive working techniques; it is easy to do and not time consuming because learners are assessed collectively. Group assessment is one way through which teachers increase the spirit of cooperation among learners and make scarce resources accessible to all of them. Thus, it is another way through which teachers impart collaborative skills, sharing skills, teamwork skills as well as leadership skills into learners. Teachers use this kind of assessment because it reduces the workload involved in assessing, grading and provision of feedback to individual learners. This assessment is more convenient for teachers as they are teaching large

classes. Teachers probably like it because it helps learners to develop a sense of responsibility and it is also one way through which teachers involve each and every learner in the instruction.

Basically, criterion-referenced assessment is used by teachers to assess the learners' mastery of educational and/or instructional objectives. A fairly large proportion of teachers (13) claimed to be using this assessment. It is not surprising, therefore, that these teachers who are using this type of assessment in their subject areas employ it to assess the extent to which the learners master their day-to-day instructional objectives. On the other hand, 11 teachers still consider norm-referenced assessment useful. This type of assessment is most appropriate for making decisions regarding the ranking, selection, sorting and placement of learners (Gipps, 1994). Most teachers using norm-referenced assessment are class teachers and, therefore, are employing it to rank learners into first class, second class and third class. Furthermore, they use it to select learners from one grade to another in internal classes; for example, the learners are selected from Forms A to B, B-C and from D to E. Heads of department use it to place learners after the results of form C (JC); those who managed to do well in maths and science are placed in a science class, while the rest are put in the class where they can pursue commercial subjects.

## 4.3 Assessment forms/Techniques used by Subject Teachers

Mathematics teachers pointed out that they assess by means of tests/examinations, class exercises and homework or assignments. Knowledge of mathematical concepts is a fundamental thing in the learning of maths and, therefore, the understanding and knowledge of maths means the understanding of these concepts. One technique used by maths teachers to assess learners' knowledge and understanding of these concepts is mastery testing (Adams, 1993). Understanding in maths is inferred. Thus, theories or models of understanding are constructed by internal systems of the mind; they cannot be observed directly, so a test or examination is the only appropriate technique that can assess that kind of understanding. This dominance of testing in mathematics was reflected by Lubisi's (2000) findings on South African lower secondary schools. The

results of Bol et al' (1998) study show that mathematics teachers were employing traditional methods of assessment, albeit to a lesser extent in comparison with the teachers in the other subject areas.

Besides tests or examinations, class exercises and homework/assignments are given to learners as a way of practice and even to assess them on what they have already been taught. Looking at the way mathematics is assessed, one can conclude that maths is assessed mostly by paper-pencil techniques, while other techniques such as classroom observations and oral questioning, seem not to be employed. These results have been corroborated by Suren (2004) who he indicated that the results of his study revealed that continuous assessment in mathematics (grade 12) at Ethekwini regions was dominated by paper-pencil strategies.

As I have earlier pointed out in the beginning of this chapter, about 14 teachers did not return their completed questionnaires, including chemistry teachers. That is to say, these results that have been presented are the ones of physics teacher only. Learners in physics are assessed by means of tests/examinations, class exercises, assignments, written presentations and practical demonstrations. These findings imply that physics learners are not only assessed by traditional written assessment techniques, but also by those techniques that require them to apply physics principles like practical demonstrations. According to physics teacher, practical demonstration helps learners to learn through handling and drawing conclusions. On the other hand, written presentation allows learners to express what they have presented in a written form.

Science, as I have shown, is offered at secondary or junior level. The results of this study show that one science teacher assesses by way of tests/examinations, oral questioning and assignments. This science teacher uses more of paper-pencil assessment techniques that require the learner to recall what he/she has been taught; in other words, these techniques demand the learner to reflect knowledge level, which is the lowest level of cognitive domain. Assessment techniques that need the learner to apply the acquired skills together with those that require extended time to accomplish like projects, observations,

laboratory work/ practical work and problem solving are not used. This kind of situation could be expected to happen, especially because this science teacher has never been trained to teach science yet he was assigned to teach it.

Assessment of learners in biology is made by means of tests/examinations class exercises, homework, oral questioning and practical work. Written assessment techniques in biology are used to assess biological facts, while practical work assesses various abilities and skills. This teacher employs practical work to assess the learner's ability to observe and record accurately what she/he has observed; the learner's ability to interpret observations is also assessed. This interpretation of observations involves both analytical and imaginative approaches in reaching conclusion as well as making some inference from the observations. Finally, practical work makes it possible for this teacher to assess the learner's manual skills or performance skills; that is, how the learner does an experiment/activity. This teacher seems to be not relying on traditional assessment techniques only, rather she is employing a number of assessment techniques, but assessment techniques such as research projects and presentations which are assessment techniques that require time to arrange and complete are still not utilized.

Written examinations/tests, class exercises, assignments, exhibitions and project work are all assessment techniques used by agriculture teachers to assess learners during the agriculture lessons. Practical projects at secondary level are in the form of practical work and it is through this practical work that agriculture teachers assess the learner's ability to apply acquired agricultural skills to construct a new product. It is worth noting that after the learner has been graded in a practical work his/her mark is added to the written examination mark and together they constitute his/her final mark and this happens in internal classes such as Form A & B. In the case of Form C (JC) the completed agricultural product is assessed through observation and an oral examination. Observation marks together with the oral examination mark are combined with the theory external examination mark and all will contribute to the learner pass mark. On the other hand, practical projects at high school level are not used to assess skills just like at junior level rather they act as data sources enabling learners to write research reports. In other

words, the learner's final mark is made up of the written examination mark and that of a research report.

Although tests/examinations and class exercises are used in home economics to assess learners, the prime assessment techniques employed are practical work and exhibitions/posters. Towards the end of third year of secondary level (JC), all sewn and knitted articles by learners are displayed and assessed. The mark that is normally derived from this coursework is added to the external written examination mark. Practical examination is conducted for the cookery part, and this is where the learner's skills and procedures for cooking are assessed. Similarly, the mark obtained during that practical examination is combined with that of external written examination. Exhibitions and posters are forms of presentation assessment or constructivist assessment which are commonly used by Agriculture and Home economics teachers. The teachers argued that these methods help learners to apply what they have learned. The use of exhibitions/posters and practical projects, both in the form of practical work and research reports by agric and home economics teachers has been anticipated by the researcher, as these subjects are the subjects with vocational/practical orientation whose main aim is to equip learners with real life or practical skills needed in the world of work.

A commercial subjects teacher assesses his/her learners through tests/examinations, class exercises, assignment and practical work. Project work, mostly done at a junior certificate level, requires the learners to engage in the buying and selling of goods, on a small case, mostly to their fellow learners. That the learners are engaged in business on a small scale is not a surprise given the nature of the subject (i.e. business education). The popularity of project work as an assessment technique among the commercial subject's teachers stems from the fact that it seems to be capable of making it possible for them to assess their learners on the application of acquired commercial concepts.

At high school level, however, the situation is different, as the assessment techniques mostly employed is the paper-pencil assessment technique. It is worth mentioning that commercial subject done at this level, as opposed to the one done at the JC level, is called

principles of accounts. The findings, as far as the assessment technique in this subject is concerned, failed to confirm Moseme's (2004) findings, which indicated that teachers teaching principles of accounts have shifted a bit from the traditional way of assessment to new way of assessment or authentic assessment.

Project work assessment is used by agriculture, home economics and business education teachers because they are convinced that this technique helps them to see how much learners can be involved in the learning activity. Teachers viewed project work as something enabling learners to practise and apply the acquired skills. They also indicated that assessment through projects gives the learners an opportunity to explore topics and draw conclusions themselves; that is, they (learners) get an opportunity to discover new information for themselves.

Assessment in English is done in various ways. All 4 teachers assess by means of tests/exams; three teachers give learners assignments and they also use oral questioning in their respective classrooms. Of the four teachers who teach English, Two employ report writing technique; the other two use performance technique (acting or role-play), while one allows learners to carry out debates. Tests/examinations are used in English language as well as in English literature (JC). Assessment in high school English language is mainly by written techniques, while at the junior level assessment is by paper-pencil techniques and performance techniques; that is, acting in the case of English literature and debates in the case of English language because English in junior level is divided into language and literature. As one English teacher stipulated, debates is one form of oral presentation he used to assess the learner's ability to express himself/herself and also to support his/her opinion with sound reasoning. Report writing is practised by English language teachers because they believed that the technique helps learners to develop report writing skill, which is mainly necessary in the world of work. These performance techniques (acting and debates) seem to be rarely used by English teachers possibly, because they are time consuming; they need thorough planning and require skilled markers.

In Sesotho, assessment is done by way of tests/examinations and oral questioning (3 teachers). Two of these three teachers also give class exercises and one teacher employs group presentations and music. Sesotho teachers claimed that they use music to find out whether learners can identify different parts of speech in songs. These presentation techniques are used to assess learners' capabilities to communicate what they have learned to others. Religious education teachers carry out assessment by means of oral questioning, assignment, class exercise, tests/examinations, presentations, drama and music. The paper-pencil techniques are possible in this subject because from junior level to high school level, learners are required to reflect the knowledge level of the subject.

The geography teacher claimed to use tests/examinations class exercises, oral questioning and assignments to assess her learners. Traditional written assessment techniques seem to be the ones used mostly by this teacher to the exclusion of other techniques, including presentations and practical projects.

The summary of assessment techniques used by teachers from different subjects has been given in Table 4.2 in page 60.

**Table 4:2 Assessment Techniques used by Teachers**

| Teachers | Techniques used |
| --- | --- |
| 1 | a, c, f |
| 2 | a, c, f, k, n |
| 3 | a, b, c, e, g |
| 4 | a, b, c, e, f, g |
| 5 | a, b, f, g, h |
| 6 | a, b, c, f |
| 7 | a, e |
| 8 | a, e, m |
| 9 | a, e, m, j |
| 10 | a, d, e, j |
| 11 | a, e, f, i, l |
| 12 | a, c, e, f |
| 13 | a, c, e, f, i, j, l |
| 14 | a, c, e, f, i, j, l |

Key: each letter represents an assessment technique used by the teacher

a- Written examinations/tests

b- Project work/practical work

c- Homework/assignments

d- Debates

e- Oral questioning

f- Class exercises

g- Exhibitions/displays

h- Poster

i- Music

j- Drama/acting

k- Written presentations

l- Presentations

m- Report writing

n- Practical demonstrations

The most popular assessment techniques, as depicted by Table 4.2, are written examinations/tests. These results are like these because teachers are certain that tests or examinations verify whether or not the intended lesson objectives have been attained. Teachers believe that tests/examinations help learners to identify their weaknesses so that they can work hard to improve. Teachers also claim that they use tests/examinations to gauge the learners' understanding of concepts and their teaching. Finally, they reported that they use examinations for promoting learners from one grade to the next and this confirms what has been reported in the ministry of education and training report (2005) that internal examinations in Lesotho are used for promotions of learners from one grade to another. Other possible reasons why tests or examinations are used by the majority of teachers is that they considered them to be valid, fair and objective. They are convenient to use and can be adopted and implemented quickly. They assess a large number of learners at once and they make learners controllable and this is confirmed by Kahn (2004) when he pointed out that teachers believed that traditional testing encourages learners' attentiveness and cooperation in the classroom. They also reinforce the kind of classroom behaviour that the teacher wants learners to show.

The second most used form of assessment as shown by Table 4.2 is oral questioning. These teachers use spontaneous oral questioning because they said it encourages learners to participate in the lesson and it also helps the teacher to find out how much learners understand as he/she proceeds with teaching. These results were anticipated because oral questioning is regarded as a teaching technique that has long been devised by Socrates. Both formal and informal questioning is taken to be a cornerstone of teaching and learning. Literature showed that questioning is second to teaching in popularity. Classroom teachers spend thirty-five to fifty percent of their instructional time asking questions. In a classroom situation, teacher's questions provide instructional cues; they

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give directions for what learners are to do and how to do it. Teachers are further convinced that oral questioning assesses the learners' knowledge, reasoning and attitudes. It assesses achievement of instructional objectives and it also motivates learners to become actively involved in lessons and it increases their understanding as well (Cotton, 2001).

The reasons given by teachers who use performance/alternative assessments like project work, presentations, exhibitions etc have supported what educationists have pointed out about performance/alternative assessment, as they said that it is an orderly attempt to gauge the learner's ability and to put into practice previous acquired knowledge (Stiggins & Bridgeford, 1982 cited Gipps, 1994). It requires learners to show the capabilities directly by making some products or involving them in some kind of activity (Haertel, 1992 cited in Gipps, 1994). It calls for heavy dependence on observations and/or skilled judgment (Mehrens, 1992 cited in Gipps, 1994).

However, more teachers appear to be hesitant to employ performance or alternative assessment techniques probably because they take time to plan and complete. They are not easy to administer and this argument has been confirmed by Kahn (2000), who indicated that teachers used constructivist assessment methods sparely, because they perceived them as making it hard for them to maintain learners' attention, cooperation and classroom control. Another possible reason why teachers are so reluctant to use these assessment techniques is that most teachers, if not all, lack skills of how to conduct them or probably they lack appropriate assessment tools like observation sheets to be used.

Class exercise is an assessment technique that teachers seem to be using mostly on the grounds that it helps them to find out whether each learner has grasped the concepts already taught, so as to provide remedy immediately to those who will appear to have problems. Furthermore, they reported to be using it to check how learners tackle problems. Homework/assignments are employed by teachers with the full understanding that they give learners that chance to make some little research on their work. The literature indicated that these two assessment techniques (class exercises and

assignments) are favoured by teachers because they enable learners to work in a relaxed atmosphere and, therefore, the responses provided are well thought of. They also allow learners enough time to practise what they have acquired. Dramatization or Acting is employed in English literature as well as in Religious education and in these two subjects, this kind of assessment assesses learners' capabilities to role-play certain characters in stories.

Other information from documents such as lesson plans, scheme and record books by teachers demonstrate that teachers do not include assessment in their daily lesson plans and even in their scheme books. However, few teachers appear to have been recording written tests in their record of work books. These results show that negligence on the side of teachers for not including assessment in their daily lesson plans while the recording of tests in those record books confirms that the only important type of assessment according to teachers is test or examination.

Comments made by teachers on assessment were that assessment is an instrument for diagnosing the strengths and weakness of both teaching and learning and as a result they suggested that it should be done frequently in order to provide remediation immediately; it is a two way communication in a classroom. Feedback is of great concern to teachers, this has been pointed out by one teacher that since they assess to advise and encourage learners to improve their learning, feedback is to be given immediately. On the other hand, teachers are aware of the terrifying effect of formal assessment, this has been shown by one teacher who indicated that sometimes formal assessment terrifies learners and this result in poor performance on the side of a learner and that poor performance does not necessarily indicate lack of understanding. To emphasize the necessity of assessment in education one teacher stated that "without assessing learners, an educator would be like a man walking in the dark forest without a torch."

In the light of these reasons and comments given by teachers, it can be concluded, therefore, that teachers are aware of why they are conducting assessment.

## 4.4 The Nature and Forms of Feedback given to Learners

An appropriate qualitative feedback enables a learner to monitor and improve his/her future performance. The data from the questionnaires demonstrate that all respondents (14) claim to be giving oral feedback, with only a few teachers giving it in a written form. However, these written comments, as reflected by the data from learners' exercise books, are not detailed enough. A few marked learners' exercise books (9) that I managed to go through proved what the data had shown about feedback, for in 5 of the 9 exercise books, only ticks were given for correct responses while a cross was awarded for the wrong answers without any written comments and the other remaining 4 books had sketchy written comments such as 'well done, repeat this exercise, make corrections'. There were negative comments such as 'untidy work, not clear, lazy, see me' were made. These findings show that what teachers are doing here is not in line with Gipps's (1994) idea of what feedback is. In other words, it is not a comprehensive factual thing indicating what the learner must do to improve his/her performance.

These results also disagree with what Bangert-Drown et al (1991) and Elawar & Corno (1985) referred to as the most helpful feedback on tests and homework, which, according to them, provides specific comments about errors. It again offers specific suggestions for improvement and encourages learners to focus their attention on the task, rather than on simply getting the right answer. In general, the kind of feedback offered to learners is of limited impact to the learners' learning, as it does not really give the learners a sense of what they have to do to improve their learning. The only information communicated to learners is that they have done well or they have not done well without showing the areas where they ought to improve.

In conclusion, teachers in this particular school use various assessment methods and techniques, but the most dominant way of assessment employed is formal written tests/examinations because teachers are convinced that it is the best way through which they can discover how learners have acquired what they have been taught. Feedback is given mostly orally.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the research problem, purpose of the study and the research question are all revisited. A summary of the findings provided and lastly, recommendations are given.

The problem under investigation was that Lesotho teachers were reported to be relying heavily on traditional form of assessment, which is formal standardized high stake tests and/or end-of-year examinations. It is this problem that led to the investigation of the assessment practices of Zenon high school teachers in the Berea district in Lesotho. The only research question that was to be answered by this study is "how do Zenon high school teachers assess across the curriculum?" The study has revealed that although a variety of assessment methods or techniques are used by teachers, but the most dominant assessment methods/techniques used are formal traditional tests or examinations as well as informal oral questioning. Continuous assessment is mostly done by means of quarterly tests as it has been indicated earlier on in the literature and also by means of class exercises, homework/assignments and coursework. Performance or alternative assessment is employed by a few teachers and these few teachers do not practise it continually.

The results further indicated that both criterion-referenced and norm-referenced assessments are used by teachers to measure the learners' performance. Feedback by teachers is superficial, for it is given orally and in a sketchy way. It can, therefore, be concluded that at Zenon high school teachers assess more summatively than formatively.

## 5.1 Recommendations

In the light of what the results or findings of this study revealed, I am making the following recommendations:

- There is a need for National Curriculum Development Centre to formulate an assessment policy that will provide schools and teachers with guidelines on how assessment must be conducted internally or at a classroom level. After an assessment policy has been made, schools too will have to formulate their own assessment policies aligned with that of national assessment policy for their internal use.

- Teachers ought to invest in classroom assessment, as it has been indicated in the literature that it is integrated in an instruction; it is more formative and it is aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning rather than assigning grades to learners.

- Continuous assessment, as has been demonstrated in the literature, is one way in which teachers are monitoring/ keeping track of learners' progress throughout the whole year. However, this continuous assessment (CA) seems to be not properly implemented as it has been pointed out by Sebatane (1985). This improper implementation of CA compels me to suggest the re-introduction of continuous assessment by National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC). This time, it has to be a planned activity. Furthermore, educational inspectors, heads of departments and head teachers or school principals should be orientated towards the use and proper assessment techniques to be incorporated in this type of assessment. After orientation, inspectors, school principals and heads of departments can communicate this knowledge about CA to educators, as together they can make CA successful.

- The findings revealed that teachers understand and do CA differently. Most teachers do it quarterly while others do it weekly, all these show that there is a lack of clarity about the concept CA and as a result, I appeal to NCDC to define the concept CA to implementers and also to determine the accepted number of times in which assessment can be done.

- Still on this issue of CA, continuous assessment's ratio to that of final examinations must be determined in terms of marks and it has to be shown in subjects' syllabi. This will reduce the degree of heavy dependence on end-of-year examinations as the only decider of the learner's achievement. It will, as well, enable teachers to do proper teaching by covering the whole syllabuses as against this teaching to the test practice that they are commonly doing.

- Regular monitoring and checking of teachers' lesson plans by inspectors, principals and heads of departments will be of great importance for making assessment successful in schools, as it has been demonstrated by the findings, that teachers seem to have forgotten to integrate assessment in their daily lesson preparations.

- Subject specialists ought to equip teachers with various assessment techniques, which teachers can use to assess learners in their different areas of learning as opposed to these paper-pencil tests/ examinations that appear to be the only assessment technique used in all subjects.

- Assessment tools such as observation sheets and the learners' profile files must be made available for teachers to assess and record various subjects and skills, unlike now where teachers are only provided with long hard cover exercise books for recording learners' marks. This kind of equipment provided to teachers indirectly encourages teachers to rely on tests or examinations that only award grades.

- Teachers must strive to assess authentically, for the literature has proved that authentic assessment as against traditional assessment, which concentrates on assessing the lower levels of cognitive domain, assesses the learner's ability to apply the acquired knowledge and skills. It examines the learner's collective abilities and it is more criterion-referenced than norm-referenced.

- The use of criterion-referenced measures/assessment by teachers is highly recommended by most educationists, as they feel that it assesses the learner's mastery and/or non-mastery of instructional objectives.

- An accurate assessment is only obtained by use of variety of techniques. The use of one or two techniques exclusively will not give an accurate picture of the learner's growth and development in any subject area, so teachers need to shift a little bit from traditional assessment techniques and implement as many different types of alternative assessment techniques as possible, so as to reach the learners with different abilities.

- The most helpful and constructive type of feedback from the point of view of educationists is a comprehensive qualitative feedback that provides specific comments about the learner's mistakes; that offers suggestions for improvement and that encourages the learners' to focus their minds on the task rather than on obtaining the correct answer.

- Teachers are advised to dedicate their effort more to doing formative assessment which monitors and improves on teaching and learning than to doing summative assessment which is only concerned with grading learners.

## 5.2 Conclusion

The results of this study provide a perspective on how assessment is conducted by teachers of different subjects at Zenon high school and they have revealed that teachers are still stuck in that traditional assessment of tests or examinations. It is, therefore, recommended that further research be done on how continuous assessment can be improved so as to serve the formative purpose and to reverse the current trend where it is serving the summative purpose.

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*Appendix A*



UNIVERSITY OF
**KWAZULU-NATAL**

RESEARCH OFFICE (GOVAN MBEKI CENTRE)
WESTVILLE CAMPUS
TELEPHONE NO.: 031 – 2603587
EMAIL: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za

29 JUNE 2006

MS. M TSILO (201505381)
EDUCATION

Dear Ms. Tsilo

ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL NUMBER: HSS/06206A

I wish to confirm that ethical clearance has been granted for the following project:

"An investigation of teachers' assessment practices at Zenoh High School in Lesotho"

Yours faithfully

MS. PHUMELELE XIMBA
RESEARCH OFFICE

PS: The following general condition is applicable to all projects that have been granted ethical clearance:

THE RELEVANT AUTHORITIES SHOULD BE CONTACTED IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THE NECESSARY APPROVAL SHOULD THE RESEARCH INVOLVE UTILIZATION OF SPACE AND/OR FACILITIES AT OTHER INSTITUTIONS/ORGANISATIONS. WHERE QUESTIONNAIRES ARE USED IN THE PROJECT, THE RESEARCHER SHOULD ENSURE THAT THE QUESTIONNAIRE INCLUDES A SECTION AT THE END WHICH SHOULD BE COMPLETED BY THE PARTICIPANT (PRIOR TO THE COMPLETION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE) INDICATING THAT HE/SHE WAS INFORMED OF THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT AND THAT THE INFORMATION GIVEN WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.

cc. Faculty Research Office (Derek Buchler)
cc. Supervisor (Dr. M Combrinck)

**TITLE: An Investigation of Teachers' Assessment Practices at Zenon High School in Lesotho.**

**A Questionnaire on Assessment Practices of Zenon High school Teachers**

Assessment is an important aspect of curriculum; therefore, teachers need to understand it in order to do it properly. This questionnaire which is to be completed by Zenon high school teachers seeks information on how teachers in their respective subjects assess. The data collected by means of this questionnaire will help teachers to understand more how assessment is done. Responses that will be given by participants will be confidential. Therefore, please feel free to answer all questions honestly; but do not write your name on this form. You are also at liberty to withdraw your participation at any time and for any reason.

**Background Information**

Age_____

Sex_____

Qualifications _____

Years of experience as a teacher_____

Subjects you have been trained to teach_____

Subjects assigned to teach_____

1. **Assessment Methods**

Please put a tick [√] inside the box for your answer

a) (i) Do you assess your pupils in a formal way?

  Yes [   ]

  No [   ]

(ii) If your answer is yes, in what ways do you assess pupils formally

_____

_____

_____

b) (i) Do you assess learners in an informal manner?

   Yes [ ]

   No [ ]

   (ii) If yes, which assessment techniques do you use?

   _____

   _____

   _____

c) (i) Do you use continuous assessment?

   Yes [ ]

   No [ ]

(ii) If yes, how often do you do that?

   _____

d) Do you give pupils end of year examinations?

   Yes [ ]

   No [ ]

e) (i) Do you sometimes give pupils an opportunity to assess themselves?(self-assessment)

   Yes [ ]

   No [ ]

(ii) If not, why not?

   _____

   _____

f) (i) Do you allow pupils to assess one another?(peer-assessment)

   Yes [ ]

   No [ ]

   (ii) If not, why not?

   _____

   _____

g) Is there any time that you assess pupils in groups?

Yes [ ]

No [ ]

h) How do you give feedback to learners? _____

_____

## 2. Points of References

Circle your answer

When assessing the learner, do you compare his/her performance against:

a) The set of pre-determined criteria

b) That of other learners in a group

c) Do them both

## 3. Assessment Techniques

Mention all assessment techniques that you use in your different subjects

_____

_____

_____

_____

For each assessment technique you have mentioned, state one reason why you use it

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. Are there other comments that you would like to make concerning assessment

_____

_____

_____

_____

**Assessment Techniques/Forms**

- Acting/Dramatization

- Assignments/Homework

- Class exercise

- Construction models

- Debates

- Exhibition/Display

- Music/song

- Posing questions

- Posters

- Practical demonstration

- Presentations

- Project work

- Research project

- Role-play

- Tests/Exams

- Written presentations e.g. reports

**Appendix C**

University of KwaZulu-Natal
Private Bag X03
Ashwood
3605
04 April 2006


District Education Officer
Department of Education Berea
Lesotho

Dear Sir/ Madam

I ask permission to conduct research at Zenon high school, which is one of the high schools in your district. I have already written consent letters to the principal of the above mentioned school and also to the participants which are teachers in this case. If you allow me, I will be conducting research on assessment practices of Zenon high school teachers, that is to say; I going to find out how teachers of that school assess. This study will not only equip Zenon high school teachers with various ways of how assessment is done, but even all teachers in the district will benefit.

If ever there is anything you do not understand in this letter, do not hesitate to contact me in this address: Mathabo Tsilo

Box 330
Mazenod 160
Lesotho
Home Tel: 22350591
Cell: 073751187
Email: mathabots@ yahoo.com

For further information concerning this research issue, I refer you to my supervisor in this address: Dr. Martin Combrinck

UKZN (Edgewood Campus)
Faculty of Education
Tel: 031-260 3688
Cell: 0837873688


Yours Faithfully

Mathabo Tsilo

**Appendix D**

University of Kwazulu- Natal
Private Bag X03
Ashwood
3605

04 April 2006

Zenon High School
P.O. Box 105
Sefikeng 224

Dear Participant

Could you please be sympathetic enough to participate in my study. If you will allow me, I will be investigating you on assessment procedures that you use in your classroom. The aim of finding out about your assessment practices is to understand how you assess. After my exposure in curriculum modules, I have gain more knowledge on how assessment is done; so I have decided to extend this knowledge that I have acquired to you my fellow colleagues with this study. At the end of this investigation you will be equipped with various methods and techniques of how assessment is done.

All what I ask from you is cooperation, for I will come to your school towards the end of April to give you questionnaire to complete and please fill it with honesty. After a week, I will come back to collect the completed questionnaire and also to analyse your assessment documents. Before analysing your assessment documents, I will request you to supply me with all those documents that you use for assessment.

Since I am a student and do not have money I will not pay you anything for assisting me. I assure you that the information you will provide me with will be confidential and after the completion of the thesis it will be destroyed. You are at liberty to withdraw from the study at any stage and for any reason.

If ever there is something that you feel you are not clear of in this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me in this address:

Mathabo Tsilo

Box 330
Mazenod 160
Lesotho
Home Tel: 22350591
Cell: 07375118
Email: mathabots@ yahoo.com

For further information concerning this research issue, I refer you to my supervisor in this address: Dr. Martin Combrinck

UKZN (Edgewood Campus)
Faculty of Education
Tel: 031-260 3688
Cell: 0837873688
Email: Combrinck@ yahoo.com

Thank you

Yours Faithfully

Mathabo Tsilo

Declaration

I.................................................................................(full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

**SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT**                                    **DATE**

**Appendix E**

University of Kwazulu- Natal
Private Bag X03
Ashwood
3605
04 April 2006

The Principal
Zenon High School
P.O. Box 105
Sefikeng 224

Dear Sir/ Madam

I ask permission to conduct a study in your school. I am doing Masters in Education in the above mentioned institution (UKZN, EDGEWOOD CAMPUS). If you will allow me, I would like to find out about the assessment practices used in your school. What I exactly want to find out is how your teachers assess pupils. This study will help your teachers to have a better understanding of how assessment has to be done.

If ever there will be any thing that you do not understand in this letter, please contact me in this address: Mathabo Tsilo

> Box 330
> Mazenod 160
> Lesotho
> Home Tel: 22350591
> Cell: 073751187
> Email: mathabots@ yahoo.com

For further information concerning this research issue I refer you to my supervisor in this address: Dr. Martin Combrinck

> UKZN (Edgewood Campus)
> Faculty of Education
> Tel: 031-260 3688
> Cell: 0837873688

Yours Faithfully

Mathabo Tsilo