

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents a summary of the main findings of this study, and the implications of the findings to CASS implementation. It will also present the conclusions and recommendations this study. The conclusions drawn are based on the problem, research questions and the objective of this study. As part of the conclusion, this chapter will briefly outline the recommendations as informed by the views of the participants.

#### **4.2 THE MAIN PROBLEM, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objective of the study was; to explore the understanding of the secondary school management teams of continuous assessment, the role of the secondary school management teams in the implementation of CASS, the kind of support provided by the Limpopo Department of Education, the successful experiences and challenges experienced by secondary school management teams in the implementation of CASS. In responding to the above questions, the study had to focus on what the literature say with regard to issues pertaining to curriculum and assessment change. In addition, the data collected through semi-structured and focus-group interviews, also provided answers to the research questions.

#### **4.3 MAIN FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY**

##### **4.3.1 Findings on participants' conceptual understanding of CASS**

Guided by the objective of this study which was to investigate the experiences of secondary school management teams in the implementation of CASS, my introductory question was aimed at getting insights as to the participants' understanding of the concept 'Continuous Assessment'. In addition, the questions were also aimed at eliciting

participants' views on the significance of this assessment policy, its introduction and implementation thereof in the South African education system.

The majority of the participants held the view that the introduction of continuous assessment and its subsequent implementation was a remarkable achievement in terms of transforming the South African education system. They indicated that the implementation of continuous assessment has marked a significant shift from the apartheid assessment policy which was summative in nature to an assessment policy which is formative in approach. In addition, participants demonstrated an understanding of what CASS is. They defined continuous assessment as an on-going process of gathering, analyzing and interpretation of learners' performance in order to assess their level of achievement. Participants further indicated that assessment in the current approach forms part of everyday teaching and learning activities.

They clearly demonstrated that assessment of learners in continuous assessment centres entirely upon learning outcomes. Participants described learning outcomes as goals that learners are supposed to achieve at the end of the learning process. They claimed that without written learning outcomes (LOs) educators cannot say whether the targeted skills or knowledge had been achieved or not. Participants also indicated that the attainment of the learning outcomes is assessed through formal and informal assessment tasks.

However, what has emerged from the collected data is that many members of the SMTs, particularly principals, lacked a clear understanding of what learning outcomes and assessment standards represent in the National Curriculum Statement. By implication, CASS calls for members of the SMT to demonstrate a sound conceptual knowledge of the principles underpinning this assessment policy. It is likely that this lack of conceptual knowledge of what learning outcomes and assessment standards represents in the NCS will compromise the educational objectives which had informed the development of this assessment policy.

#### **4.4. PURPOSE OF ASSESSMENT**

Although participants expressed different views on why learners are assessed, they had a common understanding around improvement of teaching and learning; provision of feedback; provision of remedial work to the learners and accounting to the parents.

##### **4.4.1 Improvement of teaching and learning**

The findings of this study have revealed that participants were clear of the fundamental objectives of regular (continuous) assessment of the learners' performance. In comparison with the traditional (past) evaluation practice in which assessment was mainly for promotional purpose, participants have unanimously agreed that the implementation of CASS has shifted focus from promoting learners to improving the process of teaching and learning. They indicated that authentic assessment should aim at assisting learners to discover their true potential by demonstrating what they know best. In addition, they said that assessment should assist learners realize areas where they are still lacking and also how they can make improvement in such areas.

##### **4.4.2 Provision of feedback and support to learners**

Participants agreed that another objective underlying continuous assessment is to provide feedback to the learners. They indicated that learning becomes meaningful and interesting only when learners are provided with meaningful feedback on how they performed towards achieving targeted learning outcomes. Participants claimed that feedback which is given as soon as possible after assessment has occurred influences the next step in the learning process.

#### **4.4.3 Provision of remedial work to the learners**

With regard to remedial work, participants have demonstrated a common understanding that the significance of recording, analyzing and interpreting the performance of the learners is to identify learners who have learning problems so that they could be provided with the necessary support. The collected data has revealed that the most commonly used strategy to support learners with difficulties in learning is the provision of extra-lesson.

#### **4.5 STRATEGIES USED TO SUPPORT LEARNERS WITH LEARNING PROBLEMS**

Although participants had different views with regard to the strategies they employ to support learners with learning problems or difficulties, they all agreed that giving extra-lessons and involving parents has made a great difference.

##### **4.5.1 Provision of extra-lesson**

It has emerged that struggling learners are identified and isolated from the main stream classes so that they could be given remedial work in a form of extra-lessons. Participants have indicated that learners with learning problems are given extra-lessons both in the afternoon and week-ends especially on Saturdays.

##### **4.5.2 Parental involvement**

Participants agreed that involving parents, particularly of learners who have a negative attitude towards school work, has proved to be a successful strategy in improving the performance of the learners. Details on parental involvement will be discussed shortly.

## **4.6 ADVANTAGES OF CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT**

### **4.6.1 CASS as an integral part of teaching and learning**

Participants demonstrated an understanding that, continuous assessment, unlike in the old curriculum, is not something that one thinks about at the end of a lesson, instead it must be an integral part of the planning, teaching and learning process. They indicated that this approach improves learning as learners are constantly provided with valuable information which makes them realize the limitations of their work, and in this way they are able to correct their mistakes while the learning process is continuing.

### **4.6.2 CASS is learner-centred in approach**

Participants agreed that the past evaluation practice was teacher-centered in approach and lacked clarity on what had to be assessed and also how assessment was going to be conducted. With regard to continuous assessment, participants agreed that the process is transparent and learner-centred as learners are made aware of the LOs which they would be expected to demonstrate at the end of the lesson. They indicated that it should not be assumed that, in the classroom situation, learners will automatically know the skills or knowledge they will be expected to demonstrate at the end of a lesson. Participants said learners should actively be engaged in discussion about the kind of criteria or learning outcomes they would be expected to demonstrate at the end of the lesson.

### **4.6.3 CASS uses various assessment methods**

The collected data has revealed that participants are aware of the fact that in continuous assessment, educators are required to create opportunities for learners to assess their own work through methods like self-assessment, peer-assessment and others. However, it has been found in this study that conditions in many schools within the Malamulele East Circuit are not created for learners to be actively engaged in classroom activities like self-assessment and peer-assessment. Participants claimed that they find it difficult to engage

learners in group work activities because classes were congested with educator-learner ratios ranging from 1: 50 to 1: 70.

This implies that in many schools learners were still seated in the traditional arrangement of desks in rows, with educators employing traditional teaching methods of standing in front of the class.

#### **4.6.4 Learners are assessed holistically**

Participants have agreed that one of the greatest limitations of the old assessment policy was that the performance of the learners was judged only on how learners had mastered the subject content. They claimed that this practice had compromised the unidentified or untapped skills of many learners through which they could have developed and earned a better living. In addition, although participants were aware that in continuous assessment educators are required to assess knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, it has emerged that participants were not clear of the kind of values and attitudes they were supposed to incorporate in their lessons and assessment activities. This implies that similar to the apartheid education system, the emphasis is still on the acquisition of knowledge. This compromises a central objective of CASS, which advocates that learners should be assessed holistically.

#### **4.7 DISADVANTAGES OF CASS**

The majority of the participants were in agreement that CASS is time consuming as it involves a lot of reading. They indicated that, consequently they usually spend much more time at school doing administrative work than teaching.

#### **4.8 FINDINGS ON THE ROLE OF THE SMT IN CASS IMPLEMENTATION**

Participants in this study have indicated the following managerial responsibilities for the SMT are as being central for the successful implementation of CASS.

#### **4.8.1 Planning for the availability of support materials**

Participants have agreed that as part of their planning, the SMTs have the responsibility of ensuring that educators have all the required policy documents for the successful implementation of CASS. However, it has emerged that despite the availability of these documents in schools, there were educators who are not following the assessment guidelines when drawing lesson plans and setting formal tasks.

In addition, participants had a common understanding that the SMT has the responsibility of ensuring that there is a School Annual Assessment Plan to co-ordinate and manage the administration of formal tasks. They emphasised that it is mandatory that a school must have the Annual Assessment Plan not only for internal use, but also for monitoring and the provision of support by District or Provincial officials.

#### **4.8.2 Managing in-service training for educators**

With regard to in-service training, participants agreed as members of the SMT that they sometimes organize in-service training, more especially for newly appointed educators to induct and provide them with knowledge and skills required for the successful implementation of CASS.

#### **4.8.3 Managing and supervising educators' work**

It has emerged that participants in this study agreed that it is the responsibility of the SMT to ensure that educators have work schedules and lesson plans for effective teaching and learning. They emphasized that managing and supervising educators' work must include the control of learners' portfolios in order to see if learners are assessed and provided with meaningful feedback on a regular basis.

#### **4.8.4 Managing classroom visits**

Of the six selected secondary schools for data collection in this study, only participants from two secondary schools indicated that at their schools there is a school development plan which provides for the development of staff members. They indicated that under the leadership of the principal they always ensure that classroom visits are conducted once per term. In contrast, it has been found that members of the SMT in the other four secondary schools do not conduct classroom visits because educators consider such activities a fault finding mission and degrading.

#### **4.8.5 Managing school based assessment moderation**

Participants have unanimously agreed that conducting school based assessment moderation is a central activity for the successful implementation of CASS. They indicated that it is their responsibility as members of the SMT to ensure that formal tasks are moderated before they are given to the learners. In addition, participants were in agreement that it is also part of their managerial duties to ensure that scripts of the learners are moderated after they have been marked by educators. They believed that this helps them to see if educators are following the marking guideline when marking the scripts and also if marks were allocated as indicated in the marking guideline.

### **4.9 FINDINGS ON THE SUPPORT PROVIDED TO THE SMT BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

#### **4.9.1 Support before the implementation process**

With regard to the support provided by the Limpopo Department of Education before the implementation process, the majority of the participants, particularly deputy principals and heads of departments, agreed that they attended a one week workshop organized by the Limpopo Department of Education. However, it has been found that many principals were not provided with training.



Participants further revealed that the trainings provided were ineffective because the time allocated for such training was too short. The implication is that educators who attended the workshops went back to their schools after training without in-depth conceptual knowledge of how CASS should be implemented. The findings of Jansen & Christie (1999) in the study conducted in KwaZulu-Natal and the Mpumalanga Province showed that the training was one short workshop per grade without follow-up. This has serious implications, since without a deep understanding of the classroom dynamics which came along with CASS, many educators are likely to resort to the traditional methods of teaching and assessment.

#### **4.9.2 Support provided during the implementation process**

Participants have agreed that in an attempt to provide them with the necessary skills and knowledge for the successful implementation of CASS, the Limpopo Department of Education, through Curriculum Advisors, organizes one-day workshop (usually once per quarter) at the circuit for the provision of support to the SMT. They indicated that the underlying aim is to provide members of the school management teams with skills and knowledge mainly to conduct school based assessment moderation. However, participants were concerned that the support provided was not enough for the successful implementation of CASS, as other critical aspects, for example, provision of support to learners learning difficulties, are being ignored at the expense of school based moderation.

### **4.10 FINDINGS ON THE SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCES OF THE SMT**

#### **4.10.1 Producing quality results in Grade 12**

It has been found that the majority of the participants, as was the case during the apartheid education system, were still using Grade 12 results as a yardstick through which they measure their success with regard to the implementation of CASS. They indicated that the fact that learners in Grade 12 were passing in great numbers was

evidence that their internal assessment standard was equivalent to the external examination accredited by Umalusi. It has also emerged that traditional concepts like ‘passing’ and ‘failing’ were still dominant in minds of majority of the participants. This further confirms the earlier contention that some of the educators are still trapped in the traditional assessment practices.

#### **4.10.2 Conducting school based assessment moderation**

Participants indicated that, although they were not provided with proper training as members of the SMT for managing and provision of classroom support to educators, they were at least able to conduct school based assessment moderation.

### **4.11 FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF CASS**

Although participants had divergent views on what they attributed their successful experiences to, they were in agreement on the following:

#### **4.11.1 Reading policy documents**

The majority of the participants, particularly principals, attributed their success in the implementation of CASS to extensive reading of the policy documents. They indicated that since the majority of them did not receive training, they had no option than to read pamphlets and booklets distributed by the Limpopo Department of Education on CASS.

#### **4.11.2 Support from the educators**

The majority of the participants attributed their success to the support they received from educators, particularly those who had an opportunity of attending the one week workshops.

## **4.12 FINDINGS ON CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY THE SMT IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CASS**

### **4.12.1 Lack of parental involvement**

Participants agreed that parents have a critical role to play in both the successful implementation of CASS and the improvement of the performance of learners. However, participants were concerned that majority of the parents of the learners in secondary schools in the Malamulele East Circuit were not actively involved in the implementation of CASS. Participants attributed this to lack of functional literacy amongst the majority of the parents.

### **4.12.2 Over-crowding**

Participants unanimously agreed that educators were unable to engage learners effectively in assessing their work, due to over-crowding. They claimed that in a classroom where learners were approximately seventy, they found it practically impossible to create opportunities for the learners to assess their work. This has a serious implication for the successful implementation of CASS as the situation compromises assessment methods like, peer-assessment, self-assessment and group work activities which are critical for improving the performance of the learners.

### **4.12.3 Poor command of the language of teaching and learning**

Participants were in agreement that the majority of the learners in schools in the Malamulele East Circuit were unable to express themselves in the language of learning (English). They indicated that CASS, being learner-centred in approach, requires extensive reading on the part of the learners. The failure of the majority of learners to express themselves proficiently in English hinders them from exchanging ideas with other learners, which is vital in improving their understanding of the subject matter.

#### 4.13 RECOMMENDATIONS

The introduction of the Continuous Assessment policy in the South African education system has arguably had an impact on the role of the secondary school management teams. It is against this background that the underlying objective of this study was to investigate the experiences of secondary school management teams (SMT) in the implementation of CASS. This investigation was informed by the following critical issues with regard to the SMT, namely, the conceptual knowledge of CASS, their successful experiences, challenges and their role in the implementation process.

Guided by the findings of empirical investigation, the implications and conclusions drawn in this study, the following recommendations are made:

- (a) Principals, deputy principals, and heads of department should be provided with extensive training for a period longer than a week in order to get a deep conceptual understanding of this assessment policy. A deep understanding of complex and broad concepts like CASS cannot be achieved in one week. It is only after an extensive training that an ideological shift from the traditional evaluation practice to the modern approach in assessment can be achieved. Guskey (1991) contends that dynamic responses to diversity do not emerge if the training and orientation are restricted to policy goals. Instead, the training should be of in-depth nature that takes on board theories about knowledge and relationship between theories and practice.
- (b) Curriculum Advisors should also be provided with extensive training which goes beyond the knowledge of conducting school based assessment moderation. This would enable them to provide the SMT with the kind of support which in practice illuminates and assists learners to improve their performance. Naicker (2003) maintains that it is difficult to orientate or train others if one does not possess a sound understanding of the epistemological issues and how they impact on thinking, practices and transformation in general.

- (c) The support provided by the Curriculum Advisors should not be limited to conducting workshops for the SMT. Instead their visits to schools should be extended to classroom practices so that they could be able to see if the classroom dynamics comply with current approaches of teaching and assessment.
- (d) The Limpopo Department of Education must ensure that schools have adequate resources, like classrooms or enough educators in order to address learner congestion. This would enable educators to have a reasonable number of learners in class to engage in group work activities.

#### **4.13.1 Recommendations for future research**

Although the objective of this study, was to investigate the experiences of secondary school management teams in the implementation of CASS, like in any study, other contentious issues with regard to CASS, although outside the scope of this study, emerged. In the light of this, I would therefore recommend that the following pertinent areas with regard to this assessment policy be further investigated

- (a) One of the limitations of this study was that there was no female participant amongst those selected principals interviewed for this study. I would have preferred to get the views of female principals on how these changes in curriculum and assessment impacted on them, unfortunately, by the time this study was conducted, all the secondary schools under Malamulele East were led by male principals. My understanding is that the impact of change varies from one individual to another on the basis of gender, cultural background and racial lines.
- (b) I would also recommend that the research sample be expanded and include schools located in urban areas and former model C. This would enable the researcher to collect rich and quality data which would be representative of a wider population (demographics) of South Africa.

- (c) I have noted it with a great concern that the findings of this study would have been conclusive if I had used in-depth individual interviews as the only data collecting method for all the selected participants or interviewees. One of the limitations of focus groups (used as one of the data collection tool in this study) is that some of the participants have the tendency to hide behind the ideas of other participants when responding to some of the questions.
  
- (e) In consideration of the findings that attributes like values and attitudes are largely ignored when learners are assessed, the experiences of educators and learners in the implementation of continuous assessment would be an interesting topic for further study. A topic like this would provide reliable data with regard to how educators conduct classroom activities like peer-assessment, self-assessment and group assessment in the classrooms which are characterized by over-crowding.

#### **4.14 CONCLUSION**

The collected data revealed that there is still continuation of the apartheid perception of using the final examination marks or percentages as a benchmark for measuring the performance of the learners. This, in practice, is in contrast to the fundamental objective of CASS, which is to develop learners holistically. If the kind of support provided to schools by the Department of Education through the Curriculum Advisors, continues to focus on capacitating the SMTs to conduct school based assessment moderation as revealed by this study, the situation will remain the same for years to come. In addition, the Department of Education must ensure that the focus of the support provided to schools shifts from moderation to assisting the SMTs to understand their role, particularly with regard to the classroom situation. Hopefully, through such an endeavor, the SMTs and educators would begin to realize how assessment methods like self-assessment and peer-assessment not only play a critical role in enhancing the performance of the learners, but also in the development of learners.