

**EXPLORING TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES OF CONTINUOUS
ASSESSMENT IN
ENGLISH WRITING LESSONS IN SELECTED MALAWIAN SECONDARY
SCHOOLS**

**M. Ed. (CURRICULUM AND TEACHING STUDIES-LANGUAGE EDUCATION)
THESIS**

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UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

AUGUST, 2023



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EDUCATION) THESIS**

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Submitted to the Department of Curriculum and Teaching Studies, School of Education,
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Education in Curriculum and Teaching Studies (Language Education)

University of Malawi

August, 2023

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned hereby declare that this thesis is my original work which has not been submitted to any other institution for similar purposes. Where other people's work has been used, acknowledgements have been made.

Full Legal Name

Signature

Date

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis represents the student's own work and effort and has been submitted with our approval.

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DEDICATION

To all my dear family without forgetting anyone

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank the Most High God for giving me life, wisdom and strength as I was writing this thesis.

Secondly, special thanks should go to my main supervisor Associate Professor Allan Lipenga and Co-supervisor, Dr Amos Chauma, Senior Lecturer. They made demanding and complex issues look simple and interesting when approaching them. They never gave up on me, and always encouraged me through their constructive advices to move on and in the long run led to the successful completion of this thesis.

I owe great gratitude to my fiancé, Juliet Chaula for the support and understanding.

ABSTRACT

The standards of writing in English language among the Malawian secondary school students remain unsatisfactory judging from the Malawi National Examinations Board (MANEB) Chief-Examiners' reports on English language, despite the implementation of continuous assessment. Therefore, the purpose of this exploratory study is to explore the knowledge and practices of continuous assessment by secondary school teachers of English language while assessing writing skills. The participants in the study were 8 teachers of English language from 4 different conventional secondary schools in Blantyre urban, Malawi. Adopting a case study approach and mixed research methodology, and using the 6 + 1 Trait Writing Model by R. Culham, data was generated through multiple instruments that included semi-structured interviews, questionnaire, classroom observation and document analysis. The qualitative data was analysed through Thematic Analysis (TA). In addition, the quantitative data was analysed through frequencies tabulation and percentages computation. The findings of the study show that the knowledge of the principles of continuous assessment by the participants was insufficient. The findings further reveal that most of the teachers inappropriately put these principles into practice to help students enhance their writing skills. The implication is that teachers should re-examine their focus on the practice of continuous assessment to assess all the traits of writing. They should also provide scoring rubrics when designing writing tasks. Furthermore, they should frequently report the feedback of continuous assessment of writing and hold correction sessions with students, and they should plan writing lessons based on the students' writing needs diagnosed in the continuous assessment. Finally, the heads of departments of English language need to provide well prepared handbooks of continuous assessment to improve teachers' knowledge on how students' writing abilities would be assessed.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CA	Continuous assessment
CATS	Curriculum and Teaching Studies
CAS	Continuous Assessment Score
CDSS	Community Day Secondary School
Covid- 19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
DEM	District Education Manager
EDM	Education Division Manager
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
IDI	In-depth Interview
JCE	Junior Certificate of Education
MANEB	Malawi National Examinations Board
MSCE	Malawi School Certificate of Education
MoEST	Ministry of Education Science and Technology
MIE	Malawi Institute of Education
OBE	Outcome-Based Education
PCAR	Primary Curriculum and Assessment Reform
SWED	South West Education Division
SSCAR	Secondary School Curriculum and Assessment Reform
TA	Thematic Analysis

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Chapter overview

This chapter lays foundation for the entire thesis. It presents the background to the study, statement of the problem followed by research questions, purpose of the study and significance of the study.

1.2 Background to the study

1.2.1 Malawi government's policy on continuous assessment

In the Malawian educational system, before 2004 there was no clear written policy directive regulating educational assessment (Chulu, 2009). Chulu (2009) stated that there were no assessment guidelines from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) to inform practices in order to help a large number of unqualified teachers who were in the system. Therefore, what was available were school-level policies developed by individual schools to guide assessment practices within their schools (Chulu, 2009).

However, in recent years, in striving to assure quality education, the MoEST has made an attempt to integrate continuous assessment into its curriculum reforms. For instance, the policy document called Secondary School Curriculum and Assessment Reform (SSCAR) was introduced in 2009 (MoEST, 2009). The introduction of SSCAR resulted into the implementation of a new curriculum in 2017. This curriculum embraces Outcome-Based Model (OBE) which is based on the learner-centred approach.

Historically, Chiziwa and Kunkwenzu (2022) stated that OBE in Malawi was dominantly modelled on the curriculum of South Africa educational system and one of the design features of this OBE is continuous assessment (Jansen, 1998).

1.2.2 Definition of continuous assessment

Continuous assessment (CA) is interchangeably called formative assessment or assessment for learning. It is an assessment that is administered in the process of teaching. CA is part and parcel of teaching instructions. It is defined as assessment in which learners have to be assessed in what they are able to do and display in each learning activity rather than assessing them at the end of the term (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Yolooye, 1984). Specific to the teaching of language, Brown (2003) defined CA as the evaluation of students in the process of forming their competencies and skills of language. In general, CA is one of the assessment methods by which teachers monitor and evaluate students' language learning, progress and abilities during each lesson.

The integration of CA in the new curriculum is indispensable. The issues of CA are incorporated in the new curriculum to improve the quality of secondary education in Malawi because of concerns over declining school pupils' examination scores (Chirwa & Naidoo, 2014). Furthermore, there has been an increased interest among the education community to develop relevant and effective assessment methods. It is idealised that effective methods helps teachers understand what learners know, understand and can do (Mchazime, 2003). Therefore, the result of analysing pupil CA scores by teachers leads to teachers taking pedagogical actions for greater pupil learning. Hence, the introduction of a policy of CA in secondary schools by MoEST is a measure of improved quality in assessment in all the subjects, and English language is no exception.

1.2.3 Continuous assessment in English language

English language plays a pivotal role in various aspects of life in Malawi. In Malawian educational system, English language is used as a subject as well as a medium of instruction

in secondary education. The syllabuses for English language Forms 1 through 4 state clearly that language skills or core elements (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are supposed to be taught and learned in English language lessons. These general core elements are stressed in the “Preamble” of the national syllabuses for English (2015, p.xi). English language is a skills subject. In order to communicate successfully in English, students need to practise all the language skills integrated with grammar and literature.

These syllabuses suggest teaching, learning and assessment methods such as question and answer, class discussion, debate, pair work, group work, individual work and teacher observation. It can be assumed that not only appropriate teaching strategies matter but more so the assessment techniques, especially continuous assessment if the purpose is for learning rather than of learning (Stoynof, 2012). The syllabuses are built on the Communicative Language Approach which embeds both fluency and accuracy in language use. CA is a strategy that the teacher can use to correct, support and guide learners in language acquisition, development and improvement through scaffolding. Therefore, all the core elements that have been emphasised in the English syllabuses, ideally are supposed to be consistently assessed using CA.

Chiwaya (2005) stated that many teachers of English language use CA to mainly assess writing skills. This is because writing skills provide a permanent record of performance and the national examinations mostly focus on writing skills. Even though it is hoped that students will develop writing abilities since writing in English language is usually used for CA, it seems that majority of secondary school students are hardly able to produce a comprehensive piece of writing (Mbano, 2004). Thus, the English language writing competence of students is unsatisfactory for their level. Kuthemba-Mwale (2000) and Mbano (2004) found that students were not developing writing skills in larger classes of community day secondary schools.

In the same line of reasoning, the Malawi National Examinations Board Chief Examiners' reports of 2020 and 2021 stated that a good number of students who wrote Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) and Junior Certificate Examination (JCE) examinations performed poorly on writing questions such as report writing, composition writing, letter writing, speech writing, summary writing and essay writing (MoEST, 2020, 2021). The reports further stated that the problems were rooted in the inadequate orthographical rules, fragments or ran on sentences, incomprehensive vocabulary (fail to understand the meaning of some words), deprived punctuation marks, unnecessary use of proverbs translated from vernacular language, impoverished grammatical items, misplaced signalling devices and disorganised layout. To surmount these challenges, the report recommended that teachers should frequently use CA to assess writing skills.

1.3 Statement of the problem

The main factor that motivated the study to focus on Malawian secondary school teachers' knowledge and practices of CA in writing classes is the researcher's experience. From practical observation and experience as a secondary school language teacher, when the researcher was recruited by MoEST, he was not involved in any in-service training (continuous professional development) to enhance his competence and practices of CA. Only a handful of teachers especially the Heads of Departments were involved in intermittent in-service training. Worse still, the researcher was not given a school-based guidance on CA. What is clear is that progress reports normally but not always are distributed to teachers to record the performance of students in the CA activities. This profound experience raised the curiosity of the researcher to appreciate the knowledge and practices of CA in writing lessons. This is because the effective implementation of CA in writing classes depends largely on teachers' awareness of the principles of it (Carless, 2007).

CA is famed for helping students to master writing skills (Burner, 2016). MoEST has introduced CA in the Malawian educational system to improve performance of the

students. In spite of this, a lot of Malawian students are not developing writing skills at a promising pace according to MANEB Chief Examiners' reports on English language. Many secondary school teachers of English language often do not provide adequate writing practices because they seemingly fail to comprehend the principles of CA. Teachers' knowledge and practices of CA could be one of the contributing factors to insufficient writing practices. This is because teachers do not often provide adequate writing practices (Kuthemba-Mwale, 2000; Mbano, 2004). Teachers need to have knowledge on how to create, implement, administer CA and finally communicate results to students in a valid and reliable way as possible (Weigle, 2007). Yet this area remains less explored in Malawi.

1.4 Purpose of the study

This exploratory study seeks to document teachers' knowledge and CA practices (or their lack thereof) among secondary school teachers of English language writing lessons in selected secondary schools from the South West Education Division (SWED). The major purpose was to understand in depth teachers' knowledge and practices of CA in writing lessons. The study considers teachers who implement principles of CA in English writing lessons to assess students' writing abilities to be competent. CA is powerful instructional approach which helps teacher to identify the gaps in students' writing proficiency level. The effective implementation of CA depends on the teachers' knowledge of it. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore in depth CA implementation in writing lessons so that the researcher has a better insight of teachers' knowledge.

1.5 Research questions

The present study answered the following main and specific research questions:

1.5.1 Main research question

The main research question was:

How do secondary school teachers understand and practice CA in English language writing lessons?

1.5.2 Specific research questions

The study was guided by the following specific research questions:

1. What is the secondary school teachers' understanding of CA in assessing writing skills?
2. How do secondary school teachers of English language assess writing skills through CA?
3. What factors do secondary school teachers consider when designing CA to assess writing skills?
4. How do secondary school teachers of English use results of CA?

1.6 Significance of the study

The previous studies in Malawi focused on how writing was taught in large classes in the community day secondary schools (Mbano, 2004). However, as argued in the introduction, it seems there is only miniature literature that provides evidence on how writing in English language is assessed using CA in secondary schools of Malawi. Therefore, this study is significant because the findings will contribute new knowledge to the existing knowledge of assessment of writing in English language classes in Malawian secondary schools. This may prove to be significant for teachers of English language for better implementing of CA in writing lessons to develop writing skills among students.

This study will also help curriculum developers to evaluate to what extent does new curriculum which integrated CA is being implemented. CA is the new assessment culture in Malawi. The principles that govern CA are therefore new to teachers. The study will present findings with proof as to how teachers are implementing them. That is, the findings of this study will act as the basis on which curriculum developers will evaluate the effectiveness of the principles of CA in the Malawian educational system with the view of

identifying possible deficiencies and root causes that can lead to corrective action. In this way it may contribute in providing some practical suggestions for curriculum developers for the better ways to implement CA at secondary schools.

1.7 Thesis structure

The thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter one has introduced the problem of the study. Chapter two reviews literature and discusses the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Chapter three presents research methodology of the study and its justifications. Chapter 4 presents and discusses the findings of the study. Chapter 5 concludes the thesis and presents the implications on the findings of the study.

1.8 Chapter summary

The chapter has provided the background to the study which has laid the basis of the whole chapter. It has further discussed issues of CA in English language syllabuses and the researcher's experience of CA. The second part has given the statement of the problem, research questions, and the purpose of the study, and significance of the study. The next chapter discusses the literature review and the theoretical framework that guided the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Chapter overview

This study aims at exploring teachers' knowledge and practices of continuous assessment in writing lessons; but before doing so, there must be a sort of literature review which summarizes all the important issues related to CA. This chapter reviews literature on the purposes of CA in English language lessons, teachers' knowledge of CA and how teachers use different types of writing to assess traits of writing. It also discusses the assessment desired qualities that teachers consider when designing CA of writing. The chapter also discusses the teacher feedback practices. Further, the chapter deals about the model that guides the study and its application. Finally, this chapter conceptualizes CA.

2.2 Review of relevant literature

2.2.1 Purposes of CA in English language lessons

Different scholars agreed that the primary purpose of CA is to make interpretations and decisions about students' language ability. For example, Cheng, Rogers, and Hu (2004) found that CA in language education is advantageous because it can act as a monitor of and a guide to the progress of the English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching programs. Brown (1984) and Madsen (1983) concurred with Cheng, Rogers and Hu (2004) that CA of the language skills and competencies are a very important part of the language teaching process.

This is because CA provides teachers with natural environments in assessing writing skills since it is basically a vital part of the teaching-learning process and hence it creates good opportunity to provide immediate feedback on students' written work (Brown, 2004).

Another aim of CA is to motivate students for more ESL learning. For instance, Heaton (1975) reasoned that CA which sets out to measure a student's performance as fairly as possible, without in any way setting traps for him or her, can be effectively used to motivate the student. It is assumed that the students' motivation correlates positively to their learning process. Therefore, through the CA process, the ESL students can compete with each other to get the best grades of evaluation, as CA is the indicator of the student's achievement (Heaton, 1975). Hence, this motivation is expected to lead to more participation and involvement from the student in the ESL teaching and learning process.

Some scholars concluded that CA creates positive attitudes in students towards the process of teaching and learning of language. For instance, Black and Wiliam (1998) deduced that the data yielded from the CA process can be used for developing the student's positive attitudes towards the language teaching program. These positive attitudes towards the instructional program can be helpful in developing students' ESL skills and competencies which are the objectives of the program. Therefore, students can have these positive attitudes if they find that the CA process is based on what they are taught in the second language program. Consequently, they will give the instruction the due interest. For instance, Lee and Coniam (2013) as cited by Tony Burner (2016) found that students became more positive to writing after the implementation of CA. Consequently, students showed improvement in their writing.

In addition to these studies, Madsen (1983) found that CA can be used for increasing a student's learning rate. This is because since ESL students' language competencies are periodically and continually measured in the CA process, the students must study regularly for the CA practice. Consequently, they learn more. Madsen (1983) claimed that CA can

benefit students by helping them master the language. They are helped when they study for the CA especially when these examinations are returned and discussed.

With regards to the purpose of assessment of writing using CA, Tesfaye (2020) summarised that it can be used for a variety of appropriate purposes which monitor what students actually do while writing and providing feedback to students on specific aspects of their writing and providing assistance to students. It is also used primarily as means of improving teaching and learning by using multiple assessment of writing activities including written summaries and written letters.

Bachman and Palmer (1996) as cited in Weigle (2002), concurred with Tesfaye (2020) that the primary purpose of writing assessment is to make inferences about the students' language ability (performance), and the other is to make decisions based on the inferences. Bachman and Palmer (1996) determined that the decisions may be either to report the students' level of learning (summative purpose) or to plan remedial actions in order to fill the learners' learning gaps. In regard to this decision-making, Parr, Glasswell and Aikman (2007) stated that CA helps teachers to know where learners are, to locate their strengths and identify gaps in order to make teaching decisions about next steps, including what to build on what to revisit.

It is well documented that CA plays a crucial role in English writing lessons. González (2018) stated that the EFL continuous assessment of writing plays an integral part to both students and teachers for language development. González (2018) pointed out that CA for the students helps to improve their text through brainstorming, drafting, revising and editing, among others. In other words, CA allows students to reflect on their work and implement suitable remedies for meaning to be conveyed. For the language instructor, washback, the effects that CA can have on teaching and learning (Brown, 2007; Hyland, 2004) may not only have learning and teaching consequences but can also result in academic changes that can bring upon positive or negative effects. This point is well

articulated by Huot (2002) cited in González (2018) who stated that CA may provide language teachers a window to understand their students and their own teaching practice. Huot (2002) stated that:

My message to teachers is that the proper and intelligent use of assessment can provide them with the opportunity to learn rich, useful information, about their students, pedagogy, and programs'. Therefore, allowing improvement to be a result of language assessment. (p.20)

With the special attention on the principles of CA, Lee (2011) conducted a study on the implementation of CA in the EFL writing classes. The study focused on the systematic nature of CA. The findings showed that students became more positive and motivated towards CA of writing (Lee, 2011).

In the Malawi educational system, MoEST is using CA as a measure of improved quality in assessment. SSCAR speaks of CA as a tool for improving assessment techniques to improve education quality in terms of current and future goals (SSCAR, 2009). Additionally, CA is used as an objectivity verifiable indicator of the extent to which quality assessment tools at school level are developed in Malawian primary schools. For instance, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST) in collaboration with the Malawi Institute of Education (MIE) adopted a curriculum reform, called Primary Curriculum and Assessment Reform (PCAR). In this reform, a programme of CA in primary schools was introduced in 2001 (Miske, 2003). This reform was introduced after discovering poor assessment practices in many Malawian primary schools (Mchazime, 2003).

Scholars who conducted studies of CA in primary schools found out that CA was not successfully implemented due to lack of understanding of its principles (Hares, 2013; Chulu, 2013; Miske, 2003). For example, Chulu (2013) noted that primary school teachers

in Malawi had poor knowledge of classroom test construction, reliability and validity, although they had positive attitudes towards using CA. Other reasons that were cited as a challenge to the successful implementation of CA in primary schools were inadequate teaching and learning resources as well as large classes (Hares, 2013; Chulu, 2013; Miske, 2003).

2.2.2 Teachers' knowledge of CA

Reports from previous studies demonstrated that successful implementation of CA in English writing lessons depends on teachers' understanding of the principles that guide the administration of CA. Some scholars contended that teachers' understanding of the principles of CA proved to be crucial for the implementation of CA (Lee & Coniam, 2013; Brown, 2004). Goodrum, Hackling and Rennie (2005) cited in Desta, 2019) ideally argued that:

The practice of continuous assessment at the secondary school levels is the product of teachers' awareness as one component. Since, without having sufficient awareness on the principles and purposes of CA, it is difficult to effectively practice it in the classroom. (p.1)

Research showed that teachers of English language have insufficient knowledge about the mechanisms of designing quality assessment tasks. For example, Fleming and Chambers (1983) conducted a survey of teachers' written classroom assessments and came to the conclusion that teachers' test items were of low quality according to principles of good item writing. Specifically, what characterised these items were ambiguity as well as an inclination to rely primarily on recall rather than on higher-order thinking skills. Over all, teachers were found to be deficient in devising quality tests, a finding that testifies to teachers' low assessment literacy levels (Fleming & Chambers, 1983).

Previously, Wise (1993) further conducted a study which consisted of a direct analysis of teachers' self-constructed tests. Wise (1993) found out that these classroom tests revealed

frequent violations of common question writing guidelines. The study also consisted of ratings by classroom teachers, principals and supervisors of classroom teachers that identified needs for a variety of testing competencies. Teachers expressed a high need for competencies including the use of test results for instructional purposes (Wise, 1993). Overall, they reported that they needed training in the following: grading and scoring activities, identifying pupil strengths and weaknesses, and training in test validity-related competencies including matching questions with objectives, writing questions that trigger the use of higher order thinking skills, and measuring the true progress of pupils (Wise, 1993).

Burner (2016) conducted a study on formative assessment of writing in English as a foreign language. He investigated how four teachers and 100 students responded to the new emphasis on formative assessment (continuous assessment) in English as a foreign language (EFL) writing classes in Norway. He found out that there were contradictions prevalent amongst teachers' and students' perceptions of formative assessment of writing. The contradictions revolved around feedback, grades, text revision, self-assessment, and student involvement. Burner (2016) concluded that the identified contradictions suggested the need for developing a mutual understanding of formative assessment in order to make it useful and meaningful. He further stated that using assessment for formative purposes relied not only on the teacher's understanding of CA, but also on the student's mutual understanding to make CA useful and meaningful and in order to fully exploit formative assessment as a tool for learning (Burner, 2016).

In a similar vein, Desta (2019) investigated the EFL teachers' awareness and practices of CA in writing classes. The participants of his study were 5 teachers and 120 students at Dembecha secondary and preparatory school in Ethiopia. The findings indicated that the grade 9 EFL teachers' awareness towards the principles and purposes of CA were insufficient. Based on the findings, Desta (2019) concluded that the participating teachers of English did not properly practise CA in their school. He also stated that although there were various assessment techniques in assessing writing skills, a few of them were

practised in the writing classes. With regard to the provision of feedback, Desta (2019) found out that teachers did not properly provide feedback to students in teaching and learning of writing.

Some scholars conducted studies with the intention of evaluating the practice of comprehensive nature of CA in terms of the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of students' behaviour. Osadebe (2015), for instance, conducted a study to evaluate the extent to which CA was practised by university lecturers in Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria. The evaluation of CA focused on the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of students' behaviour. A sample of 200 lecturers was randomly selected using simple random sampling and stratified random sampling techniques. A 5-point scaled questionnaire was used as an instrument to collect data. The data collected were analysed. The research questions were answered with the use of mean. The result of evaluation revealed that the extent to which university lecturers practise CA with emphasis on the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of students' behaviour was low. Osadebe (2015) concluded that there should be a continuous and effective monitoring of CA practice by the university lecturers. The work of Osadebe (2015) has moderately inspired the present study.

2.2.3 Skills assessed using CA in writing classes

Forsido (2011) explored the most dominant language skills that Grade 11 English teachers gave more emphasis on in assessing their students' performance or improvement. The site of the study was in Alamura and Tabor Preparatory Schools, Hawassa City Administration. To achieve the objectives of the study, Forsido (2011) designed a descriptive survey. The participants of the study were 26 grade 11 English teachers from Alamura and Tabor secondary and preparatory school in Hawassa City Administration. He selected the participants by using purposive sampling technique. The data were collected through archival document analysis, semi-structured interview and questionnaire and analysed using frequency, percentage and narrative analysis. The findings indicated that there were differences between teachers in implementing CA. This is the case as some teachers gave

more emphasis to grammar skill in assessing students' performance than others (Forsido, 2011). Hence, Forsido (2011) concluded that CA was not fully implemented as desired. It was recommended that teachers should need to have a clear plan to meaningfully implement CA and should balance all language skills in assessment.

In the same line, Lachachi (2016) conducted a study on assessing the writing skills in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) context. The main objective of this research work was to provide information about the methods and strategies applied for the assessment of the writing skills of the first year Masters' students of Immunology at the Department of Biology at the University of Tlemcen, as well as the difficulties encountered by students while writing. To carry out the study, Lachachi (2016) used different research instruments to collect the necessary data including questionnaire, semi-structured interview and an English test. The results obtained revealed that the most frequent difficulties encountered by ESP students while writing were their lack of vocabulary, problems in grammar and spelling mistakes. Therefore, based on the results obtained, she suggested some important measures to be implemented to ESP instruction in order to help students to improve their writing performance.

2.2.4 CA techniques used in the language classroom

Scholars pointed out that teachers use different techniques to assess students according to what each CA measures and what purpose it serves in measuring the student's language skills. For instance, Benzehaf (2017) found out that high school teachers who worked in El Jadida region used a varied number of CA techniques ranging from homework assignments to in-class written tests. Additionally, Forsido (2011) stated that progressive appraisals, which are formative in their nature, were used for evaluating language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. The purpose of progressive appraisal focuses on evaluating the progress of each learner during the process of learning language skills and follow up of his/her degree of improvement he or she achieved by the end of each lesson (Forsido, 2011).

Researchers investigated the effectiveness of different forms/types of assessing writing in EFL classes in Iran (Elahinia, 2004; Nezakatgoo, 2005; Javaherbakhsh, 2010). For instance, Ketabi (2015) examined the popularity of different forms of assessing writing in EFL classes in Iran. Specifically, she examined the frequency of forms of assessing writing among teachers of adult and young adult learners in Iran and also investigated the difference in the frequency of the forms used by two groups of teachers. The research tool used in this study was a questionnaire. The data gathered were scored and analysed. She found out that the most common forms to assess writing were writing essays and dictation among teachers of adult and young adult learners respectively. She concluded that assessing writing through different methods proved to be useful.

In the same quest, Mosmery and barzegar (2015) used different types of continuous assessment to investigate their effects on the writing performance of learners. Thus, Mosmery and barzegar (2015) studied the effects of peer, self and teacher assessment on Iranian's EFL writing at three different task level difficulties which were named as easy, medium and complex. To achieve the purpose of this study, Mosmery and barzegar (2015) selected 81 learners out of 117 and afterwards they were grouped in three, peer, teacher and self-assessment group. The learners were trained on the writing in English as a foreign language. After the training, they were asked to write in three different levels of difficulty (easy, medium, complex). The results showed that self-assessment was the most beneficial and preferable method used over three groups.

2.2.5 Factors to consider when selecting CA techniques for language classroom

Researchers in language assessment found that teachers considered a number of factors when they wanted to identify the techniques to implement CA to assess students. For instance, Cheng et al, (2004) found out that classroom assessments were determined by factors such as total strengths of students in an English language class, influence of formal testing and the role of classroom assessments in the overall learning process. The study

also reported other significant indicators of complexities of classroom assessment including nature of the English language course, students' language proficiency level, and teaching experience of the instructor.

2.2.6 Factors to consider when designing CA of writing

Students' successful performance on CA tasks greatly depends on how well teachers design those tasks. The primary consideration when designing CA of writing tasks is determining the purpose for which students are asked to write (Miller & Crocker, 1990). Stiggins, Alter and Chaipais (2004) stated that CA as a classroom practice must always be driven by a clearly articulated purpose. Thus, it should specify that either it is for learning or of learning and must arise from and accurately reflect clearly specific and appropriate achievement expectation. Accordingly, CA practice is said to be sound only when it is conducted for some purpose, sets achievement expectations in advance, employs comprehensive assessment methods, gather accurate student results and conveys meaningful information to stakeholders (Stiggins, Alter & Chaipais, 2004).

In a study by Miller and Crocker (1990), it was pointed out that when language teachers designed CA of writing to help students successfully fulfil a writing task, it was necessary to specify the conditions of the task. In other words, the teacher needs to provide students with steps and clear instructions on what they have to do and how they have to carry out the task (Miller & Crocker, 1990). Specifying the steps and instructions reduces the task complexity by structuring it into manageable chunks, thus increasing successful task completion (Miller & Crocker, 1990).

Regarding designing CA of writing tasks, the study carried out by Low (1982) showed that the five principles of practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, and washback go a long way towards providing useful guidelines in designing assessment tasks. These findings were supported by Lombard (1986) which proved that validity and reliability of multiple choice effectively was used to assess writing proficiency in ESL. The objective, multiple

choice method, was compared with a subjective and essay method. The multiple choice test was found to be a more reliable and valid method of testing writing proficiency, yet there was a correlation between the objective and subjective techniques used, indicating that both approaches tapped similar skills (Lombard, 1986).

In the context of assessing writing, teachers need to use an appropriate tool which helps them in assessing students' writing performance. The judgment of student work is inevitably a subjective one on the teacher's part (Stansfield & Ross, 1988). To reduce teacher biasness and increase the value of CA, a clear set of criteria must be identified and then applied consistently to each student's samples of writing. Instructors found that a well-designed rubric (or scoring scale) can provide such a tool in promoting accurate and reliable CA of writing (Weigle, 1994). Rubric is an important tool to be prepared by the teachers in order to give an objective score. Urquhart and McIver (2005, p. 31) argued that rubrics are very effective CA tools because they describe specific levels of performance. Besides, rubrics also explain the students' performance clearly. Research also supported the use of rubrics when designed writing tasks because they clearly communicate expectations for both teachers and students (Urquhart & McIver, 2005).

Holistic rubrics and analytic rubrics are the two main types of rubrics. The emphasis in holistic rubrics is on what a student does well. Weigle (2002) argued that holistic scoring has an advantage to focus on the students' attention on the strengths of their writing, not on their deficiencies. On the other hand, analytic scales are divided into separate categories representing different aspects or dimensions of performance. For example, dimensions for writing performance might include content, organisation, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. Each dimension is scored separately, and then dimension scores are added to determine an overall score. Weigle (2002, p.114) stated that "in analytic scoring, scripts are rated on several aspects of writing or criteria rather than given a single score depending on the purpose of the assessment." Analytic rubrics provide more detailed information about students' ability.

2.2.7 The teacher feedback practices

The researchers conducted studies focusing on the use of feedback for formative purposes. Feedback is viewed as a pedagogical tool for improving the teaching and learning of writing. For instance, Beyene and Mariam (2014) conducted a study to assess the implementation of CA in Jimma College of Teacher Education of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing classes. One of the specific research questions was intended to assess the frequency and types of feedback provisions that were being implemented in the College. To conduct the study, Beyene and Mariam (2014) employed a mixed method design. The research population were 40 student-teachers and 10 EFL teacher-educators of the college. The data were collected through questionnaire, interview and classroom observation. After analysing the data, they found out that CA activities were being practised. However, Beyene and Mariam (2014) established that the research participants only provided the quantitative type of feedback within unfair time interval. They have also found out that there was a high influence of the summative tests over a variety of assessment procedures.

To appreciate the type of feedback of students' essays that teachers provided to students in higher education, Bouzidi (2009) conducted an investigation at Ibn Zohr University. To collect data, the researcher investigated 2000 marginal and end comments on student essays. Therefore, the collected data was analysed in terms of their linguistic features and their intended pragmatic effect on the students. Then, the researcher took a second look at the revised drafts of the essays to gauge the effects the comments had on the students' revision and to assess the extent of improvement that occurred as a result of the comments. The conclusion made was that the comments were mainly form-based rather than content-based, the most-focused-upon aspects being spelling, punctuation and neatness/appearance of paper while more important aspects like thesis statement, related ideas and development of ideas, for instance, did not obtain equal attention by the teachers (Bouzidi, 2009). Consequently, the impact of such comments was restricted to some structural changes while the overall essay quality did not improve.

2.2.8 The practices of CA in Malawi schools

In the Malawi, some researchers conducted studies on how writing in English language is taught. For instance, Mbano (2004) conducted a study titled *The Teaching of Writing in Large Classes: A Study of How Writing in English is taught in Community Day Secondary Schools*. The purpose of the study was to understand how the conditions in the classrooms impact on lesson procedures and activities in a large class during writing lessons of English. He found out that the development of writing skill in English in the large classes of CDSSs was almost impossible. Even though he showed that students were taught on how to write, he was quiet on the understanding and practices of CA by the teachers of English language he studied.

The literature on assessment of writing in Malawi secondary schools also established that there is no relationship between teacher variables and the nature of assessment. Chiwaya (2005) investigated relationships that might exist between the teacher variables of professional qualifications, length of teaching experience, sex and age and the techniques that the teachers used to assess and provide feedback to the students. She found that there were no clear cut relationships between selected teacher variables and the techniques that teachers use for assessment and feedback.

In an effort to substantiate whether CA was indeed practiced by teachers in Malawian primary schools, Miske (2003) conducted a study entitled *Introducing formative assessment in Malawi: challenges and opportunities*. The study aimed at examining the role of CA in Malawian primary schools as a tool to raise standards of quality of education provision and making suggestions for its improvement. The findings of the study showed that there was no evidence that Malawian primary schools had any formal systems of CA in place. Additionally, Chirwa (2015) also conducted a study entitled *Continuous assessment in Expressive Arts in Malawian primary schools*. The purpose of this study was to investigate Expressive Arts teachers' understanding, experiences and practices of CA in a selection of six state primary schools. The findings of the study revealed that teachers'

practices were characterised by an informal, technical form of assessment that privileged rote recall of facts and meeting bureaucratic requirements.

By and large, five conclusions can be drawn from the literature review: first, the value of continuous assessment is paramount in helping students improving their writing abilities; second, continuous assessment uses different types of writing to assess different traits of writing; third, quality feedback improves students' writing works; fourth, teachers consider a number of qualities when designing continuous assessment; and teachers' continuous assessment literacy levels are low.

To sum up, with respect to research in Malawi, using of CA to assess writing abilities in English language writing lessons is still under-researched. Additionally, the few studies surveyed in Malawi did not focus on teachers' knowledge and practice of CA in English language writing lessons in secondary schools. Accordingly, research addressing teachers' knowledge and practices of continuous assessment in secondary schools is highly desirable. This provides the rationale for the present study. In other words, literature on writing in Malawi secondary schools is silent about the use of CA to assess writing skills in English language lessons. Therefore, this study intended to explore the knowledge and practices of CA by teachers of English language in assessing writing skills in selected secondary schools in Malawi.

2.3 Theoretical framework

The study was informed by the 6 + 1 Trait Writing Model advocated by Ruth Culham (2003). The 6+1 Trait Writing Model supplemented language curriculum as it a means designed to help in theorizing and evaluating the structures of adequate writing (Graham & Perin 2007). The 6+1 Trait Writing Model is one of the frameworks adopted by teachers from all walks of life to aid in assessing the qualities of writing. This model was developed in response to teachers' needs for an assessment tool that was closely linked to effective

writing instruction. Therefore, the model is as an approach to classroom assessment of student writing that provides students and teachers with more structure to understand how to write well (Culham, 2003).

Historically, 6 + 1 Trait Writing Model was built on the descriptive and theoretical work of Diederich (1974) and Purves (1988) who were instrumental in moving the educational research field away from holistic assessments to classroom-based analytical assessments of student writing to meet the needs of teachers for diagnostic assessment data on which to base their instruction.

2.3.1 Facets of the 6 + 1 Trait Writing Model

The 6+1 Trait Writing Model is based on a set of rubrics that assess different characteristics of a piece of writing. The main focus of 6+1 Trait Writing Model is on using rubrics to provide students with feedback through continuous assessment, and teacher feedback at different phases of the writing process (Marzano, 2003). Thus, a key component of the 6+1 Trait Writing Model is the ongoing use of rubrics (scoring guides) to provide feedback to students on their writing. Feedback is provided through self-scoring, peer scoring, and teacher scoring of student writing. By employing this model, teachers provide students with criteria for developing writing skills by providing a clear explanation of why students received the score they did (Culham, 2003). It is used to offer teachers as well as learners a structure for feedback.

The 6+1 Trait Writing Model is designed to help teachers assess student writing through an analytic approach by focusing seven traits that characterize quality writing (Culham 2003). Teachers have to use the traits to assess student writing to understand what students know and can do. They have to use all the traits all the time. The traits tell students what they are doing well and what they still need to work on. And they give teachers an effective instructional road map. The traits are helpful here because they offer a common language for assessing and talking about writing. The following traits represent the crucial

components of writing: ideas, organization, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, and presentation. The traits are explained briefly as shown in the table 1 below.

Table 1: The following seven traits that characterize quality writing

Traits that characterize quality writing
1. Ideas make up the content of the piece of writing—the message
2. Organization is the internal structure of the piece—the thread of meaning and the logical pattern of the ideas.
3. Voice is the soul of the piece. It is what makes the writer’s style singular, as his or her feelings and convictions come out through the words.
4. Word Choice is at its best when it includes the use of rich, colorful, and precise language that moves and enlightens the reader.
5. Sentence Fluency is the flow of language and the sound of word patterns.
6. Conventions represent level of correctness—the extent to which the writer uses grammar and mechanics with precision.
7. Presentation relates to form and layout—the physical appearance of the finished work.

Table 1 shows seven traits of writing that can help teachers in different classrooms and grade levels to communicate with students about writing using a common set of expectations and descriptors (Culham 2003). Therefore, by using these scores keyed to each trait of good writing, teachers could reinforce successful writing practices and, using those same data, they could design new instructional lessons and strategies to address areas where students were not as strong.

As already discussed, the 6+1 Trait Writing Model to assessment of writing is based on the analytic approach. The analytic approach to assessment in the 6+1 Trait Writing Model is consistent with Popham’s (2003) four criteria for instructionally effective assessments: Firstly, significance derives from the fact that the areas of measurement were a synthesis of what expert writers considered the most important aspects of good writing. Secondly,

teachability is shown by the evolution of the analytic assessment model into a valuable teaching tool. Thirdly, describability has been ensured by the development of scoring guides that describe in detail the characteristics of each level of performance and the provision of samples of student work to illustrate these characteristics. Fourthly, reportability is accomplished by the specific levels of achievement indicated by the scores for each trait. When developed as a continuous assessment which is the ongoing strategy, the model becomes an embedded part of the teaching-learning cycle and makes no additional intrusion into class time, satisfying the non-intrusiveness criterion which is the fifth one.

The ideologies and practices of 6+1 Trait Writing Model are based on continuous assessment. A key focus of the 6+1 Trait Writing model is to help teachers to provide effective feedback to students in the continuous assessments. Recent development of the 6+1 Trait Writing Model focused on classroom instruction and the use of the traits to help students plan and revise their writing, through the use of the writing trait rubrics for continuous assessment on student writing (Culham 2003). Graham and Perin (2007) supported this assertion by stating that learners' writing skills do not grow over time or having aspiration but it grow through planned training. The 6+1 trait method suggests tactical training in the different traits of writing. This tactical training is integrated in mini-lessons instruction and applied during individual conferencing. Therefore, writing continuous assessments based on the 6+1 Trait Writing Model could potentially be used to screen students at risk of failure on statewide assessments of writing performance.

The 6+1 Trait Writing Model integrates instruction and continuous assessment and provides a wide range of specific strategies and materials for teachers to use in teaching writing. Hence, this model use instructional strategies to provide teachers with a range of activities to engage students in learning about the traits, to provide direct instruction on each trait, and to provide continuous assessment feedback to students. Some of the instructional strategies that provide the framework for writing instruction in the 6+1 Trait Writing Model are listed as shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Instructional strategies

Instructional strategies
1. Teaching the language of rubrics for writing assessment.
2. Reading scoring papers and justifying the scores.
3. Giving students writing assignments to respond to effective prompts (that is, prompts that are engaging to students and provide adequate structure, guidance, and context to elicit detailed responses).

Table 2 shows instructional strategies that The 6+1 Trait Writing Model can use to facilitate the integration of assessment with instruction. It integrates evaluation with the teaching process for realizing the seven traits of decent writing. In the 6+1 Trait Writing Model, teachers use a range of activities to support classroom instruction on the writing traits and to engage students in learning about and practicing the use of the traits in assessing, and revising their writing. In summing up, trait-based writing instruction is based on the use of a set of rubrics (scoring guides) to describe and assess different characteristics of written works (Graham & Perin 2007).

2.3.2 Implication of the 6+1 Trait Writing Model to the Study

The 6+1 Trait Writing Model informed this study since it helped in the designing of data generating tools and analysing data. This is because the model suggests what is supposed to be assessed in the CA, how the assessments must be designed and graded. Additionally, the model also suggests the usage of feedback of writing task to inform their instructional strategies. Therefore, teachers' practice of CA reflects whether they assess traits of writing which is the focus of the syllabuses for English language.

2.4 Conceptualization continuous assessment

2.4.1 Principles of continuous assessment

In this study, CA constitutes the effectiveness of the implementation of its principles. The principles of CA were necessary for this study because they assisted the researcher to verify if indeed teachers understood and put them into practice in writing classes. They also helped in the formulation of data generating instruments for this study.

Firstly, CA is systematic if the teacher lays down well in advance what should be assessed, the time of assessment, the criteria for assessment, varieties and types of assessment (Ughamadu, Onwuegbu & Osunde, 1991; Yoloye, 2009; Faleye¹ & Adefisoye, 2016). Students are also expected to be informed in advance by the beginning of the school term about the nature of continuous assessment. This is the reason some schools include CA plan in their calendar of events. Secondly, CA is comprehensive in nature when it ensures that different assessment techniques/tasks are employed by teachers at different times in the quest for continuous assessment score (CAS). CA is comprehensive in nature in the sense that it assesses every aspect of the learners' qualities such as the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of the students' behaviour (Faleye & Afolabi, 2007). The affective qualities that could be factored in to assessment include class attendance, punctuality, attitude to school work or subject activities, neatness, respect for rules and regulation, cooperation with colleagues, leadership qualities, courage, perseverance, effort at knowing and many others.

Thirdly, CA is cumulative in nature since there is continuity in the collection and assessment of data. The cumulative nature of CA necessitates that the average CAS of every student in a particular session is carried over to the next class level till the last class of the school level (Faleye & Afolabi, 2007). Therefore, the final CAS of any student at any level of schooling is the composite of all the CAS obtained from time to time in a particular term and this is carried forward till the end of school year as the average score

that is to be sent out to either the ministry or any of the examination bodies for use as part of the final certification score for the student (Faleye & Afolabi, 2007). Finally, continuous assessment is guidance oriented in the sense that it offers data which can be employed to direct the students to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills so that they grow and develop in the right direction (Ughamadu, Onwuegbu & Osunde, 1991). This information can be collected if teachers give feedback of continuous assessment. Therefore, continuous assessment is effective if feedback is obtained after every assessment activity in the school. The giving of feedback guides the student in ascertaining the areas where he or she needs to try more so as to improve the performance. Feedback also notifies the parents or guardians about the students' progress in the school. Feedback assists the teacher to identify areas of students' strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, the teacher is expected to facilitate the consolidation of the areas of students' strength in learning and at the same time plan remediation for the mitigation of the areas of weakness.

2.5 Chapter summary

The chapter firstly has reviewed the already existing literature relating to practice of continuous assessment as part of teaching and learning of English language especially in the writing classes. Literature review has indicated that in the Malawian educational system there is a gap as it seems that no research exist to describe teachers' knowledge and practices of CA in English language writing lessons. Secondly, the chapter has described the 6+1 Trait Writing Model of writing which informed the study. The third part of the chapter has discussed the conceptualisation of continuous assessment. The next chapter presents research design and methodology of the study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter overview

This chapter discusses the procedures followed to collect and analyse data to come up with the findings of the study. It begins by describing the research design and then goes on to explain research methodology. Further, the description of research site, sampling techniques, data generation methods as well as instruments and data analysis methods are discussed. The chapter ends with presentation of credibility and trustworthiness of the study, ethical considerations taken during the development of this study and limitations of the study.

3.2 Research design

The present study adopted a case study research design. This design is an empirical inquiry that investigate contemporary phenomena or a limited number of events or conditions, and their relationships within its real-life context especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context may not be clearly demarcated (Yin, 1994). Therefore, the case study method selects a small geographical area or a very limited number of individuals as the subjects of study (Bhattacharjee, 2012).

The adoption of case study research design was rooted on the belief that it would enable the researcher to closely explore the data related to the teachers' knowledge and CA practices in English language writing lessons within a specific context of 4 selected secondary schools in South West Education Division (SWED).

The suitability of the case study research design was because the researcher craved to explore the participants in their normal school environment so that they could be free to express themselves. To be specific, the researcher employed one of the variances of case study research design called multiple case study design. This variance was employed because of the possible depth of information that would be collected to reveal teachers' knowledge and CA practices so that there is a better insight into the existing issue. To be more precise, the exploratory nature of this research and the required depth of exploration were the deciding factors in determining that 8 cases to be selected for the study. The selection of these cases was due to limitation of time and financial constraints.

3.3 Research methodology

The mixed methods design was used in the study. Mixed methods research design is a procedure for collecting, analysing and mixing both qualitative and quantitative research and methods in a single study to understand a research problem (Creswell, 2012). A deliberate decision was made to combine qualitative and quantitative techniques because they complemented each other, enriched the study and made the findings of this study more valid. This helped to circumvent the limitations of a single approach. Creswell and Clark (2011) concurred with this assertion when they stated that the combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques provide a better understanding of a research phenomenon than either approach alone.

Qualitative research is defined as the process of collecting and analysing textual data to get an insight of the interpretations conveyed by people about a phenomenon which cannot be possible with quantitative research (Lan, 2002). Qualitative research is mainly used to understand human behaviour factors (Lan, 2002). Qualitative research is subjective and it is aimed at understanding a social phenomenon (Hancock, 2002). The study was qualitative in nature because the research problem was exploratory, aiming at understanding participants' knowledge, practices, experiences, views, and perceptions of CA in writing classes. The objective of the study was to establish the detailed descriptions of behaviour

and thought of teachers of English concerning CA in writing lessons. Therefore, the research questions of the study were deliberated as the basis that drove the preference for the usage of qualitative approaches to generate and analyse data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

In summing, by employing the qualitative approach, the study was pragmatic, interpretative and grounded in the lived experiences of teachers of English language in the use of CA to assess writing skills (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Merriam, 1998). Qualitative approach was used because of its usefulness in discovering the meaning that teachers of English language furnished to events that they experienced in the use of CA to assess writing skills in their classes.

On the other hand, by adopting the quantitative technique, the study focused on the quantity of aspects of the subjects and their CA practices in the writing classes. Some data was generated in the form of numerals using questionnaire and classroom observation, and analysed in the form of numerals (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). Though the study seemed biased towards the qualitative paradigm, by using questionnaire there was an attempt to use elements of the quantitative approaches to research as observed by Bulmer and Warwick (1993) cited in Kholowa (1999). Therefore, from a quantitative perspective and with the intention of corroborating previously obtained qualitative results, the frequency and percentages of affective domains of CA, CA feedback, desirable qualities of CA, types of writing and traits of writing were also analysed.

3.4 Research site

For triangulation purposes, 4 conventional secondary schools with mixed gender classes from Blantyre district were selected. They are all located in Blantyre urban, in southern region of Malawi. The district falls under South West Education Division (SWED) in the southern region of Malawi. SWED is an educational division in the MoEST and is

comprised of Blantyre, Neno, Mwanza, Nsanje and Chikwawa. Blantyre district was chosen because the sampled secondary schools were easily accessible by the researcher. Additionally, due to financial limitations, it was less costly on the part of the researcher. For ethical consideration, the schools were referred to as A, B, C and D. School A is located in Bangwe Township. While School B is situated in north-west of Limbe, and, School C is in Chilobwe Township, while School D is located in Chitawira Township.

In terms of their language programs and language assessment policies, all the schools follow the Syllabuses for English language as directed by MoEST through MIE. The Syllabus mandates all the schools to use CA to assess English language proficiency skills such as listening, reading, speaking, writing and others. However, each school has its own teaching program, teaching methods and assessment criteria. Some schools indicated the dates and weeks for administering CA on the school calendar of events while other schools were silent on that, and time management for continuous assessment was responsibilities of teachers.

3.5 Sample population

The study focused on 8 teachers of English language who were in service at one of these 4 conventional secondary schools aforementioned. The specific characteristics of the participants are summarized as shown in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Specific characteristics of the teachers at schools A, B, C and D

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	male
Highest academic qualification	B.Ed.	Dip.Ed.	B.Ed.	B.Ed.	B.Ed.	B.Ed.	B.Ed.	Dip.Ed.
Years of teaching experience	13	20	7	14	3	20	20	23

N.B (B.Ed. =Bachelor of Education and Dip.Ed. =Diploma in Education)

Table 3 indicates the features of all the 8 participants who taught English in the secondary schools that have been described previously. The following teachers: T1, T3, T4, T5, T6 and T7 have Bachelor's Degrees in Language Education as their highest academic qualifications. While T2 and T8 have Diplomas in Language Education as their highest academic qualifications. In addition, the following teachers; T1, T3, T5, T7 and T8 are males while T2, T4 and T6 are females. The participants had the following teaching experiences: T1 (13 years), T2 (20 years), T3 (7 years), T4 (14 years), T5 (3 years), T6 (2 years), T7 (20 years) and T8 (23 years). The teachers were grouped in schools as follows; T1 and T5 (School A), while T2 and T6 (School B). While T3 and T7 (School C), and, T4 and T8 (School D).

In order to generate rich data, only teachers of English language who were at the time teaching in Forms 1 and 3 were involved in the study. These Forms were chosen because the researcher assumed that students in these classes would not be sitting for the Junior Certificate Examinations (JCE) and Malawi School Certificate of Education Examinations (MSCE) by the time this study was conducted, hence, little inconvenience. Therefore, from each secondary school, two teachers of English language teaching Forms 1 and 3 respectively were involved in the study. The selection of the participants was not based on the factors such as gender or age since it was not the focus of this study but the availability and willingness of teachers of English language to participant in the study.

3.6 Sampling frame and sampling procedure

Convenience sampling technique was used to select 4 conventional secondary schools in SWED because the selected secondary schools were easily accessible. On the other hand, purposively, the study selected 8 teachers of English language because they were in service at the moment the study was conducted and they were teaching Forms 1 and 3.

3.7 Data generation procedures

The process of generating data for the study was conducted in a period of two terms. This section presents the following instruments that were employed for generating data from participants; semi-structured interview, questionnaire, classroom observation and document analysis. These instruments were selected because of their suitability for gathering important data for the study. Each of these instruments is briefly described below in the chronological order in which they were implemented.

3.7.1 Semi-structured interviews

With the overall aim of exploring the knowledge and practices of CA by secondary school teachers of English language while assessing writing skills, a semi-structured interview was conducted as the first phase of the data collection process. To facilitate the interviews being conducted with 8 teachers of English language, an interview guide (Appendix 2) was used. These participants volunteered to take part in this phase depending on their availability to be interviewed and their language teaching background. The interview was guided by open-ended questions so that the participants would have to justify their points. The interviews were conducted in English language to avoid transcript translation diminish data objectivity or bias (Pavlenko, 2007). The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed for further analysis.

The semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to ask only a few predetermined questions while other questions asked were not planned in advance. It was used since it allowed the freedom in sequencing questions and allocating time, and attention to different topics (Chiwaya, 2005). Again, this tool was chosen because it supplied large volumes of in-depth data and provided insight on participants' perspectives and the meaning of events for the people involved. It also provided an opportunity for probing when clarification was needed (Creswell, 2003). However, the semi-structured interviews encouraged the respondents to provide answers that they thought the researcher might have wanted to hear.

To alleviate this challenge, disclosing the interviewee any idea or opinion were avoided. The respondents were also unfocussed and discussed about different issues not related to the CA in writing lessons. The questions had to be repeated to redirect their attention.

3.7.2 Questionnaire

During the second phase of the data collection process, participants were asked to answer a questionnaire (Appendix 3) with the purpose of obtaining more information about their experience with the use of continuous assessment to assess writing skills of their students. The questionnaire used Likert Scale of frequency. The intention was to show that one score was higher than another not the distance between the points. The number of responses of each item were only counted as percentage of the total number of responses. To gather the important data for the current study, the close ended items which were framed in 5-Likert scale type with five options were developed for the sample teachers. They did not represent quantity hence they cannot be arithmetically manipulated.

To generate data, 8 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to 8 teachers of English language from the selected secondary schools. This questionnaire captured teachers' demographic particulars, participants' age, professional qualifications, teaching subjects, their understanding of CA principles, formation of CA of writing lessons and their usage of washback of CA. In general, the questionnaire elicited their knowledge and practices of CA to evaluate their teaching methods in English writing lessons. In other words, questionnaire helped to elicit information about teachers' knowledge and practices of CA to attain objectives of writing lessons. However, the questionnaire restricted the chances for probing. To mitigate this challenge, double barrelled questions and ambiguous questions were avoided.

3.7.3 Classroom observation

The classroom observation (Appendix 4) was conducted as the third phase of the data collection process. Maja (2015) as cited by Jere (2017), observation is defined as a systematic process of recording behavioural patterns of participants, objects or occurrences without necessarily questioning. Jere (2017) further noted that observation also involves the systematic noting and recording of events in the social setting of the chosen study. The type of observation in this study was a complete observer or non- participant whereby the researcher did not participate in any activity happening in the classroom (Sarantakos, 2005). One of the advantages of being a complete observer is that the participants do not realise that they are being observed, as a result they behave naturally (Cohen et al., (2007). Therefore, by adopting this approach, participants were observed in their natural settings and no effort was made to control their activities, but simply observed and recorded what happened as things naturally occurred. The approach provided an opportunity to get the first hand information from the classroom and took note of the actual methods and activities being done in the classroom.

The study assumes that teachers' knowledge and implementation of the principles of CA in English writing lessons qualifies as the practice of continuous assessment. In addition, teachers who implement the principles of CA are regarded as assessment literary competent. Therefore, in the observations, the teachers were targeted. The participants were observed on how they implement the principles of continuous assessment in English writing lessons. Lessons were observed from January to June, 2021. Classroom observation was conducted during teaching and learning process by using a checklist as an instrument that included a set of items. The checklist had two options *Strong* and *Not Display*. The formal infers that the participants practised the item been observed while the latter means that the item was not practised. Forty-eight lessons were observed, 8 teachers of English language were involved, 4 from junior class and another 4 from senior class at each school respectively. Six lessons were observed per teacher.

The classroom observation was aimed at collecting data on teachers' knowledge and practices of continuous assessment (as a process in the field of teaching and learning of writing in English classes). It assisted the researcher to discover some practices that participants were unwilling to discuss during interview or to explain when answering questionnaire. Therefore, it can be emphasised that the main purpose of the observation schedule was to verify information on what was found out through questionnaires and interview. This served as a reality check between what the teachers alleged and what actually happened. The focus of the observation was on the administration of continuous assessment to assess writing skills of the students, the use of desirable qualities of continuous assessment, feedback practices of continuous assessment, holding correction sessions and planning the writing lessons as the result of the washback of continuous assessment.

The classroom observation was obstructed because the respondents were not always teaching and practising continuous writing assessment. To mitigate such weakness, the researcher extended the time frame for generating data and employed document analysis.

3.7.4 Document analysis

Document analysis was used to mitigate the weakness of classroom observation. The weakness of the classroom observation was based on the fact that each participant was observed after every fortnight due financial constraints. Therefore, to uncover what happened during the period of researcher's absence, the researcher used document analysis to elicit data to compensate the classroom observation. To achieve the purpose of the document analysis, teachers' assessment report, tests, student's notebooks, lesson plans and schemes and records of work and other relevant documents were analysed, so as to see the practices of CA in the writing classes with proofs. These documents indeed aided the study to discover evidence as to whether teachers of English practice CA or Not. Thus, the document analysis was employed as one way of filling checklist of classroom observation. However, the respondents were not willing to permit the researcher to access their

documents. They had to be persuaded by reassuring them of the purpose of the study and their privacy and confidentiality.

3.8 Pilot study

A pilot study is defined as a mini version of a research or a trial run conducted in preparation of a full scale study and may be conducted specifically to pre-test a research instrument (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). The pilot study was conducted at Likangala Secondary School in Zomba because in many respects the characteristics of this school are similar to that of the other selected secondary schools as they are all conventional secondary schools and located in urban. Again the selection was based on the fact that Likangala Secondary School could be easily accessed in terms of transport and communication. A total of 2 teachers of English language participated in the pilot phase. The selection of the participants was based on convenience but care was taken to ensure that the participants were selected to present the dimension that were important to the study in terms of the qualifications and geographical location. The methods for generating data that were used in the pilot study included semi-structured interview, questionnaire, observation and document analysis so as to gain a more in-depth understanding of teachers' knowledge and practices of CA when assessing writing skills in their writing lessons.

During the testing, there were some questions that posed a problem to the participants due to vagueness. The words that were hard to understand because of the deep meanings were noted. Further, the participants were also asked to identify questions they felt were vague. These observations guided the amendment of the data generating instruments accordingly before the commencement of the actual study.

3.9 Data analysis procedures

In analysing the data, the study used Thematic Analysis (TA) to transcribe, categorise and codify data. TA is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data

(Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process was used because it helped to simplify large amount of data in a sensible way and reduced lots of data into a simpler summary (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). The data was familiarised by reading and re-reading the notes and re-playing the recorded interviews over and over again so that themes were uncovered. Therefore, the qualitative data from the study underwent transcription and reported in themes and sub-themes. The major challenge that the study faced in analysing the data was lack of direction due to the flexibility nature of Thematic Analysis (TA). To alleviate this challenge, the data was analysed based on the research questions of the study. To further analyse the data, the respondents' answers to the questionnaire were tallied and analysed through frequency counting and percentage computation.

3.10 Data management

The organisation and keeping of the generated data was followed for easily access and analysis. It was well annotated in files. The information was later transferred and stored in separate files in the laptop and flash disks. There were also printed hard copies from soft transcripts and hand written information that were kept as back up. The information was also sent to e-mail box account for safe keeping.

3.11 Credibility and trustworthiness of the study

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, triangulation, pilot study, peer review and verbatim quotes were used as the strategies. This section briefly discusses some of these strategies.

3.11.1 Triangulation

The term 'triangulation' refers to the act of using at least two related data sources, data collection methods, sites or researchers with the aim of reducing inherent bias associated with a single source, method sites or researcher (Long & Johnson, 2000; Mishra & Rasundram, 2017). The study employed data triangulation, method triangulation and site

triangulation to enhance credibility of the study. To start with, data triangulation is the use of a variety of data sources, including time, space and persons, in a study (Mishra & Rasundram, 2017). To be specific, eight teachers of English language were used as source of data. Therefore, the findings from data triangulation were collaborated and any weaknesses in the data were compensated for by the strengths of other data, thereby increasing the validity and reliability of the results. Another type of triangulation that were used was method triangulation which involved the use of multiple methods to generate data. The intention was to decrease the deficiencies and biases that came from any single method. Therefore, the results from one method were used to enhance, augment and clarify the results of another. In the present study, qualitative methods were employed to generate data in the form of structural interview and questionnaire. The last type of triangulation that was employed in this study is called site triangulation. Site triangulation may be achieved by the participation of informants within several organisations so as to reduce the effect on the study of particular local factors peculiar to one institution. Four different secondary schools were selected so as to enhance site triangulation. Therefore, similar results emerged from these different sites provided greater credibility to the findings of the study.

3.11.2 Peer review

This is a process of subjecting research methods and findings to the scrutiny of others who are experts in the same field (Boone, et al., 2007). Peer review relies on colleagues to review and make informed decisions about whether one's study is legitimate and adds to the large dialogue of findings in the field (Boone, et al. 2007). Thus, the study employed the use of friends and scholars to critique the ideas of the study as a means of entailing credibility of the findings.

3.11.3 Use of verbatim quotes

Verbatim quotes are short, to the point remarks that allude to or support an interpretation (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). The main purpose of using quotes and extracts in qualitative research is to demonstrate how the findings and interpretations have arisen from the data

(Corden et al. 2006). In this study, verbatim quotes were used to support researcher's arguments in the reporting the findings.

3.12 Ethical issues

3.12.1 Informed consent

An ethical clearance was obtained from the Chancellor College (see Appendix 4). Then, permission was sought by applying to Education Division Manager (EDM) and the letter obtained was sent to the observation secondary schools. Additionally, the head teachers of each school were verbally requested after presenting the letter from the Education Division Manager (EDM). Selected participants received an invitation letter with a consent form to declare their willingness to participate in the study. Additionally, the selected participants were informed about the purpose of the study, how the findings of the study would be disseminated and how they would benefit from the study.

3.12.2 Privacy and confidentiality

Privacy means that people can expect to be free from intrusion; that is, they do not want researchers to contact them unless permission for such contacts has been given (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002). Confidentiality, on the other hand, is simply defined as means that the researcher can match names with responses but ensures that no-one else will have access to them (Devaus, 2002). Privacy and confidentiality of the respondents were upheld by not revealing their identity in any report, paper or public forum. Code names were given to the secondary schools. Clear assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were provided in the introductory letters of the questionnaires.

3.13 Limitations of the study

The limitations of the study could be that the participants might not have given the true reflection of their everyday classroom practices. The researchers' presence during observations might have influenced the teachers to change their behaviour as they were observed. This is referred to as Hawthorne's effect or observer effect. However, the participants were observed a number of times which made them be used to the presence of the researcher. This helped to minimise the Hawthorne's effect.

Further to that, the process of generating data was obstructed by class disruption due to national wide teachers' strike. This development hindered the process of generating data since there were no activities that took place during the time teachers staged strike. This delayed the process of collecting data. To mitigate the adversary of teachers' strike, the period of collecting data was extended.

Finally, Corona Virus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) was the major setback since normal classes were disturbed and they were divided into sub-classes as preventive measure to contain the further spreading of the disease. This special arrangement negatively affected the schedule of the researcher. Still more, some participants were exempted after expressing their unwillingness to participate in the study for medical background due to siege in the cases of Covid- 19. This forced the study's schedule to reposition some research sites and in some case research participants. One teacher had to be supplanted in the first week of data collection process as the teacher succumbed to Covid-19.

3.14 Chapter summary

This chapter has indicated that the exploratory nature of the study leads to adoption of case study research design and mixed research approach. The chapter has also discussed that 8 secondary school teachers of English language were chosen as research participants. It has also described that the convenient and purposive sampling techniques were adopted.

Further, the chapter has shown that semi-structured interviews, questionnaire, classroom observation and document analysis were used to generate data. It has also indicated that the generated data was analysed through thematic analysis, frequency tabulation, and percentage computation. The chapter has presented pilot study, peer review, triangulation and verbatim quotes that were employed to achieve credibility and trustworthiness of the study. Again, pseudonyms were used in place of participants and schools. Finally, this chapter has also discussed Covid-19 and teachers' wide national strike as some of the limitations of the study. The next chapter presents the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Chapter overview

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study on exploring teachers' knowledge and practices of continuous assessment in English writing lessons in selected Malawian secondary schools. The presentation of the findings is organised in relation to four themes that emerged after the coding and categorising of the data on the following research questions. The main research question was: How do secondary school teachers understand and practice CA in English language writing lessons? The specific research questions were: What is the secondary school teachers' understanding of CA in assessing writing skills? How do secondary school teachers of English assess writing skills through CA? What factors do secondary school teachers consider when designing CA to assess writing skills? How do secondary school teachers of English use feedback of CA?

4.2 Teachers' understanding of CA

This section presents the findings of the first research question. The study sought to explore the teachers' understanding of the principles of CA especially the comprehensive nature which stipulates that teachers need to assess affective domains of students' behaviour in classes. The participants were asked to state whether they used continuous assessment to assess affective domains of students' behaviour in English language writing classes. Table 4 shows participants' responses on the questionnaire.

Table 4: Teachers' assessment of affective domains of CA

Affective domains of CA	Very often (%)	Often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Undecided (%)	Never (%)
class attendance	0	0	0	0	100
punctuality	0	0	0	0	100
respecting rules	0	0	0	0	100
cooperation with colleagues	0	0	25	0	75

N.B (%= Percentage)

Findings from Table 4 indicate that all teachers did not assess the affective domains of students' behaviour such as class attendance, punctuality and respecting of class rules in the writing lessons. Even though, 25% of the respondents claimed that they awarded grades to students for cooperation with colleagues, it seems that the awarding of these grades was not based on their knowledge of affective domains of students' behaviour but on their intuition. This implies that the participants were not paying attention to affective domains of the students during writing classes.

To find out the reasons for not assessing affective domains of students' behaviour in writing lessons, the participants were interviewed. The participants expressed different reasons for ignoring assessment of affective domains of students' behaviour in writing classes. When asked whether they gave grades to students for class attendance, Teacher 4 from School D responded that,

“Aaah! That’s how I find things to be done so I have never seen the students been given grades because of attending classes but we just call the register, no grade is attached to that.” [IDI-T4-School D]

Addition, Teacher 1 from School A replied that,

No I don’t (give grades for class attendance) because we are not oriented on how we go about that. I that is not what I am supposed to do since some students have a behaviour of missing classes regularly so it’s not easy to follow each student. [IDI-T1-School A]

The statements indicate that the participants did award grades for attending writing lessons. The participants honestly indicate that they were not aware that students are supposed to be assessed for class attendance.

Again, the participants were asked on the semi-structured interview to state the reasons for not using CA to assess students' punctuality in writing class. Teacher 3 from School C stated that grades for punctuality in English writing classes were not awarded because "I wasn't trained anywhere that students were supposed to be given grades because of the punctuality." [IDI-T3-School C]

Teacher 4 from School D also responded that,

“...it is the function of the formal teacher to award grades for punctuality since the formal teachers are responsible for affairs in the classrooms.” [IDI-T4-School D]

The quotations illustrate that participants did not assess punctuality of the students in writing lessons. The nature of their responses show that they have no any idea that students' punctuality needs to be assessed.

When asked whether they gave grades for respecting class rules, Teacher 8 from school D stated that,

There is no clear picture on how I can award marks to students because they are following the class rules. Addition, I have so many students in my class so I don't think I can manage to make a follow up on all the students. Imagine I have 98 students. [IDI-T8-School D]

The statements indicate that the respondents did award grades for respecting writing lessons rules. Here, again, the participant acknowledged that respecting of class rules is not assessed as he said, 'There is no clear picture...' Such reasoning confirm that the participant was not aware of the assessment of affective domains of students' behaviour in the writing lessons.

The respondents were further inquired whether they gave grades for cooperation with colleagues. In responding to this, Teacher 6 from School B stated that,

...if we give them writing task as the group which is part of continuous assessment, the participation obvious will have some marks. The marks that they score as the group is for everyone. If the group performed badly, it means each member of that particular group, will be graded with a failing score. [IDI-T6-School B]

The statement indicates that Teacher 6 from School B did award grades to students for participating in group writing tasks. However, classroom observation showed that the participant in question never asked students to do the writing tasks in groups hence the teacher never assessed participating in groups as one of the affective domains of students' behaviour in writing classes.

All in all, the participants had the impression that affective domains of the students' behaviour in writing classes were not of paramount importance as they were unacquainted that CA emphasis that teachers should assess them. Therefore, they did not use CA to assess them. They reasoned that they had never seen or even instructed that students could be assessed on the affective domains students' behaviour in writing classes.

In writing classes, teachers have to use continuous assessment to assess cognitive (knowledge/thinking), psychomotor (skills) and affective aspects of the students' behaviour (attitudes) (Graham, 1997; Brown, 1994). This is because different social, emotional, and psychological factors adversely affect the writing skills of the students (Myles & Robinson, 2012). However, the evaluation system before the introduction of CA system focussed mainly on the former. With the usage of CA, the assessment of writing skills is beyond cognitive behaviour domains. The affective domains can significantly

improve, inhibit or even prevent students from learning how to write effectively. Since the feedback on CA of this domain can increase teachers' effectiveness in writing classes by reviewing their methods of teaching and considering the needs and problems of writing of their students which can assist them in designing their writing lesson plans. This is because there is a significant positive correlation between affective domains of students' behaviour and learners' writing performance (Deb, 2018).

The findings of the first research question show that teachers of English language did not use continuous assessment to assess affective domains of students' behaviour in writing lessons. It is unfortunately that affective domains of students' behaviour are ignored by teachers in writing lessons. However, there is a significant association between affective domains of students' behaviour and attainment (Rothman, 2001). Thus, positive correlation indicating that there exists positive relationship between affective domains of students' behaviour in writing lessons and performance. The time devotes going to writing classes contributes to a successful achievement in a writing abilities. For students who frequently skips writing classes, they will be at a drawback for they had missed several materials covered. Students who abscond writing classes miss information that helps him or her on how to write better. On the other hand, students who attend writing classes learn the necessary skills on how to write better as teachers teach them. They learn something that ought to have been obvious but which was not until the teacher says it. The point is that writing classroom attendance and writing abilities can interact to produce an increase or decrease in academic achievement. This is the reason that CA is supposedly used to assess class attendance as it believes that for students to do better, they have to report for classes. To put it differently, CA assess the whole learner as some factors not related to writing usually contribute to the performance of the students in writing classes. Therefore, students have to be assessed in all the domains including affective domains of students' behaviour.

This study assumes that teachers' knowledge of affective domains of students' behaviour on CA is used as one component of continuous assessment principles in teaching and learning process. The findings show that teachers are not aware that affective domains of

students' behaviour are an integral part of the teaching and learning process in the writing lessons. This is the pointer that show lack of knowledge about the main presumption of CA in teaching learning process. Therefore, it seems like most teachers do not have clear knowledge about the concept of continuous assessment in most cases to employ it at the classroom level. These findings concurred with the findings of Osadebe (2015) who in his study found out that the extent to which university lecturers practise continuous assessment with emphasis on the affective domains of students' behaviour was low.

The findings of the current study are also supported by the findings from Desta (2019), Yigzaw (2013), Tesfom (2012) and Sileshi (2007) who found that teachers' understanding of the principles of continuous assessment in writing classes were insufficient. This was because most of the secondary school teachers of English language showed that they did not know what governs CA practices. For instance, Desta (2019) investigated that teachers of English as Foreign Language did not take part in-service training of CA. Even the small number of participants who admitted that they once or twice attended the in-service training, they too seemed not able to use principles of CA when assessing writing skills of their students.

The findings of the study contradicted with findings from a study conducted by Pratama, Laksmi and Irawati (2018) who found that teachers employed CA to assess affective domains of students' behaviour in writing classes. Pratama, Laksmi and Irawati (2018) found that the students' writing performance was more influenced by affective factors towards writing and teachers used CA to assess these factors. Subsequently, Pratama, Laksmi and Irawati (2018) concluded the students with good writing performance were those who had attended the writing lessons. These students also gained high motivation and good attitude towards writing. The point is that different affective factors affects the fluency and accuracy of second language learners' writings.

To sum up, the findings of the first research question show that teachers of English language disregarded the affective domain of students' behaviour which is one of the important tenets of continuous assessment. To be precise, the findings indicate that the comprehensive nature of CA which demands that the assessment activity of the teacher is expected to cover the affective domains of the students' behaviour was not practised by the participants. The affective activities that were not factored in all continuous assessment of writing include class attendance, punctuality, respect for rules and regulation, and cooperation with colleagues.

4.3 The practice of CA in assessing writing skills

In the writing classes, teachers ideally are supposed to use CA at different stages in the process of teaching and learning of writing to assess students' writing works. The CA practices in writing lessons involve using different types of writing to assess different traits of writing to improve students' writing abilities. Therefore, the second research question explored traits of writing and types of writing that were assessed by teachers in the writing lessons. The findings are presented in the following sections.

4.3.1 Traits assessed in CA

This section presents some of the findings on the first sub-research question on the teachers' practices of CA to assess language skills. The participants were asked to tick on the questionnaire the traits of writing they mostly assessed in CA of writing. The responses are presented as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Traits of writing assessed by teachers generated by questionnaire

Language skills	Very often (%)	Often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Undecided (%)	Never (%)
spelling	87.5	12.5	0	0	0
vocabulary	50	37.5	12.5	0	0
grammar structure	75	25	0	0	0
sentence structure	75	12.5	12.5	0	0
Coherence	25	37.5	37.5	0	0
Politeness	0	0	62.5	12.5	25
emotive tone	0	0	62.5	12.5	25
discourse markers	25	37.5	12.5	25	0
Register	12.5	62.5	25	0	0

N.B (% =percentage)

The findings in Table 5 indicate that the assessment of traits such as spelling, vocabulary, grammar structure, sentence structures and coherence was better. However, almost all participants ignored the assessment of some traits such as scale of formality (politeness), use of emotive tone, use of discourse markers and register.

Classroom observation was conducted with the help of document analysis to confirm the findings from the questionnaire. The intention was to explore the traits of writing that were marked by the participants in their classes. Figure 1 and 2 show the samples of extracts of marked scripts by T5, T7 and T8. It worth noting that some parts of the marked scripts are covered to hide names of the students and their schools for the sake of confidentiality and privacy.

Table 6: The traits of writing assessed by teachers generated by document analyses

Traits of writing	Strong (%)	Not displayed (%)
cohesion	36	64
spellings	64	36
the choice of structure of the writing assessment tasks	71	29
grammatical structure	71	29
use of discourse markers	0	100
sentence structure	36	64
scale of formality (politeness)	0	100
vocabulary	0	100
use of emotive tone	0	100
use of discourse markers	0	100

N.B: Strong= traits were assessed and Not displayed= traits were not assessed

As Table 6 illustrates, the findings from the classroom lesson observation are in agreement with the findings from teacher questionnaire that the participants used continuous assessment to assess some traits of writing and ignored others. Thus, the findings from classroom lesson observation show that teachers assessed grammatical accuracy and spelling errors. However, the findings show that traits such as the scale of formality (politeness), emotive tone, register (select language forms appropriate to topic), discourse markers and vocabulary were not assessed in CA of writing.

All in all, participants were selective when they used continuous assessment to assess traits of writing as they were not assessing all the traits of writing. Consequently, they focused on the form of students' writing tasks while ignoring over all content of the writings.

The study shows that teachers preferred using CA to assess technical aspects of students' writing works compared to the communicative aspects. That is, the assessment of the students' writing works was focused on the form not on the content. This is because teachers when marked students' writing works they focused on spellings errors and grammatical accuracy. The tendency of selecting technical aspects for assessment means that students receive information about their strengths and weakness on only few traits hence they do not develop writing abilities in all the traits. Information provided by assessment of few traits is limited. Therefore, students are not equipped with necessary skills that would help them to produce good writing pieces. The findings of the current study explain some of the reasons why Mbano (2004) and Chiwaya (2005) found that students at secondary schools were not developing writing skills at a promising pace despite starting learning how to write from primary schools.

For students to develop a set of sophisticated writing skills, teachers have to balance the assessment of both grammatical accuracy and communicative aspects of writing. To put it differently, there is the need to assess both forms and content. In the writing classes, teachers should use continuous assessment to assess fluency, content, conventions, syntax

and vocabulary. This line of reasoning corresponds the facets of 6+1 Trait Writing Model to assess students' writing works. This model helps teachers to assess students' writing works through an analytic approach by focusing on crucial traits that characterize quality writing (Culham, 2003). Teachers have to assess all the traits all the time when evaluating students' writing works. The traits instruct students what they are doing well and what they still need to work on. And they give teachers an effective instructional road map. The traits are helpful here because they offer a common language for assessing and talking about writing (Culham, 2003).

The findings of the study that teachers only focused on the form of the writing not the communicative aspects of writing concurred with the findings from Bouzidal (2009). Bouzidi (2009) discovered that teachers' assessments of students' writing works were mainly form-based rather than content-based, the most-focused-upon aspects being spelling, punctuation and neatness/appearance of paper while more important aspects like thesis statement, related ideas and development of ideas, for instance, did not obtain equal attention by the teachers. Nirmla (2008) also found that ESL learners were not good enough in English due to traditional approaches of teaching. This was the case since teachers focused on grammar, tenses, preposition, spelling and punctuation. Similarly, the California State Standards observed that some traits were given much more attention than others. This leads many educators to believe the importance of writing to be a focus on one trait over another, specifically conventions. That is, the emphasis is heavily placed on conventions. The California State Standards made an assumption that teachers spent the majority of their time assessing conventions during writing lessons, and much less time on the other five traits: word choice, organization, sentence fluency, voice, and ideas. Consequently, the impact of selective assessment of traits of writing is restricted to some structural changes while the overall essay quality does not improve.

The findings of the study, however, were inconsistent with findings from (Jarmer et al., 2000; Bellamy, 2000; Olbrych, 2001) who found that teachers who were trained on the use of all traits of writing were capable of using CA of writing to improve students' writing

works. Bellamy (2000) studied the trait model effects on the development of teachers. It was initiated that after a short workshop, teachers were able to use the model. Teachers also conveyed that their students were able to implement the traits. Moreover, Coe et al., (2011) proved that using the trait in the assessments help to classify students with troubles at writing. Additional studies observed the effectiveness of the trait model on students writing development. The results showed that through training students on the measures of quality writing incorporated in the trait model, students demonstrate progression in writing (Jarmer et al., 2000; Bellamy, 2000).

The findings of the present study disagrees with previous researches (Jarmer et al., 2000; Bellamy, 2000; Olbrych, 2001) as participants in the present study were not guided on the practice of 6 + 1 Trait Writing Model since syllabuses for English in forms 1 through 4 are silent on this model. The syllabuses need to incorporate The 6+1 Trait Writing Model with the writing instruction strategies to offer framework to these detached strategies (Culham 2003). Hence, without the basic writing skills needed for success, teachers face difficulties at assessing writing in classes as they do not get the proper instruction in assessment literacy in writing.

4.3.2 Types of writing used in CA

This section presents the additional findings to the second research question. Continuous assessment demands that students' writing works are supposed to be assessed at different phases in the process of teaching and learning using different types of writing. Therefore, the participants were asked to tick on the questionnaire how frequently they assess students' writing works using various types of writing. The intention was to explore whether students were assessed at different phases of teaching and learning of writing using different types of writing. The findings are presented as in Table 7.

Table 7: Types of writing assessed by teachers generated by questionnaire

Types of writing	Often (%)	Always (%)	Sometimes (%)	Rarely (%)	Never (%)
report writing	38	0	38	13	13
business letter writing	65	0	25	0	0
friendly letter writing	50	25	0	25	0
note making	50	0	25	25	0
summary writing	38	13	38	13	0
composition writing	38	38	13	0	0

As Table 4 shows, the majority of the respondents often assessed business letter writing, friendly letter writing and note making at different phases in the process of teaching and learning of writing. However, report writing, summary writing and composition writing were not often assessed at different phases in the process of teaching and learning of writing. This implies that respondents were inefficiently alternating different types of writing to assess students' writing abilities at different phases in the process of teaching and learning of writing as they ignored other types of writing.

The classroom lesson observation was conducted to get additional information to the data obtained from the teachers through the questionnaire. This data related to the continuously assessment of students' writing abilities at different phases in the process of teaching and learning of writing through alternating the types of writing. The findings are presented as in Table 8.

Table 8: Types of writing assessed by teachers generated by classroom observation

Participants	Types of writing		F
	Term 1	Term 2	
T1	report writing	none	1
T2	none	report writing	1
T3	composition	none	1
T4	none	none	0
T5	friendly letter writing	summary writing	2
T6	none	report letter writing	1
T7	essay writing	none	1
T8	business letter writing	composition writing	2

NB (F=Frequency)

The findings reveal that only T5 and T8 which represented 25% of the participants assessed students' writing works at different phases in the process of teaching and learning of writing, as they alternated types of writing when using CA to assess students. However, T1, T2, T3, T4, T6 and T7 which represent 75% of the participants used only one or none of the types of writing in CA to assess students' writing abilities at different phases in the process of teaching and learning of writing. That is, the majority of the participants were not using continuous assessment to assess students' writing abilities at different phases of teaching of writing as they did not alternate types of writing when assessed their students' writing works.

The findings indicate that majority of the participants did not assess students' writing works using different types of writing at different phases in the process of teaching and learning of writing. Assessment of students' writing works in the class should occur at many

different stages throughout the term and should come in many different types of writing. This is because continuous assessment is a progressing process not one time movement as it is the assessment for learning. Continuous assessment is the part of instruction of teaching and learning. The participating teachers are supposed to carry out continuous assessment in classroom in an ongoing or continual way. In this process, teachers can make observations time to time to collect data to determine the level of students' writing abilities. It is supposed to be done by giving particular writing tasks to students based on their previous achievement in writing classroom. Teachers should continuously assess the students' writing abilities to decide about the level of their performance in class. It also helps them to find out what the learners have learnt. Continuous assessment is part and parcel of instructional process that has to be taken as a key tool in educational quality assurance endeavour (Abejehu, 2016).

The findings of the study that teachers were not assessing different types of writing at different phases of teaching and learning of writing show that teachers were not executing the comprehensive nature of continuous assessment. This is because continuous assessment stipulates that teachers have to ensure that different types of writing are employed at different times in the quest for continuous assessment system. The importance of this is unquestionable as it takes care of whatever inadequacy that can have been accessioned by the students' writing inability to maximally express their ability when a particular type of writing is assessed. For example, a student who has phobia for report writing could make up for his/her inadequacy in other types like business letter writing or summary writing. The comprehensive nature of continuous assessment in this feature implies that the teachers have to conduct series of writing tasks at different stages of teaching and learning of writing in the classroom.

In writing lessons, all the processes of writing such as brainstorming, drafting, revising and editing ideally are supposed to be assessed using continuous assessment to help students develop an effective and reliable process for creating finished pieces. Students' writing ability is concerned with developing certain skills which are developed and perfected through practice. Continuous assessment offers that opportunity for students to practice

writing using different types at different times in the process of teaching and learning of writing. This is the rationale for treating continuous assessment as one of the important aspects of a teaching and learning process. CA is an effective aspect of teaching and learning and it is an integral part of the teaching and learning process (Black & William, 1998). Hence, CA is an assessment for learning which is likely to improve students' writing achievement.

To sum up, the findings show that the majority of the participants did not assess students' writing works at different phases in the process of teaching and learning of writing. Still more, the findings reveal that teachers were not alternating types of writing when they assess students' writing works at different stages of teaching and learning. Therefore, based on the teachers' assessment practice of writing, it shows that teachers do not implement comprehensive nature of continuous assessment in the writing classes. This is because the comprehensive nature of continuous assessment requires the teacher to conduct a series of continuous assessment writing activities or tasks at different stages of teaching and learning in the classroom (Afolabi, 1999). Hence, in this study, CA was not used to improve the writing skills of the students because it was not used as it is supposed to be.

4.4. Designing of CA

The manner teachers design writing tasks determines the performance of the students. Therefore, the third research question explored the features of writing tasks that teachers considered when they designed them. The participants were asked to tick on the questionnaire the different assessment desirable qualities that they considered when designing continuous assessment of writing. The responses are presented as in Table 9 below.

Table 9: The desirable qualities of CA generated by questionnaire

Desirable qualities of CA	Very Often (%)	Often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Undecided (%)	Never (%)
topic restriction	13	38	25	25	0
authenticity	0	63	38	0	0
prompt	38	63	38	13	0
scoring rubrics	12	38	0	0	0

The findings in Table 9 indicate that majority of the teachers (63%) often considered authenticity when designing continuous assessment of writing. While 63% of the respondents very often included prompt when designing continuous assessment of writing to students' wellbeing. On the other hand, 38% of the respondents very often considered topic restriction when designing continuous assessment of writing the purpose while 38% did not include scoring rubrics on the writing tasks they designed.

In order to triangulate the findings from third research question, the researcher conducted classroom lesson observation. The samples of the writing tasks that teachers designed and wrote on the blackboard are presented below:

Teacher 5 from School D wrote on the blackboard the following writing tasks:

“Imagine that you are the youth ambassador against abuse in your area.
Write the composition that will present before your classmates explaining
the effects of drug abuse. Write 150 to 200 words.” [IDI-T5-School D]

In addition, Teacher 8 from School D wrote on the blackboard the following writing tasks:

“Imagine that you have been selected to a new Boarding Secondary School to continue your secondary education. Write a letter to your friend who is living in another district informing him/her about the new school.” [IDI-T8-School D]

The writing tasks were analysed to unveil the desirable assessment qualities. The findings are presented as in the Table 10 below.

Table 10: The desirable qualities of CA generated by classroom observation

Desirable qualities of CA	Strong (%)	Not displayed (%)
topic restriction	100	0
authenticity	100	0
prompt	86	14
scoring rubrics	14	86

As can be seen from the Table10, the majority of the respondents considered the desirable qualities when forming the continuous assessment of writing in terms of topic restriction, authenticity and prompt. However, the provision of scoring rubrics was rated low as only 14% of the participants considered it when they designed writing tasks. It worth noting that the findings from the classroom observation contradicted with findings from questionnaire as teachers considered many assessment desirable qualities unlike what they wrote on the questionnaire.

All in all, the participants considered many necessary assessment designing qualities such as topic restriction, authenticity and prompt. However, the findings show that they ignored provision of scoring rubrics as to guide students what they would be assessed.

Students' successful performance on continuous assessment writing tasks greatly depend on how well teachers design the tasks. This is referred to as simplicity. This aspect stresses that continuous assessment should be simple in both design and operation. Therefore, the desirable qualities of continuous assessment are at the heart of CA. The specific research question number three was aimed at exploring different assessment desirable qualities that the participants considered when designing continuous assessment of writing. The majority of the respondents considered the desirable qualities when forming the continuous assessment of writing. These findings agreed with the findings of Benzehaf (2016) and Coombe (2010) in their study, who found that most of the participants were knowledgeable in regard to designing CA of writing.

The findings of the third research question, however, indicate that the participants ignore the provision of scoring rubrics when designing writing tasks. The participants did not indicate the areas to be assessed to students in all classroom-writing activities. Scoring rubrics are considered as one of the steps or actions of the assessment designing process in this study. Scoring rubrics refer to the aspects of writing tasks that are assessed, and they provide the basis for teachers of English language to make evaluation about the work students produce. Scoring rubrics are aspects of a task, which the teachers of English language takes into consideration when making awarding grades (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007).

The participants could include areas to be assessed when design writing tasks. This is in line with 6 + 1 Trait Writing Model which advocate the provision of scoring rubrics when designing writing assessment to guide the students. Continuous assessment is part of teaching and learning processes. Therefore, when design continuous assessment of writing, it is expected that teachers should include the areas that they will assess as to guide the students to focus. In general, teachers should include the content, organization, vocabulary, language use, thesis statement, emotive tone, mechanics and hand-writing as part of scoring rubrics. These should be part of the writing questions to be used as continuous assessment. Provision of scoring rubrics in the assessing of writing is valuable because it supports students' understanding and to gain better grades (Orsmond et al., 2000).

Teachers are expected to have knowledge about the importance of provision of scoring rubrics to students. They should operationalize the knowledge in the designing of writing tasks. Subsequently, if the specific requirements of each writing tasks are known to students, they are not in the dark about what they are required to do to pass the continuous assessment. This implies that providing students with scoring rubrics is important in order to make them understand and focus on aspects of their writing work. Sadler (2005) argued that students deserve to be given an opportunity to understand the basis upon which grades are assigned in the writing lessons. This is consistent with Feng's (2007) findings that all students in his study believed that it is necessary to always receive explained scoring rubrics because it helped them to understand how to do the writing work.

To wind up, the findings of the third research question show that participants considered topic restriction, authenticity and prompt when they designed writing tasks to use in CA. This is recommend as students' successfully in writing works depends on the clarity of the questions. On the other hand, participants did not include scoring rubrics to guide students on the areas that they would be assessed. The discussion show that the provision of scoring rubrics is valuable since it helps students to focus when writing.

4.5 The teacher feedback practices

This section presents the findings of the fourth research question. The main purpose of CA is to evaluate the progress that students are making in the process of teaching and learning of writing. Therefore, the participants were asked to tick on the questionnaire whether they frequently gave feedback of continuous assessment of writing tasks and incorporated its grades to the end of term to produce the final grade. They were also asked whether they held corrections sessions after giving feedback of continuous assessment, and planned writing lessons from the feedback of continuous assessment. The responses are presented as in Table 11.

Table 11: The teacher feedback practices generated by questionnaire

Teacher feedback practices	Very Often (%)	Often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Undecided (%)	Never (%)
giving feedback	50	50	0	0	0
correction sessions	75	25	0	0	0
incorporation of grades of CA into final grade	38	25	25	0	25
planning lessons from feedback	100	0	0	0	0

The findings show that 50% of the teachers frequently gave feedback to students while 75% of the participants very often held correction sessions with their students after giving feedback of continuous assessment. The findings also show that all participants used the feedback on CA to plan for their lessons. However, it was discovered that teachers were not incorporating or integrating the grades or marks of CA into the end of term grade to produce a final grades of the students.

In further exploration, during the face to face interviews, the participants were asked to state whether they held correction sessions with their students. Teacher 1 from School A stated that,

Yeah I report those general ones (errors). For example, aaah what I do is to give them individually what has been written or achieved and the feedback itself because I just write whatever to be improved right away on their textbooks, exercise books or their marked scripts. [IDI-T1-School A]

The above verbatim quote shows that the teachers provided the feedback of continuous assessment of writing tasks through indicating the errors students made on their writing works. However, the above verbatim quote does not show that the teachers prepared the special writing lessons to hold correction sessions.

The participants were also asked to state whether they incorporated marks or grades of continuous assessment of writing with the end of term marks to produce a final grade. Teacher 2 from School B responded that,

Yes we add accumulative grade of CA of writing in the final grade...Aaah

I was just told by school that CA should carry 40% so that the final exams should be 60%. Aaaa! I add the total marks that students get from continuous assessment to their final grade that I put on the school report.

[IDI-T2-School B]

However, Teacher 7 from School C stated that,

It is not easier to do that (accumulate the scores of CA into the final grade) since I have so many students hence doing that it implies extra work on top of teaching. As you know, it is tough to mark let us compositions or letter writing so that presents addition work. [IDI-T7-School C]

The verbatim statement indicates that the participants did not add the grades of continuous assessment of writing to the end of term grades to produce the final grade.

Lastly, participants were probed to state whether they used feedback of CA of writing tasks for lesson planning and improving methods of teaching of writing. Teacher 5 from School A, for instance, commented that,

“Maybe I think it gives me information and some kind of guide as to how I should go where maybe I should revise and where I should do some remediation.” [IDI-T5-School A]

Teacher 8 from School D also stated that,

Yes, I use that one (results of CA of writing) to evaluate okay yes for example after giving task and I look at whether they have done well yes so I will come back to my lesson plan to say students did not perform well in this particular area. So what was my lesson plan like. So I go there to revise my lesson plan and look at the methodology and the resources that have been used because it might happen that there are some methodologies which were used and ended up misleading the students. [IDI-T8-School D]

The quotations indicate that teachers of English language used the feedback of continuous assessment of writing to prepare the writing lessons.

The participants were observed in their classrooms as the reality check. Document analysis supplemented the classroom observation to see directly what participants claimed they did during the interview and on the questionnaire concerning feedback practices on CA of writing. The responses are presented as in Table 12 below.

Table 12: The teacher feedback practices generated by classroom observation

Teacher feedback practices	Strong (%)	Not displayed (%)
giving feedback	43	57
correction sessions	43	57
incorporation of scoring grades to final grade	14	86
planning lessons from feedback	0	100

As indicated in Table 12, 43% of the participants frequently gave feedback of continuous assessment of writing to students. In addition, 43% of the participants held correction sessions with their students after giving feedback of continuous assessment. However, the

findings from classroom observation as Table 12 shows contradicted from what participants claimed they did during interview and questionnaire as 86% of them did not incorporate grades of continuous assessment of writing with the end of term marks to produce the final grade. The findings further indicate that none of the respondents used feedback on CA of writing to plan for writing lessons.

To sum up, the findings reveal that the participants did not frequently give feedback of continuous assessment as well as holding correction sessions in the writing lessons. The findings further show that teachers did not incorporate the grade of continuous assessment of writing lessons to end of term grades to produce the final grade. It was also discovered that feedback of continuous assessment of writing was not used to plan for writing lessons.

The findings of the study concurred with what Desta (2019) and Remadna (2016) found that most of the teachers did not give frequent/timely feedback to the students in the teaching and learning of writing. But one of the principles of CA is guidance oriented which advocates that feedback is to be obtained after every assessment activity in the school. CA as an integral part of teaching and learning process is meant to provide information to both the teacher and the students on their teaching and learning process respectively. That is, CA results provide vital feedback to both teachers and students in the process of learning not at the end of the term. Brown (2004) stated that the main purpose of CA is to improve writing skills through the provision of quality continuous feedback. The participants should provide regular feedback for students to get acquainted about their strengths and the areas where they need to improve.

The findings relating to the fourth research question also reveal that not all participants of the study held correction sessions with students. This is consistent with what Benzehaf (2016) found out that a good number of teachers did not hold correction sessions with their students. The findings also agreed with the findings by Sardareh (2016) and Lee (2007) who found out that teachers were not using feedback systematically to support learning and teachers were not aware of strategies to implement formative feedback to improve

students' learning. In teaching and learning of writing, correction sessions after giving feedback is an important tool for the sustenance of good performance as well as a veritable instrument for the improvement of poor performance. This is because through corrections sessions after giving feedback, students come to know where they are lacking in the process of writing. Therefore, teachers of English language should hold correction sessions after giving feedback on writing works to make the writing process easier and understandable for their students. In this way students can learn the necessary skills of developing writing.

The findings also show that participants did not use the feedback of continuous assessment of writing to plan their teaching. It is idealised that teachers need to use feedback of continuous assessment of writing to evaluate their teaching methods. The feedback of continuous assessment helps to communicate the areas of students' strengths and weakness to the teachers to enable them make adjustments to the teaching and learning methods. In other words, the feedback on continuous assessment of writing enables the teachers to assess their instructional methods from time to time in order to improve their performance (Osadebe, 2015). This helps teachers to know the next step of students' learning and to which direction they need to move forward.

To sum up, the findings of the fourth research question show that participants did not frequently give feedback to students. Therefore, they did not accumulate grades of CA to end of term marks to produce the final grade. Still more, they did not hold correction sessions to help students to revise their writing works. The findings also indicate that participants did not diagnosed students' writing needs through CA as they did not plan writing lessons based on the feedback of CA. The ongoing discussion however showed that teachers should use feedback of CA to help students improve their writing abilities.

4.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has revealed that the participants have the impression that the affective domains of the students' behaviour in English language writing classes were not of paramount importance, therefore, they did not continuously assess them. The chapter has further shown that the participants were not assessing students' writing works at different phases using different types of writing in the process of teaching and learning of writing. It has also shown that participants were selective as they were not assessing all the traits of writing. Consequently, they focussed on the form of students' writing works while ignoring over all content of the writings. The chapter has further shown that the participants considered many desirable assessment designing qualities when designed writing tasks but they ignored the provision of scoring rubrics as to guide students what they would be assessed. Finally, the chapter has revealed that the participants did not frequently give feedback of continuous assessment as well as holding correction sessions in the writing lessons. As a result, they did not accumulate the grades of continuous assessment and planned for writing lessons from feedback of continuous assessment of writing.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter presents the summary of the major findings, the conclusions drawn and implications forwarded by the study.

5.1 Summary

This exploratory study sought to document teachers' knowledge and practices of continuous assessment (CA) in English writing lessons in selected Malawian secondary schools specifically in Blantyre urban. The major purpose was to understand in depth teachers' awareness and practices of continuous assessment in writing lessons. To attain this, the study was mainly responding to four research questions. These are: How do secondary school teachers practise CA to assess writing skills? What factors do secondary school teachers consider when designing CA to assess writing skills? How do secondary school teachers of English use feedback on CA to evaluate their teaching methods? What is the secondary school teachers' understanding of CA in assessing writing skills? The findings to these four research questions have been discussed in Chapter 4 of the current thesis.

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the 6 + 1 Trait Writing Model was used to formulate data generate tools and analysed the findings. The current research work was conducted in the form of a case study and combined both qualitative and quantitative research methods for data collection and analysis.

The research questions of the present work have been discussed through the use of four research instruments. All 8 participating teachers of English language were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher freedom in sequencing questions and allocating time and attention to different topics. To obtain more information about participants' experiences regarding the use of CA to assess students' writing works without the influence of the researcher, questionnaire was employed. Further, the classroom observation was conducted as a reality check between what the teachers alleged during interview and questionnaire, and what actually happened in the writing classes. Lastly, classroom observation was supplemented by document analysis so as to uncover what happened during the period of researcher's absence. The study has shown that the generated data was transcribed, analysed and interpreted into themes and sub-themes using thematic analysis, tabulation and percentage tallying.

The findings of the study were presented in four broad categories of conceptions of CA teachers' knowledge, traits assessed, types of writing assessed, CA desirable assessment qualities and CA feedback practices in English language writing lessons. Under each of these broad categories, the study had major themes which were further into sub-themes. In general, the findings are that teachers' knowledge of principles of continuous assessment is minimal. Therefore, they did not effectively implemented them to assess students' writing works at different stages of teaching and learning of writing to help students develop writing abilities. Below, the study discuss the main findings.

5.2 Conclusions

The conclusions from the findings of the study are presented under the four research questions in the following sections.

5.2.1 The secondary school teachers' knowledge of CA

From the findings on the first research question, the study established that most of the secondary school teachers of English language did not have adequate knowledge of principles of continuous assessment when they assessed writing skills of their learners. The comprehensive nature of CA which demands that the assessment activity of the teacher is expected to cover the affective domains of the students' behaviour was not practised by the teachers of English language. The affective domains that were not factored in all continuous assessment of writing skills included class attendance, punctuality, respect for rules and regulation, and cooperation with colleagues. There was insufficient understanding and practices of the principles of continuous assessment by teachers of English language when they assessed students' writing works.

5.2.2 How secondary school teachers use CA to assess writing skills

The study established that during continuous writing assessment, the participants used different types of writing such as report writing, business letter writing, friendly letter writing, note making, summary writing and composition writing to assess writing skills. These types of writing were used to assess traits of writing such cohesion, coherence, choice of structure, spellings and grammatical structure. However, the study discovered that participants did not assess students' writing works at different stages using different types of writing as continuous assessment requires. Further, the participants' attention was focussed on spelling errors and grammatical structures of the students' writing works. This suggests that teachers did not assess other important skills such as coherence and cohesion. On the same, the study also established that the teachers ignored other skills such as the scale of formality (politeness), use of emotive tone, register (select language forms appropriate to topic), use of discourse markers and vocabulary when using continuous assessment to writing skills.

5.2.3 Factors that secondary school teachers when designing writing tasks

From the findings, the study concluded that the participants considered different types of desirable qualities of continuous assessment when they wanted to assess writing skills. The teachers considered the nature of students, availability of time and materials and prompt. However, the findings revealed that teachers did not disclose the scoring rubrics of continuous assessment of writing to students. The study findings suggest that without knowing the scoring rubrics (criteria), which would be used, the students did not know what was being assessed during continuous assessment of writing which contributed to their poor performance.

5.2.4 The CA feedback practices

The findings revealed that teacher feedback on CA was not fully utilised to benefit student learning of writing. Continuous assessment results of writing were not used for diagnostic purposes since not all participants provided feedback to the students. Consequently, most of the participants did not all hold correction sessions to revise students' writing works. As a result, majority of the participants did not use the feedback of continuous assessment to plan and modify their approaches to teaching of writing. Still more, all the participants did not add the results of continuous assessment of writing to the end of term grade to produce the final grade of the students. Yet continuous assessment is centred on cumulative nature as it is used for both reporting and grading.

5.3 Implications

To harness the potential of teacher understanding and practices of continuous assessment to improve teaching and learning of writing, the findings of the study suggest that teachers of English language may use continuous assessment to assess student writing and performance in the class at many different stages throughout the term and could come in many different types. Teachers should assess forms of language as well content of the

writing. The writing works of the students are supposed to be grammatically accurate and meaningful not only focuses primarily on formal accuracy and correctness. This can be attained if teachers assess the clarity of communication, organisation of ideas, conventions, discourse markers and textual features, which do reflect communicative purpose of writing proficiency. Therefore, teachers need to re-examine their focus on the assessment of the traits of writing by the heads of departments or officials from MoEST/MIE through workshops. Attention needs to be paid not only on correcting spellings and grammatical structures, but also to all the traits of writing to produce learners that are proficient in writing in English language as advocated by the 6+1 Model of Writing.

The findings of the study also suggest that for teachers to support students improve their writing abilities, scoring rubrics need to be revealed to students. Scoring rubrics define the expectations of writing tasks with ways to indicate different levels of effectiveness in meeting those expectations. Furthermore, relying on the scoring rubric for assessment directs learners to think critically and develop their writing skills. Therefore, teachers of English language when designing continuous assessment of writing should provide students with information about scoring rubrics (assessment criteria) which is used to assess their writing works, in order to help them to meet the writing standards required. The scoring rubrics allow students to focus on those particular traits of writing that will be assessed. Hence, when scoring rubrics are explicit, students write more effectively and appropriately as they are informed what is needed to achieve the desired performance.

The findings of the study also suggest that teachers of English language should frequently report the feedback of continuous assessment to students because feedback guides the students on the long road to developing their writing capabilities. One of the major purpose of continuous assessment of writing is to provide feedback to students since it is crucial to writing development. Feedback as part of instruction is crucial since it provides necessary information to students and teachers about the strengths and weaknesses in the processes of teaching and learning of writing. To students, it tell them whether or not the piece of writing has achieved the intended communication purpose and areas for

improvement. On the other hand, teachers should plan their writing lessons based on the students' writing needs diagnosed in the continuous assessment. The findings also suggest that teachers should also frequently hold correction sessions after giving feedback with students to revise students' writing works for improvement. Correction sessions provide room for more practice as learners' writing skills grow through planned trainings. The main emphasis of the correction sessions is to provide operational feedback to students in order to be able to make enhancements in their writings.

Teachers do need the proper training in continuous assessment issues that will allow them to perform their careers in the best way. The effective implementation of continuous assessment depends on the teachers' knowledge of its principles. The findings of the study suggest that teachers of English language need to have knowledge of the principles that govern continuous assessment at large for them to execute it adequately in the writing lessons. The heads of departments or officials from MoEST/MIE through workshops need to provide teachers with well-prepared manuals of continuous assessment to improve their awareness on how the continuous assessment would be practised in writing lessons. The manuals should highlight all the aspects of students that are supposed to be assessed including cognitive, affective, psychological factors and overall continuous assessment practices. This is because the prime objective of the teaching and learning of writing is to develop the writing skills and competence of language among the students.

5.4 Areas for further research

The first area that the researcher identified that needs further study is on examining the understanding and the practices of continuous assessment by rural secondary school teachers of English language in assessing writing skills. The purpose of the study will be to investigate the attitudes of secondary school teachers of English towards continuous assessment and the challenges that they encounter when they use continuous assessment in writing lessons.

The second area that requires further study is on the comparison between private secondary school (especially high schools) and public secondary school teachers when they practise CA of writing. The purpose of the study will be to compare the attitudes of the teachers towards continuous assessment of writing and the methods used by both private and public school teachers of English language in the conduct of CA of writing.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION FROM CHANCELLOR COLLEGE



Chancellor College

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND TEACHING STUDIES

To: Whom it may concern
From: PG office, Curriculum and Teaching Studies department
Date: 9th December, 2020

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION FOR OLIVER MAUNDA

The bearer of this letter, Oliver Maunda (MED-LED-08-19), is a postgraduate student in the School of Education at the University of Malawi, Chancellor College. He is pursuing a master of education Language degree in Curriculum and Teaching Studies.

Oliver Maunda is currently conducting his fieldwork, collecting data for his study. Any assistance rendered to him will be greatly appreciated.

Should you require additional information concerning this letter, please feel free to contact the undersigned.

Yours sincerely,

Bob Maseko, PhD
PG COORDINATOR
CURRICULUM AND TEACHING STUDIES DEPARTMENT

Email: bmaseko@cc.ac.mw



LEGE

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE TEACHER

1. Presentation of the interviewer and purpose of the study.

My name is O. Maunda. I am presently a student at the University of Malawi, Chancellor College, finishing a Master degree in Language Education. I have been teaching English language for quite some time. The purpose of this study is to explore how teachers of English language understand and practice continuous assessment in writing lessons by interviewing some English language teachers.

2. Breaking the ice

1. Could you briefly describe your experience in using continuous assessment?
2. Have you ever attended the in-service training of continuous assessment?
3. What is your attitudes towards continuous assessment?

3. Focus on the subject

1. Do you give grades to students for writing class attendance as part of continuous assessment?

Probe: How?

2. Do you give grades to students for punctuality in writing class as part of continuous assessment?

Probe: How?

3. Do you give grades for respecting class rules in writing class as part of continuous assessment?

Probe: How?

4. Do you give grades for cooperation with colleagues in writing class as part of continuous assessment?

Probe: How?

5. Do you include continuous assessment scores of writing task in the final examination scores of your students?

Probe: Why?

6. What are the factors that you consider when designing continuous assessment writing task?

Probe: How do you design continuous assessment writing task?

7. What are the elements that you assess in continuous assessment writing task?

Probe: How do you grade each element that you assess in continuous assessment writing task?

8. Do you disclose to students scoring rubrics (instructions) of continuous assessment writing task?

Probe: How?

9. How frequently do you assess writing skills of your students in English language class?

10. Which writing tasks do you use during continuous assessment?

11. Do you alternate these writing tasks when assessing learners in the continuous assessment?

Probe: Why?

12. How do you report the results of continuous assessment of writing task to students?

13. Do you incorporate marks or grades of continuous assessment of writing with the end of term marks to produce the final grade?

14. Do you hold correction sessions with your students after marking their writing task?

Probe: How?

Probe: What are the reasons of holding correction sessions with your students?

15. How do you use feedback of continuous assessment of writing task?

Thank you for participating in the study!

APPENDIX 3: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Dear teachers,

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information required for the research to be conducted concerning Continuous Assessment (CA) in English language writing classes. Your genuine responses will contribute to the quality of the study. Please feel free and respond to each item as genuinely as possible. To this effect, no need for writing your name. I would like to express my appreciation in advance for taking your time to respond to this questionnaire.

Part 1: Background information of the respondents (Tick what applies to you)

- 1) What is your sex? a. Male _____ b. Female _____
- 2) What is highest educational qualification?
a. Diploma in language _____ b. Bachelor in language _____ c. Masters in education (language) _____
- 3) How many years have you been teaching English language in secondary school?
a. 1-5 _____ b. 6-10 _____ c. 11-15 _____ d. 16-20 _____ e. 20 and above _____
- 4) What is your current class that you are teaching?
a. form 1 _____ b. form 3 _____
- 5) What is the subject that you teach in the class/classes selected above?
a. English language b. English literature c. both English literature and English language

Part 2: General Directions: Read each of the statements given below, decide the answer you think appropriate and put a tick (✓) in the grid

Part I: Teachers Practice of Continuous Assessment (CA)

N	Item	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Never
1.	I conduct continuous assessment to assess writing skills.				
2.	I do use continuous assessment plan for my lessons.				
3	I use a variety of writing tasks that enable me check out my students' progress in writing.				
4	I give students feedback of continuous assessment writing task.				
5	I do disclose to students scoring rubrics (instructions) of continuous assessment writing task.				
6	I incorporate marks or grades of continuous assessment of writing with the end of term marks to produce the final grade.				
7	I give grades to students for writing class attendance as part of continuous assessment.				
8	I give grades to students for punctuality in writing class as part of continuous assessment.				
9	I give grades to students for respecting for rules in writing class as part of continuous assessment.				
10	I give grades to students for cooperation with colleagues in writing class as part of continuous assessment.				

Part II: How often do you carry out the following assessment desirable qualities?

N	Qualities of continuous assessment	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Undecided
1	topic restriction (the belief that all students should be asked to write on the same topic with no alternatives allowed)				
2	construct validity(achieve objectives of the writing task)				
3	authenticity(writing task reflect real world)				
4	impact(consider the effects of writing task on students perceptions and performance)				
5	practicality(reflect the implementation of the writing task in terms of human resource, materials and time allotted)				
6	scoring rubric (instructions for carrying out the writing task)				
7	Writing Prompt(defining the writing task for students)				

Part III: Type of language skills most frequently assessed in continuous assessment of writing

N	Types of	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Undecided	Never
1	spellings					
2	vocabulary					
3	grammatical structure					
4	sentence structure					
5	cohesion					
6	coherence					
7	scale of formality(politeness)					
8	use of emotive tone					
9	use of discourse markers					
10	register					

Part IV (a): How often do you carry out the following writing tasks for assessing Writing skills?

SN	Techniques	always	often	Sometimes	rarely	never
1	report writing					
2	business letter writing					
3	friendly letter writing					
4	note-marking					
5	summary writing					
6	composition writing					
7	short story writing					

Part IV (b): How frequently do you assess writing skills of your students in English language class?

a. Once every month b. Once every two weeks c. Once every week

Part V (a): The results of CA

N	Item	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Never
1.	I give students feedback of continuous assessment of writing task.				
2	How frequently do you provide feedback of writing assessment to your students?				
3	Do you correct with students their errors in writing assessment?				
4	I do write feedback on students' papers.				
5	I incorporate average assessment continuous score of writing assessments into the final examinations of my student.				
	I do hold correction sessions with my students.				
6	I use feedback of continuous assessment writing task to plan my writing lessons.				

End, *****Thanks so much for your time!!!**

APPENDIX 4: THE CHECK-LIST FOR CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

Code _____ of _____ school:

Code _____ of _____ teacher:

Class observed:

Date:

—

Sex of teacher:

No. of students: Girls=_____ Boys= _____

Title of lesson:

Lesson _____ time:

Legends: 1. Strong 2. Not Displayed

1.

Observation	Items	1	2
Teacher's understanding of continuous assessment writing tasks	1. The teacher gives grades to students for writing class attendance as part of continuous assessment.		
	2. The teacher gives grades to students for punctuality in writing as part of continuous assessment.		
	3. The teacher gives grades to students for respecting writing class rules as part of continuous assessment.		
	4. The teacher gives grades to students for cooperation with colleagues in writing class as part of continuous assessment.		
	5. The teacher alternates the writing tasks when assessing writing.		

2.

Observation	Items	1	2
Teacher's practice of continuous assessment writing tasks	1. The teacher assesses how ideas are expanded to show in-depth understanding of the topic.		
	2. The teacher assesses how ideas are connected.		
	3. The teacher assesses the choice of structure of the writing assessment tasks.		
	4. The teacher assesses the emotive tone of the writing tasks.		
	5. The teacher assesses the choices of language forms appropriate to topic in writing tasks.		
	7. The teacher assesses spellings in writing tasks.		
	8. The teacher assesses word formation in writing tasks.		
	10. The teacher assesses grammatical structure in writing tasks.		
	11. The teacher assesses the scale of formality (politeness).		
	12. The teacher assesses the select language forms appropriate to topic.		

3.

Observation	Items	1	2
Types of writing tasks	1. Report writing is used as continuous assessment writing task.		
	2. Business letter writing is used as continuous assessment writing task.		
	3. Friendly letter writing is used as continuous assessment writing task.		
	4. Note-marking writing is used as continuous assessment writing task.		
	5. Summary writing is used as continuous assessment writing task.		
	6. Composition writing is used as continuous assessment writing task.		
	7. Short story writing is used as continuous assessment writing task.		
	8. Speech writing is used as continuous assessment writing task.		
	9. Completing a partially written text is used as continuous assessment writing task.		
	10. Writing a paragraph using a given topic sentence is used as continuous assessment writing task.		

4.

Observation	Items	1	2
Continuous assessment desirable qualities	1. The teacher asks all students to write on the same topic with no alternatives allowed.		
	2. The writing continuous assessment tasks reflect real world.		
	3. The teacher reflects the implementation of the continuous assessment writing task in terms of human resource, materials and time allotted.		
	4. The teacher gives instructions for carrying out the continuous assessment writing task.		
	5. The teacher defines the continuous assessment writing task for students.		

5.

Observation	Items	1	2
Teacher's feedback of continuous assessment	1. The teacher reports feedback of continuous assessment writing task to students.		
	2. The teacher corrects with students their errors in continuous assessment writing task.		
	3. The teacher uses feedback of continuous assessment writing task to plan for writing lessons.		
	4. The teacher incorporate marks or grades of continuous assessment of writing with the end of term marks to produce the final grade.		