



History Teachers' Perspectives on Continuous Assessment in Tanzanian Secondary Schools

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Abstract: Continuous Assessment (CA) is a key component of competence-based education reforms, intended to promote formative assessment, continuous feedback, and competency development. Despite policy reforms in Tanzania, evidence suggests a persistent gap between CA policy intentions and classroom implementation. This study explored History teachers' awareness of CA policy implementation in secondary schools in Bagamoyo District, Tanzania. An exploratory qualitative case study design was employed involving five purposively selected public secondary schools. Twenty participants, comprising History teachers, Heads of Schools, and School Quality Assurers, were selected purposively. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document review, and analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis. The findings revealed that although teachers recognized CA as a mandatory component of teaching and national examination grading, their understanding was largely procedural rather than conceptual. Teachers demonstrated limited knowledge of policy provisions, formative assessment principles, moderation procedures, and competency-based assessment practices. Policy awareness was shaped primarily by school leadership, departmental routines, and examination practices rather than direct engagement with official policy documents. Consequently, policy enactment varied across schools and was influenced by leadership support, professional learning opportunities, and contextual constraints. The study recommends strengthening teachers' policy literacy through continuous professional development, simplified policy implementation guides, school-based professional learning communities, and monitoring systems that emphasize pedagogical quality alongside administrative compliance.

Keywords: Continuous Assessment, Policy Awareness, Policy Enactment, History Education, Assessment Literacy, Competency-Based Curriculum

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1. Introduction

Educational assessment has undergone significant transformation over the past three decades as education systems worldwide have shifted from traditional examination-oriented approaches toward formative assessment that supports teaching and learning. Rather than serving solely as a mechanism for measuring students' achievement, assessment is increasingly viewed as an integral part of the instructional process that promotes learner engagement, guides instructional decisions, and develops higher-order competencies (Black & Wiliam,

2018; OECD, 2023). Consequently, Continuous Assessment (CA) has become a central component of competence-based curriculum reforms implemented across Europe, North America, Asia, Africa, and other developing education systems.

Continuous Assessment refers to the systematic collection and use of evidence about learners' progress throughout the teaching and learning process. Unlike end-of-course examinations that evaluate learning after instruction, CA provides continuous information that enables teachers to monitor learners' progress, provide timely feedback, and adapt instruction to improve learning outcomes (Sadler,

1989). Its formative orientation positions assessment as an ongoing instructional practice rather than merely a certification exercise. International organizations such as UNESCO, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the World Bank advocate the integration of formative assessment into competence-based curricula as a strategy for improving educational quality and learner achievement (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2021). Current assessment reforms encourage teachers to employ diversified assessment techniques, provide meaningful feedback, engage learners in self-assessment, and use assessment evidence to improve teaching. These expectations require teachers to possess adequate assessment literacy and a sound understanding of policy intentions.

Despite widespread adoption of Continuous Assessment policies, research indicates that implementation frequently falls short of policy expectations. In many countries, CA has become dominated by routine testing, record keeping, and examination preparation rather than functioning as a tool for enhancing learning (Evans et al., 2023). Ball et al. (2012) argue that educational policies are not implemented mechanically; instead, they are interpreted and enacted within specific school contexts shaped by leadership, organizational culture, teacher knowledge, and available resources. Consequently, teachers' understanding of policy becomes a critical determinant of successful implementation.

Teacher awareness extends beyond simply recognizing the existence of policy documents. It encompasses policy literacy, that is, the ability to understand policy objectives, interpret assessment principles, and translate policy expectations into effective classroom practices (Postareff et al., 2021). Similarly, assessment literacy requires teachers to understand formative assessment principles, develop appropriate assessment tasks, provide constructive feedback, and use assessment information to support learners' progress (DeLuca et al., 2019). Without adequate policy and assessment literacy, Continuous Assessment risks becoming a procedural exercise focused primarily on compliance.

Empirical studies across different educational contexts consistently report limited teacher awareness of assessment policies. Studies conducted in South Africa, Ghana, Kenya, Ethiopia, and other African countries indicate that many teachers possess only superficial knowledge of Continuous Assessment policy and frequently rely on traditional examination practices instead of formative approaches (Kanjee, 2020; Ong'ondo, 2023; Sayed & Ahmed, 2023). Similar findings have been reported in Canada and Australia, where inadequate assessment literacy constrains teachers' ability to implement competence-based

assessment effectively (DeLuca et al., 2019; Tan, 2022). These studies demonstrate that teacher awareness is fundamental to successful policy enactment.

In Tanzania, Continuous Assessment has been progressively institutionalized through education reforms beginning with the Musoma Resolution and reinforced by the Education and Training Policy (2014, revised 2023), the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) curriculum framework, and assessment guidelines developed by the National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA). These policy documents position CA as a compulsory component of learner evaluation and emphasize competency-based assessment, diversified assessment methods, formative feedback, moderation, and continuous monitoring of learner progress (MoEST, 2023; NECTA, 2024; TIE, 2019).

Although these policy frameworks provide clear expectations, several studies suggest that implementation remains problematic. Tanzanian teachers continue to depend largely on written tests while making limited use of formative feedback and diversified assessment techniques (Byabato & Kisamo, 2014; Kitta & Tilya, 2019). Furthermore, professional development opportunities remain limited, policy dissemination is uneven, and assessment moderation is inconsistently practiced. These challenges suggest that many teachers may not fully understand the pedagogical intentions underlying Continuous Assessment policy.

The challenge is particularly important in History education because the subject emphasizes critical thinking, historical inquiry, source analysis, interpretation of evidence, and argument construction. Assessing these competencies requires teachers to move beyond conventional written tests and employ diverse formative assessment strategies that support continuous learning. Effective implementation of Continuous Assessment in History therefore depends not only on the availability of policy documents but also on teachers' understanding of assessment principles and policy expectations.

Bagamoyo District provides an important context for examining these issues because secondary schools continue implementing competence-based curriculum reforms under varying institutional conditions. Exploring History teachers' awareness of Continuous Assessment policy within this context provides valuable insight into how national assessment reforms are interpreted and enacted at the classroom level.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Continuous Assessment (CA) has been established in Tanzania as a mandatory component of competency-based education through the Education and Training Policy (2014, revised 2023), the Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum framework, and the National Examinations Council of Tanzania assessment guidelines (MoEST, 2023; NECTA, 2024). These policy documents envision Continuous Assessment as a formative process that supports continuous learning, provides meaningful feedback, promotes competency development, and contributes to students' final assessment. However, despite these policy intentions, evidence suggests that classroom implementation remains inconsistent.

Previous studies in Tanzania indicate that many teachers continue to emphasize written tests and examination preparation while giving limited attention to formative feedback, diversified assessment methods, and competency-based assessment practices (Byabato & Kisamo, 2014; Kitta & Tilya, 2019). Existing research has largely attributed these challenges to inadequate training, limited resources, and heavy workloads. However, relatively little attention has been paid to teachers' awareness and understanding of Continuous Assessment policy itself. Since teachers are the primary actors responsible for translating policy into classroom practice, limited policy awareness may significantly influence how CA is interpreted and implemented.

Furthermore, most Tanzanian studies have examined Continuous Assessment at the general education level, with few focusing specifically on secondary school History teaching. This represents an important knowledge gap because History requires assessment of complex competencies such as historical reasoning, interpretation of evidence, critical thinking, and argumentation, which demand effective formative assessment practices. Little is therefore known about how History teachers understand Continuous Assessment policy and how this awareness influences their classroom assessment practices, particularly in Bagamoyo District. This study was therefore conducted to explore History teachers' awareness of Continuous Assessment policy implementation in secondary schools in Bagamoyo District, Tanzania. By examining teachers' understanding of policy provisions, sources of policy knowledge, and factors influencing policy awareness, the study sought to generate evidence that can inform policy implementation, teacher professional development, and efforts to strengthen formative assessment practices in Tanzanian secondary schools.

1.2 Objective of this paper

This paper aimed to explore history teachers' awareness on continuous assessment policy implementation in Secondary schools

2. Literature Review

The study is guided by two complementary theoretical perspectives. Sadler's Formative Assessment Theory (1989) provides a pedagogical lens for understanding how assessment supports learner improvement through feedback, self-monitoring, and continuous progression. Policy Enactment Theory (Ball et al., 2012) complements this perspective by explaining how teachers interpret, negotiate, and operationalize policy within complex institutional contexts. Together, these theories facilitate a nuanced examination of the relationship between policy awareness and classroom assessment implementation.

2.1 Teachers' Awareness of Continuous Assessment Policy

Teachers' awareness of Continuous Assessment (CA) policy is a critical determinant of successful assessment reform. Awareness extends beyond recognizing the existence of policy documents to understanding policy objectives, assessment principles, procedural requirements, and the ability to translate policy expectations into meaningful classroom practice. According to Ball et al. (2012), teachers are not passive recipients of policy but active interpreters who shape how reforms are enacted within specific school contexts. Consequently, variations in teachers' understanding largely determine whether CA functions as a formative tool for improving learning or remains a procedural requirement.

Globally, research consistently demonstrates that teachers' policy awareness is closely linked to assessment literacy and professional learning. In Singapore, Tan (2022) conducted a qualitative study using interviews and document analysis to examine how secondary school teachers interpreted competency-based assessment reforms. The study found that although teachers understood procedural assessment requirements, many continued to interpret policy through long-established examination traditions, resulting in limited use of formative assessment. Similarly, Postareff et al. (2021), in a mixed-methods study involving university teachers in Finland, reported that teachers with stronger conceptual understanding of assessment were more likely to implement formative approaches, whereas those with limited assessment literacy relied primarily on grading. Likewise, DeLuca et al. (2019) conducted a mixed-methods study in Australia and found that many teachers

possessed technical knowledge of assessment procedures but lacked confidence in interpreting assessment criteria and designing competency-based assessments. In addition, Schildkamp et al. (2020), through a comparative qualitative study across several European countries, found that teachers' effective use of assessment information depended not only on policy knowledge but also on professional collaboration and supportive school leadership. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that successful implementation of CA requires conceptual understanding of assessment purposes rather than procedural compliance alone.

In Lesotho, the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC, 2020) evaluated curriculum implementation using interviews, observations, and document analysis and found that although teachers recognized CA as compulsory, they largely viewed it as a mechanism for generating examination marks rather than supporting learning. In South Africa, Kanjee (2020) employed qualitative interviews and classroom observations to investigate teachers' assessment literacy following implementation of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). The findings revealed that teachers concentrated on completing assessment schedules and recording marks while giving limited attention to formative feedback and learner improvement. Likewise, Hayford (2018) used a mixed-methods design in Ghana and found that teachers understood CA requirements but had limited knowledge of alternative assessment strategies and formative feedback, leading them to rely heavily on written tests. Similarly, Ayanwale et al. (2023) surveyed secondary school teachers in Nigeria and reported that although teachers demonstrated moderate awareness of assessment reforms, many lacked the skills needed to implement learner-centred assessment effectively. These African studies consistently indicate that awareness of policy requirements does not necessarily translate into understanding of the formative philosophy underpinning Continuous Assessment.

Byabato and Kisamo (2014) examined teachers' assessment knowledge using questionnaires and interviews in secondary schools and found that many teachers possessed limited understanding of formative assessment and depended primarily on written examinations. They attributed this to inadequate training, limited access to policy documents, and weak professional support. Similarly, Kitta and Tilya (2019) explored competence-based curriculum implementation using qualitative methods and reported that teachers often received curriculum directives without sufficient opportunities to interpret policy documents, leading them to implement reforms through established school routines rather than policy intentions. Mosha (2018) also found that although teachers were aware of curriculum reforms, many lacked adequate understanding of competency-based pedagogy

and assessment principles. Likewise, Mahera (2020), using questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations, found that many teachers continued to associate assessment with examinations and grading rather than with feedback and learning improvement. These findings suggest that teacher awareness in Tanzania remains largely procedural, limiting effective implementation of Continuous Assessment.

Although previous studies have generated important insights into teacher awareness of CA, several knowledge gaps remain. First, most studies have examined teachers across different subjects, providing limited understanding of subject-specific assessment practices. Second, few studies have focused specifically on History teachers, whose subject requires assessment of historical inquiry, evidence interpretation, critical thinking, and argumentation. Third, limited research has examined how teachers' awareness of CA policy influences its enactment in classroom practice within Tanzanian secondary schools. This study addresses these gaps by exploring History teachers' awareness of CA policy implementation in secondary schools in Bagamoyo District. Particularly, paying attention to how teachers interpret policy provisions, acquire policy knowledge, and translate policy expectations into classroom assessment practices.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore History teachers' awareness of CA policy implementation in secondary schools in Bagamoyo District, Tanzania. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand teachers' interpretations, experiences, perceptions, and meanings attached to CA policy rather than measuring variables numerically. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research is suitable when researchers aim to explore complex educational phenomena within their natural contexts and generate deeper understanding of participants' experiences. In this study, teachers' awareness of CA policy was viewed as a socially constructed phenomenon influenced by professional experiences, school cultures, leadership practices, and contextual conditions. Therefore, qualitative inquiry provided an opportunity to capture how History teachers understood policy expectations, how they accessed policy knowledge, and how such understanding influenced classroom assessment practices.

The qualitative approach was also consistent with the study's theoretical foundation. Policy Enactment Theory (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012) emphasizes that educational policies are interpreted and reconstructed by actors within particular contexts rather than implemented mechanically. Similarly, Sadler's Formative Assessment

Theory (1989) focuses on teachers’ understanding of assessment purposes, feedback processes, and learning improvement. These theoretical assumptions require an interpretive approach capable of examining teachers’ meanings and experiences.

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted an exploratory case study design. A research design provides a systematic framework that guides the collection, organization, and interpretation of data to answer research questions (Creswell, 2014). The exploratory case study design was selected because the study investigated a contemporary educational phenomenon teachers’ awareness and enactment of Continuous Assessment policy within its real-life school context. According to Yin (2018), case study research is appropriate when researchers seek to investigate a phenomenon where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly separated. In this study, History teachers’ awareness of CA policy could not be understood independently from the institutional environment in which they worked. Factors such as school leadership, access to policy documents, professional development opportunities, examination demands, and resource availability influenced how teachers interpreted and enacted CA policies.

The exploratory nature of the design was justified because limited empirical evidence exists regarding how History teachers specifically understand and operationalize CA policy within Tanzanian secondary schools. Rather than testing predetermined relationships, the design enabled the researcher to explore patterns, meanings, and contextual influences emerging from participants’ experiences. Furthermore, the case study design allowed methodological triangulation through multiple sources of evidence, including interviews, classroom observations, and document review. Yin (2018) argues that using multiple sources of evidence strengthens case study validity by allowing researchers to compare and confirm findings from different perspectives.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Bagamoyo District, Coast Region, Tanzania. The district was selected because secondary schools within the area have been implementing

competence-based curriculum reforms that emphasize learner-centred pedagogy and continuous assessment approaches. Bagamoyo District provides relevant context for examining CA policy implementation because schools operate under national assessment requirements while experiencing diverse institutional and resource conditions. The district contains both long-established and relatively newly established secondary schools, creating variations in leadership practices, teacher experiences, and access to educational resources. Such variations provided an appropriate setting for exploring how contextual factors influence teachers’ understanding and enactment of CA policy.

3.3 Target Population

The target population consisted of History teachers, Heads of Schools, and School Quality Assurers involved in secondary education in Bagamoyo District. These participants were selected because they possessed direct experience and knowledge regarding CA policy implementation.

History teachers formed the primary participant group because the study focused specifically on their awareness and interpretation of CA policy within History classrooms. Heads of Schools were included because school leaders influence policy interpretation, professional support, and institutional practices related to assessment implementation. School Quality Assurers were included because they provide external monitoring and professional guidance regarding curriculum and assessment implementation. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), qualitative studies require participants who possess rich information related to the phenomenon under investigation rather than large representative samples.

The study employed purposive sampling to select participants and schools. Purposive sampling involves intentionally selecting participants who possess relevant knowledge and experience concerning the research phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Five public secondary schools were purposively selected based on the following criteria: Availability of History subject teaching; Implementation of CA practices; Variation in school characteristics; and Accessibility for conducting repeated field visits. The final sample consisted of:

<i>Category of Participants</i>	<i>Number</i>
<i>History teachers</i>	10
<i>Heads of Schools</i>	5
<i>School Quality Assurers</i>	5
<i>Total Participants</i>	20

The sample size was guided by the principle of data saturation, whereby data collection continued until additional interviews generated limited new information or themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The selected participants provided diverse perspectives regarding CA policy awareness, interpretation, and implementation.

3.4 Sources of Data

The study utilized three sources of qualitative data; primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from participants through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Interviews generated detailed information regarding teachers' understanding of CA policy documents, sources of policy knowledge, challenges experienced, and perceptions regarding implementation. Classroom observations provided direct evidence of how teachers translated CA principles into instructional practices. Observation focused on assessment techniques, feedback practices, learner engagement, and documentation of assessment activities. Secondary data were obtained through document review. The reviewed documents included: Education and Training Policy (2014, revised 2023); Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum frameworks and History subject syllabi; NECTA assessment guidelines and procedures; School Continuous Assessment records and assessment plans. Document review enabled comparison between official policy expectations and actual school-level practices.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

Data was collected by semi-structured interviews. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), semi-structured interviews allow researchers to explore predetermined topics while providing flexibility for participants to explain their experiences. Interview questions focused on: Teachers' knowledge of CA policy documents; Understanding of CA objectives; Sources of policy information; Interpretation of formative assessment principles; Challenges affecting policy implementation. Interviews lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and were conducted in a language comfortable for participants. With participants' permission, interviews were audio-recorded and supplemented with field notes. Non-participant classroom observation was conducted to examine actual assessment practices. Observation was guided by a checklist developed from CA policy requirements and Sadler's Formative Assessment Theory (1989). The observation focused on: Use of assessment techniques; Teacher questioning practices; Feedback provision; Learner participation; Evidence of formative assessment processes. Classroom observation helped minimize reliance on self-reported data and enabled comparison between teachers stated understanding and actual practices.

Moreover, document review was conducted to examine policy expectations and institutional evidence of CA implementation. The reviewed documents included national policy documents, curriculum guidelines, and school-level assessment records. The document review focused on: CA requirements; Assessment procedures; Documentation standards; Moderation practices; Evidence of policy implementation. According to Bowen (2009), document analysis provides valuable contextual information and enables researchers to compare intended practices with actual implementation.

3.6 Data Analysis

The study employed Braun and Clarke's (2021) Reflexive Thematic Analysis for analysing qualitative data. Reflexive thematic analysis was selected because it provides a flexible yet rigorous approach for identifying, interpreting, and reporting patterns within qualitative datasets.

3.7 Trustworthiness of the Study

The study ensured trustworthiness through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability strategies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility; Credibility was enhanced through triangulation of interviews, observations, and document review. Member checking was also conducted by sharing key interpretations with selected participants for confirmation. Dependability; A detailed research process was maintained, including documentation of data collection procedures, coding decisions, and analytical processes. Confirmability The researcher maintained reflexive notes to minimize personal bias and ensure that interpretations were grounded in participant evidence. Transferability; Detailed descriptions of the study context, participants, and findings were provided to enable readers to determine applicability to similar contexts.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were observed throughout the research process. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from relevant authorities. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw. Participants' identities were protected through the use of pseudonyms. All collected information was used strictly for academic purposes.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings are presented using evidence from interviews, classroom observations, and document review. The discussion is guided by Sadler's Theory of Formative Assessment (1989) and Policy Enactment Theory (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012). Sadler's theory provides insight

into teachers' understanding of assessment purposes, feedback, and learning improvement, while Policy Enactment Theory explains how teachers interpret and adapt policy within specific institutional and contextual environments. **Surface-Level Awareness of CA Objectives**

The findings revealed that History teachers in Bagamoyo District secondary schools demonstrated a surface level awareness; that CA is a compulsory component of the national assessment system. Most participants recognized CA as a requirement linked to students' academic progression, school reporting, and final examination grading. Teachers commonly associated CA with activities such as class tests, assignments, examinations, and record keeping. However, although teachers acknowledged the existence and importance of CA, their understanding was mainly procedural rather than conceptual. Participants could explain what they were required to do but demonstrated limited understanding of why CA was introduced and how it should contribute to improving learning outcomes. One History teacher from School H explained:

"We know that Continuous Assessment is required because students' marks must be recorded throughout the year. We conduct tests and submit results as required, but the main thing is ensuring that students have enough marks before final examinations. (School H History teacher, February 2026).

This statement indicates that the teacher understood CA primarily as a requirement for generating marks rather than as a pedagogical process for supporting learning improvement. The emphasis on recording and submission reflects an administrative interpretation of CA. Similarly, a teacher from School K stated:

"CA is part of our school assessment system. We prepare tests, mark them, enter scores in the registers, and submit them. That is what we understand as implementing CA. (School K History teacher, February 2026).

The response demonstrates awareness of CA procedures but limited recognition of its formative dimensions, such as feedback, learner reflection, diagnosis of misconceptions, and instructional adjustment. The findings suggest a distinction between policy awareness and policy understanding. Teachers were aware that CA exists and that it is mandatory; however, their understanding did not consistently extend to the principles underlying CA reform.

This finding supports the argument by Ball et al. (2012) that educational policies are not transferred directly from documents into practice. Instead, policies are interpreted and reconstructed by practitioners based on their professional knowledge, institutional cultures, and available resources. In this study, teachers appeared to interpret CA mainly through existing school routines of testing and recording marks rather than through the broader policy intention of assessment for learning.

The findings also align with Sadler's (1989) Formative Assessment Theory, which argues that effective assessment requires more than measuring achievement. Learners must understand expected standards, compare their performance against those standards, and receive opportunities to improve. The limited conceptual understanding observed among teachers suggests that, CA implementation may not fully achieve these formative purposes. Similar findings were reported by Kitta and Tilya (2019) in Tanzania, who found that teachers often understood assessment reforms at the level of compliance but experienced difficulties translating policy principles into classroom practices. Likewise, Ayanwale et al. (2023) found in African contexts that inadequate assessment literacy reduces teachers' ability to implement competency-oriented assessment approaches. Therefore, the findings indicate that History teachers' awareness of CA policy remains largely surface-level, characterized by recognition of requirements but limited internalization of pedagogical intentions.

Superficial engagement with policy frameworks

Although teachers frequently referred to national authorities such as the Ministry of Education, Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE), and the National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA), the study found that many participants could not clearly identify specific CA policy documents or explain their provisions. Teachers commonly relied on general statements such as "government guidelines," "NECTA instructions," or "school assessment procedures" rather than demonstrating familiarity with particular policy frameworks.

A teacher from School D explained:

"We know that CA comes from the government and NECTA requirements, but honestly, most teachers do not read the policy documents themselves. We normally follow what the academic office tells us."
(School D History teacher, February 2026).

This suggests that teachers' policy knowledge was mediated through administrative communication rather than direct engagement with official policy texts. Similarly, a Head of School from School M noted:

“Teachers receive information during meetings, but few go back to read the actual documents. Most depend on instructions given by school leaders.”
(Head of School M, February 2026).

The statement indicates that school leadership acted as an intermediary between national policy and classroom implementation. These findings can be interpreted through the lens of Policy Enactment Theory (Ball et al., 2012), which emphasizes that policy implementation involves interpretation and translation rather than simple application. Teachers do not implement policies in isolation; instead, they enact them through existing organizational structures and professional cultures. In this case, CA policy knowledge was filtered through school-level communication channels. While this process enables practical adaptation, it may also reduce teachers’ opportunities to critically engage with policy intentions.

This finding corresponds with Datnow and Park (2022), who argue that teachers’ understanding of reforms depends heavily on opportunities for professional dialogue and collective sense-making. Where such opportunities are limited, teachers often rely on simplified interpretations of policies. Similarly, Postareff et al. (2021) highlight that limited policy literacy constrains teachers’ ability to transform reform principles into meaningful classroom practices. The findings therefore reveal a gap between policy availability and policy accessibility. Although CA documents may exist institutionally, their influence remains limited when teachers lack opportunities to study, interpret, and discuss their implications.

Limited Understanding of the Formative Purpose of Continuous Assessment

The study further found that many History teachers associated CA mainly with grading, ranking students, and preparing learners for national examinations. Few participants explicitly described CA as a process for diagnosing learning difficulties, providing feedback, or improving instructional decisions. A teacher from School Z explained:

“The purpose of CA is mainly to know whether students are progressing and to prepare them for NECTA examinations. We use the results to determine their performance levels.”
(School Z History teacher, February 2026).

Although monitoring student progress is an element of assessment, the response emphasizes measurement rather than improvement. A School Quality Assurer from School H added:

“Teachers conduct assessments regularly, but many still see CA as producing marks. The connection between assessment results and improving teaching is not always clear.”
-(SQA School H, February 2026).

The findings demonstrate a tension between the intended formative orientation of CA policy and teachers’ operational understanding of assessment. According to Sadler (1989), formative assessment becomes meaningful when assessment information is used to identify gaps between current and expected performance and when learners receive opportunities to improve. However, the findings suggest that CA practices in the studied schools were often reduced to measurement and documentation. This aligns with Birenbaum (2020), who describes such practices as “instrumental awareness,” where teachers recognize assessment procedures but do not fully internalize their educational purposes. Similarly, the OECD (2023) emphasizes that assessment reforms frequently become compliance exercises when teachers lack opportunities for professional engagement with assessment philosophy.

The findings also correspond with Shepard (2022), who argues that strong examination cultures often reshape formative assessment reforms into preparation mechanisms for high-stakes testing. Therefore, the limited understanding of CA’s formative purpose represents a major barrier to realizing the intended goals of assessment reform in History education.

Experience based awareness

The findings revealed that experienced History teachers tended to rely heavily on accumulated professional intuition and classroom experience rather than on structured engagement with formal CA policy guidelines. Although, teachers demonstrated confidence in setting tests, marking scripts, and maintaining assessment records, their practices were largely shaped by experiential learning developed over time. This suggests that awareness of CA was grounded more in practice-based familiarity than in deliberate understanding of current policy frameworks. From School D, a history teacher explained:

“I have learned through many years of teaching History. You begin to understand what kind of questions test real understanding. But that knowledge comes from experience, not from formal training on Continuous Assessment.”
(School D History Teacher, February, 2026).

This statement illustrates that the teacher’s assessment competence is rooted in personal experience rather than

formal policy guidance. While experiential knowledge enables practical effectiveness, it also indicates limited engagement with updated CA principles. The teacher's emphasis on "what works" suggests that classroom practices are shaped by trial-and-error learning rather than alignment with structured assessment standards.

Another History teacher from School K supported this view by noting:

"New teachers struggle more because they are not given orientation on CA beyond being told to conduct tests. They learn by observing older teachers." (School K History Teacher from, February 2026).

This statement highlights the reproduction of practice through informal mentoring rather than formal training. It suggests that assessment knowledge is transmitted through observation and imitation, which may reinforce existing routines rather than introduce innovative or policy-aligned approaches. As a result, new teachers inherit established practices that may not reflect current assessment reforms. A Head of School from School Z further reinforced this pattern, explaining:

"We have not had recent workshops specifically on Continuous Assessment. Teachers mostly depend on what they learned in college years ago." (Head of School Z, February 2026).

This statement points to an institutional gap in continuous professional development. The reliance on pre-service training indicates that teachers are not being supported to update their assessment practices in line with evolving policy expectations. Consequently, CA implementation becomes static, reflecting past training rather than current reform priorities. In general, these responses demonstrate that teachers' awareness of CA is mediated by professional experience and institutional history rather than sustained engagement with policy. From a policy enactment perspective, teachers interpret and implement policy through existing beliefs, routines, and contextual norms. In this case, experienced teachers appear to filter CA policy through familiar practices, maintaining stability but limiting transformation.

Sadler's theory of formative assessment and Policy Enactment Theory as advanced by Stephen J. Ball. Sadler's framework emphasizes that effective assessment depends on teachers' clear understanding of learning standards, their ability to evaluate student performance against those standards, and their capacity to provide feedback that closes the gap between current and desired performance. In this study, reliance on experiential knowledge without explicit engagement with policy guidelines suggests that

these conditions are only partially met. Teachers demonstrate practical competence in administering assessments but lack systematic alignment with policy-defined criteria and formative intentions.

At the same time, Policy Enactment Theory explains how teachers interpret and translate policy within existing school cultures and routines. The findings indicate that experienced teachers draw heavily on established practices, filtering CA policy through prior knowledge rather than reshaping their approaches in line with reform expectations. This results in what can be described as adaptive enactment where policy is adjusted to fit context, but not necessarily transformed into its intended pedagogical form.

These findings are supported by Darling-Hammond, Hyler & Gardner (2020) who argue that meaningful assessment reform requires continuous, practice-linked professional learning. Similarly, Datnow and Park (2022) emphasize that policies are often adapted to fit existing school cultures rather than reshaping them. Sayed and Ahmed (2023) further note that in resource-constrained contexts, experiential knowledge frequently substitutes for formal policy engagement. While the reliance on experience provides valuable contextual insight and practical efficiency, it also carries important limitations. Without structured policy engagement, teachers may continue to implement assessment in ways that prioritize testing and grading over formative learning. Therefore, experience alone does not ensure alignment with CA policy intentions; it must be complemented by ongoing professional development and institutional support to promote pedagogical transformation.

Generally, the study demonstrates that History teachers in Bagamoyo District possess basic awareness of CA policy; however, their understanding remains largely procedural. The findings reveal a significant gap between recognizing CA as a requirement and internalizing its formative purpose. The next section presents the implications of these findings for policy, practice, and future research.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This section presents the conclusions and recommendations derived from the study findings on History Teachers' Awareness of CA Policy Implementation in Secondary Schools: Evidence from Bagamoyo District, Tanzania. The conclusions are drawn from evidence obtained through interviews, classroom observations, and document review, while being interpreted through the complementary perspectives of Sadler's Theory of Formative Assessment (1989) and Policy Enactment Theory (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012). The study sought to explore the extent to which History teachers understand Continuous Assessment (CA) policy requirements, the

nature of their engagement with policy documents, and how their understanding influences the implementation of CA within classroom contexts. The findings demonstrate that teachers' awareness of CA exists, but it remains largely procedural, with significant implications for effective policy enactment and the realization of formative assessment goals.

5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that teachers' understanding of CA policy was insufficiently conceptualized. Although teachers were familiar with the existence of CA requirements, many demonstrated limited knowledge of specific policy documents, assessment principles, moderation requirements, and the formative purposes underlying CA reforms. Their understanding was commonly derived from school instructions, departmental traditions, and administrative communication rather than systematic engagement with policy documents. From the perspective of Policy Enactment Theory (Ball et al., 2012), this indicates that CA policy was not simply implemented but interpreted through institutional structures and professional cultures. Teachers enacted the policy based on mediated understandings shaped by school leadership, available resources, and existing assessment traditions. Consequently, policy awareness did not automatically translate into comprehensive policy comprehension.

Furthermore, through the lens of Sadler's Theory of Formative Assessment (1989), limited conceptual understanding constrains the ability of teachers to use CA as a mechanism for improving learning. Since formative assessment requires clear understanding of quality standards, comparison of learner performance, and actions to close learning gaps, inadequate understanding of these principles reduces CA to a recording and grading exercise. Therefore, the study concludes that a significant gap exists between awareness of CA as an obligation and understanding of CA as a pedagogical tool for enhancing learning.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE), and National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA) strengthen CA policy implementation through the following measures:

1. The Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST) and Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) should develop simplified CA implementation manuals that translate technical policy requirements into practical classroom strategies. Current policy documents should be

complemented with teacher-friendly materials explaining: The purpose of CA; Examples of formative assessment strategies; Assessment criteria and standards; Feedback approaches; Moderation procedures; Documentation requirements. Such guidelines would improve teachers' policy literacy and reduce dependence on informal interpretations.

2. The TIE should strengthen the continuous professional development programs focusing specifically on assessment literacy. Training should move beyond explaining procedures and emphasize: The philosophy of formative assessment; Designing competency-based assessment tasks; Using assessment evidence to improve teaching; Providing effective feedback; Supporting learner self-assessment. This recommendation aligns with Sadler's theory, which emphasizes that assessment effectiveness depends on teachers' ability to establish standards, identify learning gaps, and facilitate improvement.
3. The study recommends that NECTA should strengthen coherence between CA objectives and national examination structures. Since examination pressures influence teachers' interpretation of CA, national assessment systems should ensure that formative assessment principles are not overshadowed by summative examination demands. CA should be positioned as a tool for improving learning rather than merely generating examination marks.

The study recommends further research in the following areas:

1. Future studies should examine CA policy awareness among History teachers across different regions of Tanzania to determine whether the findings from Bagamoyo District represent wider national patterns.
2. Large-scale quantitative studies should investigate relationships between teachers' assessment literacy, CA practices, and student learning outcomes.
3. Future research should incorporate students' perspectives to understand how CA practices influence learner motivation, engagement, and achievement.

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