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Beyond Grades: Examining the Validity of Continuous Assessment Practices for Measuring Learner Competence in Competency-Based Secondary Schools in Namibia

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Continuous assessment has become a central component of competency-based education because it is intended to provide continuous evidence of learners' knowledge, skills, values, and competencies throughout the teaching and learning process. Unlike traditional summative examinations, continuous assessment seeks to capture learners' progress through diverse assessment activities, including classroom tests, assignments, projects, presentations, practical tasks, and observations. Despite its widespread adoption in many education systems, questions remain regarding the extent to which continuous assessment practices provide valid and credible measures of learner competence. In Namibia, the implementation of competency-based education has further increased the importance of classroom assessment, yet empirical evidence concerning the validity of these practices remains limited.

This study investigated the validity of continuous assessment practices for measuring learner competence in competency-based secondary schools in Namibia. Guided by Messick's Unified Theory of Validity, Constructive Alignment Theory, and Competency-Based Education Theory, the study adopted an interpretivist paradigm and employed a qualitative multiple case study design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving 20 teachers, heads of department, and school administrators purposively selected from secondary schools. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and themes related to assessment validity, curriculum alignment, assessment literacy, and the credibility of classroom assessment practices.

The study generated evidence on the extent to which continuous assessment tasks aligned with intended learning outcomes and accurately reflected learner competence. It also identified contextual, institutional, and pedagogical factors that influenced assessment validity. The findings contribute to educational assessment theory, strengthen understanding of teachers' assessment literacy, and provide evidence-based recommendations for improving continuous assessment practices, curriculum implementation, and educational policy within competency-based secondary education in Namibia and comparable educational contexts.

Keywords: Continuous Assessment; Assessment Validity; Learner Competence; CompetencyBased Education; Assessment Literacy; Secondary Education; Classroom Assessment; Namibia.

1 Introduction

Education systems worldwide have undergone substantial transformation in response to rapid technological advancement, globalisation, and changing labour market demands. These developments have shifted educational priorities from the transmission of factual knowledge towards the development of competencies that enable learners to think critically, solve complex problems, collaborate effectively, communicate confidently, and apply knowledge in authentic contexts (UNESCO, 2021; OECD, 2023; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Consequently, many countries have adopted competency-based education (CBE), which emphasises the demonstration of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes required for successful participation in contemporary society.

Assessment occupies a central role within competency-based education because it provides evidence of learners' competency attainment while informing teaching and learning. Contemporary assessment extends beyond the traditional function of grading learners at the end of instruction to include formative processes that provide timely feedback, guide instructional decisions, and support continuous learner improvement (Black and Wiliam, 2021; Brookhart, 2022 ; Pellegrino, 2024). Among these approaches, continuous assessment has become a defining feature of competency-based curricula because it generates evidence of learner progress through multiple assessment activities, including classroom tests, assignments, projects, presentations, practical investigations, portfolios, self-assessment, peer assessment, and classroom observations (Wiliam, 2022; Brown, 2023). Such approaches are intended to provide a more comprehensive representation of learner competence than reliance on high-stakes examinations alone.

Despite its widespread adoption, the effectiveness of continuous assessment depends on the validity of the evidence it generates. Assessment validity refers to the extent to which assessment tasks measure the intended learning outcomes and whether interpretations and decisions based on assessment results are justified (Messick, 1989; AERA

et al., 2018). Within competency-based education, valid assessment requires close alignment between curriculum objectives, instructional activities, assessment tasks, and scoring procedures so that learners are evaluated on the competencies they are expected to demonstrate. Where such alignment is weak, assessment outcomes may fail to reflect learners' actual abilities, thereby compromising the credibility of educational decisions.

International research has identified several factors that may threaten the validity of continuous assessment, including inadequate teacher assessment literacy, poorly designed assessment tasks, inconsistent interpretation of curriculum standards, subjective marking, limited moderation practices, and insufficient professional development (Brookhart, 2022; Brown, 2023 ; Pellegrino, 2024). These challenges are often exacerbated in developing countries by contextual constraints such as large class sizes, limited instructional resources, inadequate assessment support, and disparities in school infrastructure. Collectively, these factors raise important questions regarding whether continuous assessment consistently provides valid evidence of learner competence across different educational contexts.

In Namibia, the competency-based National Curriculum for Basic Education identifies continuous assessment as a key mechanism for monitoring learner progress and evaluating competency development throughout the learning process (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2024). Teachers are expected to employ diverse assessment methods that generate authentic evidence of learners' cognitive, practical, and affective competencies. However, concerns remain regarding the consistency, quality, and validity of these assessment practices. Variations in teachers' assessment literacy, curriculum interpretation, assessment design, and school contexts may influence the extent to which continuous assessment accurately measures learner competence. Moreover, empirical studies examining the validity of continuous assessment within Namibia's competency-based secondary education system remain limited.

This study addresses this gap by examining the validity of continuous assessment practices in measuring learner competence in competency-based secondary schools in Namibia. Guided by Messick's Unified Theory of Validity and Constructive Alignment Theory, the study investigates teachers' assessment practices, curriculum alignment, assessment literacy, and contextual factors influencing assessment validity. By providing empirical evidence from the Namibian context, the study contributes to the literature on educational assessment while offering practical recommendations for strengthening classroom assessment practices, teacher professional development, curriculum implementation, and educational policy within competency-based education.

1.1 Background to the Study

Assessment has long been recognised as one of the most influential components of educational practice because it shapes curriculum implementation, influences instructional practices, directs learners' approaches to learning, and provides evidence of educational achievement (Black and Wiliam, 2021; Brookhart, 2022; Pellegrino, 2024). Traditionally, educational systems relied predominantly on summative examinations administered at the end of an instructional period to determine learners' academic performance and certify educational attainment (Brookhart, 2022). Although summative assessment continues to play an important role in certification, accountability, and educational progression, it provides only a limited representation of learners' overall competence, often emphasising factual recall rather than the application of knowledge, higher-order thinking, problem-solving, and authentic performance in real-life contexts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; OECD, 2023). Consequently, contemporary educational reforms increasingly advocate assessment systems that monitor learning continuously and provide richer evidence of learner development throughout the instructional process (UNESCO, 2021; Earl, 2023).

The global transition towards competency-based education has accelerated the adoption of continuous assessment as an essential component of effective teaching and learning (Mulder, 2017; OECD, 2023). Unlike traditional assessment approaches that rely heavily on terminal examinations, continuous assessment enables teachers to collect multiple sources of evidence regarding learners' cognitive, practical, social, and affective development over time (Black and Wiliam, 2021; Wiliam, 2022). Through diverse assessment activities, including classroom tests, assignments, projects, portfolios, presentations, practical investigations, observations, peer assessment, self-assessment, and reflective exercises, continuous assessment seeks to provide a comprehensive representation of learner achievement while simultaneously supporting learning through constructive feedback and instructional improvement (Brookhart, 2022; Earl, 2023). Consequently, continuous assessment has become an indispensable strategy for promoting meaningful learning and ensuring that assessment reflects the multidimensional nature of learner competence within competency-based education (Brown, 2023; Pellegrino, 2024).

The concept of learner competence extends beyond academic achievement to encompass the integrated application of knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and behaviours required to perform effectively in authentic contexts (Mulder, 2017; OECD, 2023). Competency-based education therefore requires assessment approaches capable of measuring learners' ability to transfer knowledge across unfamiliar situations, solve complex problems, communicate effectively, collaborate with others, demonstrate creativity, and exercise responsible citizenship (UNESCO, 2021 ; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Continuous assessment is particularly suited to this educational philosophy because it allows repeated observations of learner performance across multiple learning experiences and authentic contexts, thereby generating comprehensive evidence of learners' progressive competency development (Black and Wiliam, 2021; Wiliam, 2022).

Despite its recognised theoretical advantages, the implementation of continuous assessment remains accompanied by significant challenges that may compromise the validity of assessment outcomes. Assessment validity depends upon several interrelated factors, including the quality of assessment design, constructive alignment between curriculum outcomes and assessment tasks, teachers' assessment literacy, fairness of assessment procedures, consistency of scoring practices, moderation mechanisms, and institutional support for quality assurance (Messick, 1989; Biggs and Tang, 2011; Brown, 2023). Where these conditions are not adequately satisfied, continuous assessment may fail to provide accurate evidence of learner competence, thereby weakening educational decision-making and reducing stakeholder confidence in assessment outcomes (Brookhart, 2022; Pellegrino, 2024). These

concerns have generated increasing international interest in examining the validity, credibility, and educational usefulness of classroom assessment practices within competency-based education systems (Brown, 2023; OECD, 2023).

1.2 Context of Continuous Assessment in Competency-Based Education

Competency-based education represents a paradigm shift from traditional content-oriented curricula towards educational systems that prioritise the development and demonstration of measurable competencies. Within this framework, learning is evaluated according to learners' ability to apply knowledge and skills in authentic situations rather than their capacity to memorise information for high-stakes examinations. Consequently, assessment becomes an integral part of the learning process, providing continuous evidence of learners' progression towards achieving clearly defined competencies.

Continuous assessment occupies a central role within competency-based education because it facilitates ongoing monitoring of learner development while supporting formative feedback and instructional adjustment. Rather than relying exclusively on terminal examinations, competency-based curricula encourage teachers to employ multiple assessment methods that capture different dimensions of learner competence. These methods include written assessments, performance tasks, practical investigations, collaborative projects, oral presentations, portfolios, classroom observations, peer assessment, and self-assessment. The integration of diverse assessment strategies increases opportunities for learners to demonstrate competence across a range of authentic learning situations.

In Namibia, the implementation of the competency-based curriculum has strengthened the emphasis on continuous assessment as a mechanism for improving educational quality and promoting learner-centred instruction. Teachers are expected to design assessment activities that align closely with curriculum learning outcomes, provide meaningful feedback, and support progressive learner development throughout the academic year. The National Curriculum for Basic Education recognises continuous assessment as an essential component of competency-based learning because it contributes to fair, comprehensive, and evidence-based evaluation of learner achievement.

Nevertheless, the successful implementation of continuous assessment depends not only on policy intentions but also on teachers' professional competence in designing valid assessment tasks, interpreting assessment evidence, and making defensible judgments regarding learner performance. Variations in assessment literacy, curriculum interpretation, resource availability, and institutional support may influence the extent to which continuous assessment genuinely reflects learner competence. These contextual realities underscore the importance of critically examining the validity of continuous assessment practices within competency-based secondary education and provide the foundation for the present study.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Continuous assessment has become a cornerstone of competency-based education because it is intended to provide continuous, authentic, and comprehensive evidence of learners' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies throughout the teaching and learning process. Unlike traditional summative examinations that measure learning at a single point in time, continuous assessment seeks to monitor learners' progress through diverse assessment activities such as classroom tests, assignments, projects, presentations, practical investigations, portfolios, observations, peer assessment, and self-assessment. These assessment strategies are expected to provide teachers with sufficient evidence to support instructional decisions while ensuring that learners progressively achieve the competencies prescribed by the curriculum (Black and Wiliam, 2021; Brookhart, 2022; OECD, 2023).

The successful implementation of continuous assessment depends largely on the validity of the assessment evidence generated. Assessment validity refers to the extent to which assessment tasks accurately measure the intended learning outcomes and whether the interpretations and decisions based on assessment results are appropriate and justifiable (Messick, 1989; Brown, 2023). Within competency-based education, validity is particularly important because learner competence extends beyond factual knowledge to include higher-order thinking, problem-solving, communication, collaboration, creativity, practical application of knowledge, and lifelong learning competencies. Consequently, continuous assessment should provide authentic evidence that learners are capable of applying acquired knowledge and skills in meaningful contexts.

Despite the widespread adoption of continuous assessment within competency-based education systems, concerns continue to emerge regarding the extent to which classroom assessment practices genuinely measure learner competence. International studies have reported challenges associated with poor alignment between assessment tasks and curriculum learning outcomes, inadequate teacher assessment literacy, subjective marking practices, inconsistent interpretation of assessment standards, insufficient moderation procedures, and limited professional development in educational assessment (Brookhart, 2022; Pellegrino, 2024; Wiliam, 2022). These challenges may compromise the credibility, fairness, consistency, and validity of assessment outcomes, thereby reducing confidence in educational decision-making.

In Namibia, continuous assessment forms an integral component of the competency-based curriculum implemented through the National Curriculum for Basic Education. Teachers are expected to employ diverse assessment methods that support learner-centred instruction while providing reliable evidence of learners' competency development. However, relatively little empirical evidence exists regarding whether current continuous assessment practices are sufficiently valid to measure learner competence across different secondary school contexts. Existing studies have largely focused on curriculum implementation, learner achievement, and assessment practices, while limited attention has been given to examining assessment validity as a multidimensional construct involving curriculum alignment, assessment literacy, authenticity, fairness, and evidence-based interpretation.

Furthermore, variations in teachers' professional preparation, school resources, institutional support, moderation practices, and contextual realities may influence the quality and validity of classroom assessment practices. These

factors raise important questions concerning whether assessment activities adequately represent intended curriculum competencies and whether assessment results accurately reflect learners' actual abilities. Without empirical evidence regarding the validity of continuous assessment practices, educational stakeholders may continue making important instructional and policy decisions based on assessment evidence whose credibility has not been sufficiently established.

Therefore, there is a need to investigate the validity of continuous assessment practices within competency-based secondary education in Namibia. Specifically, this study seeks to examine how continuous assessment is designed, implemented, and interpreted by teachers, the extent to which assessment activities align with intended curriculum learning outcomes, and whether classroom assessment provides valid evidence of learner competence. Addressing these issues will contribute towards strengthening assessment quality, enhancing teachers' assessment literacy, informing educational policy, and improving the overall effectiveness of competency based education.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the validity of continuous assessment practices for measuring learner competence within competency-based secondary schools in Namibia. Specifically, the study seeks to explore how continuous assessment is conceptualised, designed, implemented, and interpreted by teachers, and to determine whether assessment activities generate valid and credible evidence of learners' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies. Furthermore, the study aims to investigate the extent to which classroom assessment tasks align with intended curriculum learning outcomes while identifying contextual, institutional, and pedagogical factors that influence assessment validity. Ultimately, the study intends to generate evidence-based recommendations that can strengthen assessment literacy, improve classroom assessment practices, enhance curriculum implementation, and support educational policy development within competency-based education.

1.5 Research Objectives

The study is guided by the following specific objectives:

1. To examine the continuous assessment practices employed by teachers in competency-based secondary schools.
2. To evaluate the extent to which continuous assessment tasks align with intended curriculum learning outcomes and competency standards.
3. To explore teachers' understanding and application of assessment validity in classroom assessment practices.
4. To investigate the effectiveness of continuous assessment practices in providing valid evidence of learner competence.
5. To identify pedagogical, institutional, and contextual factors influencing the validity of continuous assessment practices in secondary schools.
6. To propose evidence-based strategies for strengthening the validity and quality of continuous assessment within competency-based secondary education.

1.6 Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What continuous assessment practices are commonly implemented in competency-based secondary schools?
2. To what extent do continuous assessment activities align with intended curriculum learning outcomes and competency standards?
3. How do teachers conceptualise and apply assessment validity during the design and implementation of continuous assessment?
4. How effectively do continuous assessment practices provide valid evidence of learner competence?
5. What pedagogical, institutional, and contextual factors influence the validity of continuous assessment practices?
6. What strategies can strengthen the validity and effectiveness of continuous assessment within competency-based secondary education?

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to make significant theoretical, practical, and policy contributions to the field of educational assessment. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing body of knowledge on assessment validity by extending the application of Messick's Unified Theory of Validity, Constructive Alignment Theory, and Competency-Based Education Theory to classroom-based continuous assessment within secondary education. The findings will provide empirical evidence regarding the extent to which continuous assessment practices generate valid interpretations of learner competence, thereby enriching contemporary discussions on educational assessment and competency-based curriculum implementation.

Practically, the findings will assist teachers in improving the design, implementation, interpretation, and moderation of continuous assessment activities. By identifying strengths and weaknesses within existing assessment practices, the study is expected to strengthen teachers' assessment literacy and promote more authentic, reliable, fair, and learner-centred assessment strategies. Improved assessment practices may ultimately enhance instructional quality,

learner engagement, and the achievement of curriculum competencies.

The study will also benefit school administrators by providing evidence that can inform internal quality assurance mechanisms, professional development initiatives, moderation procedures, and school-based assessment policies. Educational policymakers and curriculum developers may utilise the findings to review existing assessment guidelines, strengthen national assessment frameworks, and improve the implementation of competency-based education within Namibian secondary schools.

Furthermore, the study contributes to future research by identifying areas requiring additional investigation regarding classroom assessment, learner competence, assessment validity, teacher professional development, and educational quality assurance. Given the increasing international emphasis on competency-based education, the findings may also be relevant to other developing countries implementing similar curriculum reforms.

1.8 Scope and Delimitations of the Study

This study focuses on the validity of continuous assessment practices within competency-based secondary schools in Namibia. The investigation specifically examines how teachers design, implement, and interpret continuous assessment activities for measuring learner competence. The study considers multiple dimensions of assessment validity, including curriculum alignment, authenticity, fairness, assessment literacy, and the credibility of assessment evidence.

The study is limited to selected secondary schools implementing the competency-based curriculum and primarily involves teachers and school administrators responsible for classroom assessment. Learners, parents, curriculum developers, and external examination officials fall outside the primary scope of the investigation, although their perspectives may indirectly inform the discussion where appropriate.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative multiple case study design situated within an interpretivist paradigm. Consequently, the findings are intended to provide rich contextual understanding rather than statistical generalisation to all secondary schools in Namibia. Nevertheless, the insights generated may offer transferable lessons for similar competency-based education contexts within the region and beyond.

1.9 Organisation of the Article

The remainder of this article is organised into eight sections. Section 2 presents a comprehensive review of the literature on continuous assessment, learner competence, assessment validity, competency-based education, assessment literacy, and previous empirical studies, culminating in the identification of the research gap. Section 3 discusses the theoretical and conceptual framework underpinning the study, drawing upon Messick's Unified Theory of Validity, Constructive Alignment Theory, and Competency-Based Education Theory.

Section 4 outlines the research methodology, including the research paradigm, design, study setting, sampling procedures, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. Section 5 presents the empirical findings organised according to the major themes that emerged during data analysis. Section 6 discusses the findings in relation to the existing literature and theoretical framework.

Finally, Sections 7, 8, 9, and 10 present the practical implications, policy implications, limitations of the study, and conclusions, respectively, together with recommendations for improving continuous assessment practices and strengthening assessment validity within competency-based secondary education.

2 Literature Review

The literature review critically examines the theoretical and empirical foundations underpinning this study. It synthesises contemporary scholarship on continuous assessment, learner competence, assessment validity, and competency-based education to establish the conceptual basis for the study and identify the existing research gap.

2.1 Alignment between Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

Constructive alignment between curriculum, instruction, and assessment is widely regarded as one of the fundamental principles of effective teaching and learning. The concept, originally advanced by (Biggs and Tang, 2011), argues that curriculum learning outcomes, instructional activities, and assessment tasks should function as an integrated system in which each component reinforces the others. Within this framework, learners are expected to engage in learning activities that prepare them to demonstrate the competencies specified in the curriculum, while assessment provides valid evidence of the extent to which these competencies have been achieved. Consequently, assessment validity is largely dependent on the degree of alignment between what is intended to be learned, what is taught, and what is ultimately assessed.

Competency-based education further strengthens the importance of constructive alignment because its primary objective is to develop measurable competencies rather than merely transmit subject content (Mulder, 2017; OECD, 2023). Curriculum learning outcomes therefore specify observable competencies that learners are expected to demonstrate upon completing a learning programme. Teachers are consequently required to design instructional strategies and assessment activities that provide learners with opportunities to acquire and demonstrate these competencies. When alignment is achieved, assessment results provide meaningful evidence of learner competence and support valid educational decisions (Biggs and Tang, 2011; Brown, 2023).

Research consistently demonstrates that effective curriculum alignment contributes to improved learner achievement, instructional coherence, and educational quality (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Teachers who align assessment activities with curriculum objectives are more likely to evaluate higher-order thinking, authentic problem-solving, and practical application of knowledge rather than isolated factual recall. Furthermore, aligned assessment

encourages learners to focus on meaningful learning outcomes because assessment expectations correspond directly with classroom instruction (Black and Wiliam, 2021; Wiliam, 2022). This integration enhances both the formative and summative functions of classroom assessment.

Despite its recognised importance, achieving constructive alignment remains a significant challenge in many educational systems. Studies have reported that assessment tasks frequently fail to represent intended curriculum outcomes because teachers often prioritise easily measurable content over complex competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, and ethical reasoning (Brookhart, 2022; Pellegrino, 2024). Inconsistencies in curriculum interpretation, inadequate assessment literacy, and limited professional development may further weaken the alignment between instruction and assessment, thereby reducing the validity of assessment evidence (Brown, 2023). These challenges are particularly relevant within competency-based education, where the assessment of multidimensional competencies requires carefully designed classroom assessment practices.

In the Namibian context, the National Curriculum for Basic Education emphasises learnercentred pedagogy and competency-based assessment, requiring teachers to align instructional practices with clearly defined curriculum competencies (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2024). Continuous assessment is expected to provide evidence that learners have achieved these competencies through a variety of authentic assessment activities. However, little empirical evidence exists regarding the extent to which classroom assessment tasks remain consistently aligned with curriculum learning outcomes across secondary schools. Examining this alignment therefore represents an important dimension of assessing the validity of continuous assessment practices.

2.2 Authentic Assessment and Competency Development

Authentic assessment has become an essential component of competency-based education because it evaluates learners' ability to apply knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values within realistic and meaningful contexts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Unlike conventional examinations that frequently assess memorisation and procedural knowledge, authentic assessment requires learners to demonstrate competence through activities that resemble real-life situations, thereby providing richer evidence of meaningful learning. Examples include project-based learning, case studies, portfolios, investigations, laboratory experiments, oral presentations, simulations, collaborative assignments, and community-based learning activities (Brookhart, 2022).

The theoretical foundation of authentic assessment is grounded in constructivist learning theory, which views learning as an active process in which learners construct knowledge through meaningful experiences and social interaction (Biggs and Tang, 2011). From this perspective, assessment should evaluate learners' ability to integrate conceptual understanding with practical application rather than simply recalling isolated information. Authentic assessment therefore promotes deeper learning by encouraging learners to analyse information, solve complex problems, make informed decisions, and reflect critically on their own learning (Wiliam, 2022). These characteristics closely align with the goals of competency-based education, which emphasises transferable competencies required for lifelong learning and active participation in society.

Contemporary educational reforms increasingly advocate authentic assessment because it provides more comprehensive evidence of learner competence than traditional written examinations alone (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2021). Competencies such as communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, leadership, ethical reasoning, and digital literacy are inherently difficult to measure using objective tests. Authentic assessment addresses this limitation by creating opportunities for learners to demonstrate these competencies through complex tasks that integrate multiple forms of knowledge and skill (Mulder, 2017). Consequently, authentic assessment is considered particularly suitable for evaluating the multidimensional learning outcomes associated with competency-based curricula.

Continuous assessment provides a practical framework for implementing authentic assessment because it enables teachers to collect evidence from multiple learning experiences over time. Rather than relying on a single assessment event, continuous assessment encourages the use of diverse assessment strategies that collectively provide a comprehensive representation of learner competence (Black and Wiliam, 2021). Frequent assessment opportunities also allow teachers to provide constructive feedback, identify learning difficulties, and support learners' progressive competency development throughout the instructional process (Earl, 2023). This formative orientation enhances learner motivation while strengthening the educational value of classroom assessment.

Despite these advantages, implementing authentic assessment presents several practical challenges. Designing authentic tasks often requires considerable teacher expertise, careful planning, appropriate assessment criteria, and sufficient instructional resources (Brown, 2023). Teachers may also encounter difficulties developing reliable scoring rubrics, ensuring consistency in marking, and balancing the demands of authentic assessment with curriculum coverage and administrative responsibilities (Pellegrino, 2024). Large class sizes and limited professional development further constrain teachers' capacity to implement authentic assessment effectively, particularly in resource-constrained educational settings.

Nevertheless, the literature consistently concludes that authentic assessment contributes significantly to competency development when appropriately designed and aligned with curriculum outcomes. By providing learners with opportunities to demonstrate meaningful performance across diverse contexts, authentic assessment strengthens the validity of classroom assessment and supports more accurate judgments regarding learner competence (Brookhart, 2022; OECD, 2023). Consequently, examining the extent to which continuous assessment incorporates authentic assessment practices is essential for evaluating whether classroom assessment genuinely measures learner competence within competency-based secondary education.

2.3 Reliability and Fairness in Continuous Assessment

Reliability and fairness are fundamental principles of educational assessment because they determine the consistency

, accuracy, and equity of assessment decisions. While validity addresses whether an assessment measures the intended learning outcomes, reliability concerns the consistency of assessment results when similar competencies are assessed under comparable conditions (AERA et al., 2018; Messick, 1989). Fairness, on the other hand, requires that all learners are provided with equitable opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and competencies without discrimination arising from assessment design, administration, scoring procedures, or contextual factors (Brookhart, 2022). Together, reliability and fairness contribute to the overall credibility and trustworthiness of continuous assessment practices.

Within competency-based education, ensuring reliability presents unique challenges because continuous assessment relies on multiple assessment methods, diverse learning activities, and teachers' professional judgement rather than standardised examinations alone (Brown, 2023). Classroom assessments frequently include written assignments, projects, presentations, portfolios, practical investigations, peer assessment, self-assessment, and classroom observations, each of which introduces potential variation in scoring and interpretation (Black and Wiliam, 2021). Although such diversity provides richer evidence of learner competence, it may also reduce consistency if clear assessment criteria and moderation procedures are not implemented.

The literature suggests that reliability can be strengthened through the development of explicit assessment criteria, detailed scoring rubrics, moderation practices, and collaborative assessment among teachers (Brookhart, 2022). Rubrics provide transparent performance standards that guide both teachers and learners, thereby reducing subjective interpretation and promoting consistency across different assessors. Similarly, moderation enables teachers to compare assessment decisions, discuss discrepancies, and establish common standards for evaluating learner performance (Pellegrino, 2024). These quality assurance mechanisms are particularly important within competency-based education, where assessment frequently involves complex performance tasks that require professional interpretation.

Fairness represents an equally important dimension of continuous assessment because classroom assessment should provide all learners with equal opportunities to demonstrate their competencies regardless of gender, socio-economic background, language, disability, or cultural differences (AERA et al., 2018). Fair assessment requires transparent assessment criteria, accessible assessment tasks, constructive feedback, and consistent application of assessment standards across learners (Brookhart, 2022). Furthermore, fairness extends beyond equal treatment to include the provision of appropriate support and accommodations that enable all learners to demonstrate their abilities under equitable conditions.

Despite these principles, several studies report persistent challenges affecting the reliability and fairness of continuous assessment. Teachers may differ in their interpretation of curriculum standards, application of scoring criteria, provision of feedback, and overall assessment expectations (Brown, 2023). Large class sizes, excessive administrative responsibilities, limited assessment literacy, and insufficient moderation may further contribute to inconsistent assessment practices, thereby reducing the reliability of classroom assessment evidence (OECD, 2023 ; Pellegrino, 2024). These concerns are particularly relevant within competency-based education because assessment decisions often influence learner progression, certification, and educational opportunities.

Consequently, contemporary educational reforms increasingly advocate strengthening assessment quality through professional development, standardised moderation procedures, and the use of evidence-based assessment frameworks (UNESCO, 2021). Improving reliability and fairness not only enhances the technical quality of classroom assessment but also strengthens the validity of inferences made regarding learner competence. For this reason, reliability and fairness constitute essential dimensions for evaluating the effectiveness of continuous assessment practices within competency-based secondary education.

2.4 Teacher Professional Judgement in Classroom Assessment

Teacher professional judgement refers to the informed decisions teachers make when designing assessment tasks, interpreting assessment evidence, assigning grades, and making conclusions regarding learner achievement (Brookhart, 2022). Within continuous assessment, professional judgement is indispensable because many aspects of learner competence, including critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, ethical reasoning, and problem-solving, cannot be measured objectively through standardised tests alone (Brown, 2023). Consequently, teachers must draw upon their professional knowledge, pedagogical expertise, curriculum understanding, and assessment literacy when evaluating learners' performance.

The role of teacher professional judgement has become increasingly significant following the adoption of competency-based education. Unlike traditional assessment systems that rely heavily on objective examinations, competency-based assessment requires teachers to interpret learners' performance across diverse assessment activities, including projects, portfolios, presentations, investigations, practical tasks, and classroom observations (Mulder, 2017). Such assessment activities frequently involve open-ended responses and authentic performance, requiring teachers to exercise professional judgement in determining the extent to which learners have demonstrated the intended competencies.

Scholars argue that effective professional judgement should be evidence-based, transparent, and aligned with curriculum learning outcomes rather than influenced by personal beliefs or subjective impressions (Messick, 1989). Teachers should therefore utilise clearly defined assessment criteria, scoring rubrics, moderation procedures, and multiple sources of assessment evidence before making decisions regarding learner competence (Black and Wiliam, 2021). These practices reduce subjectivity while increasing the consistency and credibility of classroom assessment decisions.

Professional judgement is also closely associated with formative assessment because teachers continuously interpret assessment evidence to identify learners' strengths, diagnose learning difficulties, and adapt instructional strategies (Wiliam, 2022). Through ongoing observation and feedback, teachers support learners' competency development while simultaneously generating evidence that contributes to summative assessment decisions. This

and underscores the importance of sound professional judgement throughout the assessment process.

However, teacher professional judgement is not without challenges. Research indicates that assessment decisions may be influenced by unconscious bias, inconsistent interpretation of curriculum standards, limited assessment literacy, workload pressures, and insufficient moderation practices (Brown, 2023; Pellegrino, 2024). Variations in teachers' experience, professional training, and understanding of competency-based assessment may also contribute to differences in assessment decisions across classrooms and schools. Such inconsistencies have important implications for the validity, reliability, and fairness of continuous assessment.

To strengthen the quality of teacher professional judgement, educational researchers advocate sustained professional development in assessment literacy, collaborative moderation, reflective practice, and evidence-informed decision-making (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2021). Teachers should be supported in developing expertise in assessment design, interpretation of learner evidence, feedback strategies, and the application of competency standards. Strengthening teachers' professional judgement not only improves the quality of classroom assessment but also enhances the validity of continuous assessment as a measure of learner competence within competency based secondary education.

2.5 Challenges Associated with Continuous Assessment

Despite its recognised benefits, the implementation of continuous assessment is constrained by several pedagogical, institutional, and contextual challenges. One of the most significant challenges is inadequate teacher assessment literacy, which may limit teachers' ability to design valid assessment tasks, apply appropriate assessment criteria, interpret learner evidence, and provide effective feedback (Brookhart, 2022; Brown, 2023). In addition, the workload associated with planning, administering, marking, and recording multiple assessment activities often places considerable pressure on teachers, particularly in schools characterised by large class sizes and limited resources (Wiliam, 2022; OECD, 2023).

Continuous assessment is further affected by inconsistencies in assessment standards, where variations in teachers' interpretation of curriculum outcomes and scoring criteria may compromise the reliability and fairness of assessment decisions (Pellegrino, 2024; AERA et al., 2018). Resource constraints, including limited instructional materials and inadequate technological support, may also restrict the implementation of authentic assessment activities that measure higher-order competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and problemsolving (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2021). Furthermore, subjectivity and potential bias in teacher judgement may reduce the credibility of assessment outcomes if transparent assessment criteria and moderation procedures are not consistently applied (Brookhart, 2022). Addressing these challenges requires continuous professional development, effective moderation systems, adequate resource provision, and strengthened institutional support for quality classroom assessment.

2.6 Empirical Evidence from International Studies

International evidence suggests that continuous assessment enhances learner engagement, supports formative feedback, and promotes competency development when effectively implemented (Black and Wiliam, 2021; Wiliam, 2022). Studies indicate that assessment methods such as projects, portfolios, presentations, and practical investigations provide richer evidence of learner competence than traditional examinations because they evaluate learners' ability to apply knowledge in authentic contexts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; OECD, 2023). These approaches are particularly effective in assessing higher-order competencies, including critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and problem-solving (UNESCO, 2021).

However, empirical studies also reveal persistent concerns regarding the validity and reliability of continuous assessment. Teachers frequently encounter difficulties in designing authentic assessment tasks, applying assessment criteria consistently, and interpreting competency standards, particularly where assessment literacy and professional support are limited (Brookhart, 2022; Brown, 2023; Pellegrino, 2024). Consequently, the effectiveness of continuous assessment depends not only on its implementation but also on the quality of assessment design, curriculum alignment, teacher professional judgement, moderation practices, and institutional support (AERA et al., 2018). These findings highlight the need to investigate whether continuous assessment practices within Namibia's competency-based secondary education system provide valid and credible evidence of learner competence.

2.7 Research Gap

Existing literature indicates that continuous assessment plays a significant role in supporting competency-based education through formative feedback, learner-centred instruction, and continuous monitoring of learner progress (Black and Wiliam, 2021; Wiliam, 2022; OECD, 2023). However, most studies have focused on the implementation and perceived benefits of continuous assessment rather than examining its validity as a measure of learner competence (Brookhart, 2022; Brown, 2023; Pellegrino, 2024). Furthermore, much of the available evidence originates from developed countries, limiting its applicability to developing educational contexts such as Namibia, where differences in resources, teacher preparation, and curriculum implementation may influence assessment practices (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2021). In Namibia, empirical research has largely examined curriculum reform and competency-based education, with limited attention given to whether continuous assessment provides valid and credible evidence of learner competence. This study addresses these gaps by investigating the validity of continuous assessment practices in competency-based secondary schools in Namibia, focusing on curriculum alignment, teachers' assessment practices, and the extent to which continuous assessment accurately measures learner competence. The findings are expected to contribute to educational assessment theory, strengthen assessment literacy, and inform policy and practice in competency based education.

3 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Messick's Unified Theory of Validity and Constructive Alignment Theory. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for examining whether continuous assessment practices generate valid evidence of learner competence within competency-based secondary education. While Messick's theory focuses on the validity of assessment evidence and the interpretation of assessment results, Constructive Alignment Theory emphasises the alignment between curriculum learning outcomes, instructional activities, and assessment tasks.

3.1 Messick's Unified Theory of Validity

Messick's Unified Theory of Validity conceptualises validity as the extent to which evidence supports the interpretation and use of assessment results rather than merely the quality of an assessment instrument (Messick, 1989; AERA et al., 2018). The theory argues that valid assessment should accurately represent curriculum content, measure intended competencies, and support fair educational decisions. Within competency-based education, where learner competence extends beyond factual knowledge to include practical skills, critical thinking, and problemsolving, Messick's framework provides an appropriate basis for evaluating whether continuous assessment generates valid and credible evidence of learner competence (Brown, 2023). In this study, the theory guides the evaluation of assessment design, curriculum alignment, and teachers' interpretation of assessment evidence.

3.2 Constructive Alignment Theory

Constructive Alignment Theory, developed by Biggs and Tang (2011), proposes that effective learning occurs when curriculum outcomes, teaching activities, and assessment tasks are deliberately aligned. Within competency-based education, assessment should directly measure the competencies learners are expected to demonstrate rather than merely testing content knowledge (Mulder, 2017; OECD, 2023). The theory therefore emphasises that learners should be assessed using authentic tasks that reflect intended learning outcomes. In the context of this study, Constructive Alignment Theory provides a framework for examining whether continuous assessment practices implemented in secondary schools are aligned with curriculum competencies and instructional practices, thereby supporting valid assessment of learner competence (Brookhart, 2022).

4 Research Methodology

4.1 Research Paradigm, Approach and Design

This study is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, which seeks to understand individuals' experiences and interpretations of social phenomena within their natural contexts (Creswell and Poth, 2024; Denzin and Lincoln, 2024). Accordingly, a qualitative research approach was adopted to explore teachers' and school administrators' perspectives on the validity of continuous assessment practices in competency-based secondary education. Qualitative inquiry facilitates an in-depth understanding of classroom assessment practices, teachers' professional judgement, and the contextual factors influencing assessment validity (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

The study employed a multiple case study design to investigate continuous assessment practices across selected secondary schools in Namibia. This design is appropriate because it enables an in-depth examination of continuous assessment within its real-life educational context while allowing comparisons across different school settings (Yin, 2024). The integration of the interpretivist paradigm, qualitative approach, and multiple case study design provides a coherent methodological framework for exploring how continuous assessment practices generate valid evidence of learner competence in competency-based secondary education.

4.2 Research Context and Participants

The study was conducted in 6 purposively selected competency based secondary schools in Namibia, where continuous assessment constitutes an integral component of teaching, learning, and learner evaluation under the National Curriculum for Basic Education (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2024). The cases comprised secondary schools actively implementing competency-based assessment and were selected to provide information-rich evidence from diverse educational settings. To preserve institutional anonymity, the schools are not named. This case description clarifies the basis of selection while protecting the participating institutions.

The target population comprised secondary school teachers and school administrators who are directly involved in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of continuous assessment. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their professional roles, teaching experience, and involvement in classroom assessment. This sampling strategy ensured the inclusion of information-rich participants capable of providing detailed insights into assessment design, curriculum alignment, teacher professional judgement, and the interpretation of learner competence (Creswell and Poth, 2024; Patton, 2015). By engaging participants with direct experience of competency-based assessment, the study sought to generate comprehensive and contextually grounded evidence regarding the validity of continuous assessment practices in Namibian secondary schools.

4.3 Data Collection

Data were collected using three complementary qualitative methods: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers and school administrators to explore their experiences, perceptions, and practices regarding the design, implementation, and

validity of continuous assessment. The flexible nature of the interviews enabled participants to provide detailed accounts while allowing the researcher to probe emerging issues relevant to the study (Creswell and Poth, 2024).

Classroom observations were undertaken to examine how continuous assessment practices were implemented during teaching and learning activities. Observations were recorded contemporaneously using the pilot-tested observation checklist and descriptive field notes, which were expanded immediately after each visit. The records focused on assessment strategies, learner engagement, feedback practices, and the alignment between instructional activities and curriculum learning outcomes. In addition, document analysis was conducted using assessment plans, learners' assessment records, marking rubrics, lesson plans, and curriculum documents to corroborate evidence obtained through interviews and observations (Bowen, 2009).

To enhance the quality of the research instruments, a pilot study was conducted in a secondary school that was not included in the main study. Feedback obtained during the pilot informed minor revisions to the interview guide and observation checklist, improving the clarity, relevance, and consistency of the data collection instruments. Data were collected over the study period following approval from the relevant educational authorities and informed consent from all participants.

4.4 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022). The analysis commenced with data familiarisation through repeated reading of interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary evidence. This was followed by systematic coding to identify meaningful units of information related to continuous assessment practices, assessment validity, curriculum alignment, and learner competence. Similar codes were subsequently organised into broader themes that reflected recurring patterns across the data.

The emerging themes were reviewed, refined, and defined to ensure that they accurately represented participants' experiences and addressed the research objectives. Data from interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis were triangulated to enhance the depth and credibility of the findings by comparing evidence obtained from multiple sources (Patton, 2015). The final themes were interpreted in relation to Messick's Unified Theory of Validity and Constructive Alignment Theory, providing a theoretical basis for understanding the validity of continuous assessment practices in competency-based secondary education.

4.5 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

The trustworthiness of the study was ensured by applying the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirm ability proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility was enhanced through methodological triangulation involving semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, as well as member checking to verify the accuracy of participants' responses. Transferability was supported by providing rich descriptions of the research context and participants, enabling readers to determine the applicability of the findings to similar educational settings. Dependability was strengthened through a transparent documentation of the research process, while confirm ability was achieved by maintaining an audit trail and ensuring that the findings were grounded in participants' experiences rather than researcher bias (Creswell and Poth, 2024).

Ethical principles were observed throughout the study. Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant institutional ethics committee, and permission to conduct the research was granted by the Ministry of Education and participating schools. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity through the use of pseudonyms, and all research data were securely stored and used solely for academic purposes. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty, in accordance with accepted ethical standards for educational research (BERA, 2024).

5 Presentation of Findings

This section presents the findings of the study based on data collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The findings are organised into five themes that emerged from the thematic analysis and are presented in relation to the research objectives and questions. Illustrative quotations from participants are included to support the interpretation of the findings while preserving participants' anonymity through the use of pseudonyms.

5.1 Participant Demographic Characteristics

A total of 20 participants took part in the study, comprising 16 teachers, two heads of department, and two school administrators from selected competency-based secondary schools in Namibia. Participants varied in terms of gender, teaching experience, academic qualifications, subject specialisation, and administrative responsibilities. This diversity provided multiple perspectives on the implementation and validity of continuous assessment practices.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants (N = 20)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Years of Experience	1–5 years	5	25.0
	6–10 years	8	40.0
	Above 10 years	7	35.0
Professional Role	Head of Department	2	10.0
	School Administrator	2	10.0
Highest Qualification	Bachelor's Degree	6	30.0
	Honours Degree	8	40.0
	Master's Degree	6	30.0

5.2 Theme 1: Continuous Assessment Practices in Secondary Schools

The findings indicated that teachers employed a variety of continuous assessment strategies to monitor learners' progress throughout the academic year. Frequently reported assessment methods included classroom tests, assignments, projects, presentations, practical activities, class exercises, and informal classroom observations. Participants generally viewed continuous assessment as an important component of competency-based education because it enabled continuous monitoring of learner progress and informed instructional decisions. Representative quotations illustrating this theme include:

"Continuous assessment has become part of our everyday teaching practice. We use class tests, assignments, presentations, group activities, and practical tasks to monitor learners' progress throughout the term. Unlike relying only on examinations, these assessment activities allow us to identify learners who need additional support before the end of the academic year."

(P3, Teacher)

"As a Head of Department, I encourage teachers to use a variety of assessment methods rather than depending solely on written tests. Continuous assessment provides valuable evidence of learners' knowledge, practical skills, and participation. However, maintaining consistency across teachers remains a challenge because assessment practices sometimes differ from one classroom to another."

(P8, Head of Department)

Figure 1 summarises how frequently the five most commonly reported assessment practices were identified in the interview data. These values are descriptive code frequencies: a participant was counted once for a practice when that practice appeared at least once in the participant's transcript. The values therefore indicate the number of participants who reported each practice; they are not inferential statistics, nor do they represent the number of times the practices were implemented in classrooms. The frequencies were checked against coded transcripts and considered alongside observation and document evidence during thematic interpretation.

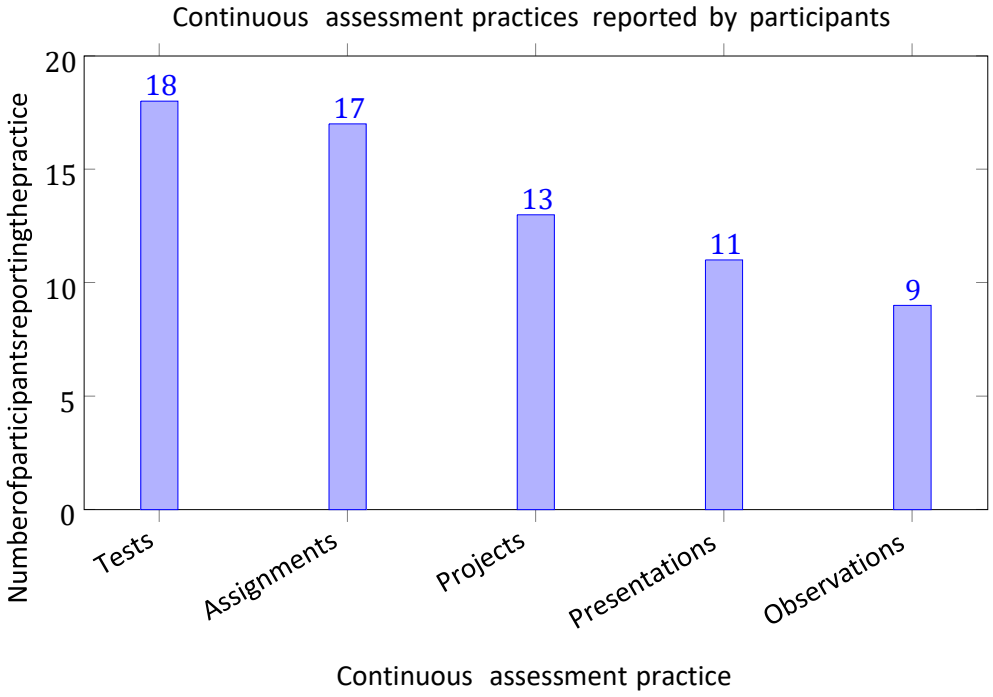


Figure 1: Participant-level code frequencies for commonly reported continuous assessment Practices (*N* =20).

5.3 Theme 2: Alignment between Assessment Tasks and Learning Outcomes

Participants emphasised that effective continuous assessment depends on close alignment between curriculum learning outcomes, classroom instruction, and assessment tasks. Most teachers reported using curriculum documents when designing assessment activities; however, variations were observed in the extent to which assessment tasks measured higher-order competencies prescribed by the competency-based curriculum. Classroom observations and document analysis provided additional evidence regarding the degree of alignment between assessment activities and intended learning outcomes.

Illustrative quotations include:

"Before preparing any assessment task, I first consult the syllabus to ensure that the activity addresses the specific learning outcomes and competencies learners are expected to achieve. This helps me design assessments that evaluate not only content knowledge but also learners' ability to apply what they have learned in practical and real-life situations. However, aligning every assessment with all intended competencies can sometimes be challenging, especially when time and resources are limited."

(P6, Teacher)

5.4 Theme 3: Teachers' Understanding of Assessment Validity

The analysis revealed varying levels of understanding regarding assessment validity. While several participants associated validity with assessing what learners had been taught, others demonstrated broader understandings that included curriculum alignment, fairness, authenticity, and the appropriate interpretation of assessment evidence. Differences in assessment literacy were also reflected in teachers' approaches to assessment design, feedback, and moderation. Example quotation:

"To me, a valid assessment is one that measures exactly what learners are expected to know and be able to do according to the curriculum. If the assessment tasks are not aligned with the learning outcomes, the results cannot accurately reflect learners' competence. We therefore need to design assessment activities that give every learner a fair opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and understanding."

(P10, Teacher)

5.5 Theme 4: Continuous Assessment as a Measure of Learner Competence

Participants generally perceived continuous assessment as a valuable approach for evaluating learner competence because it provides multiple opportunities for learners to demonstrate knowledge, practical skills, and higher-order thinking over time. Classroom observations further suggested that diverse assessment strategies enabled teachers to obtain richer evidence of learner performance than would be possible through a single end-of-term examination. However, participants also noted that the quality of assessment evidence depended on the design and implementation of assessment activities. Representative quotation:

"From a school management perspective, continuous assessment provides a more comprehensive picture of learners' competence than relying solely on final examinations. It allows teachers to monitor learners' progress over time, identify learning difficulties early, and provide appropriate support. However, its effectiveness depends on the quality of assessment tasks, consistency in implementation, and proper moderation to ensure that assessment results accurately reflect learners' actual competencies."

(P12, School Administrator)

5.6 Theme 5: Factors Affecting Assessment Validity

Participants identified several factors that influenced the validity of continuous assessment practices. These included teachers' assessment literacy, workload, class size, availability of instructional resources, moderation practices, curriculum interpretation, and institutional support. Document analysis further indicated that schools differed in their assessment planning and moderation procedures, suggesting variation in the implementation of continuous assessment across schools.

Illustrative quotation:

"One of the biggest challenges we face is ensuring that every assessment task is fair, valid, and consistent. Large class sizes, limited teaching resources, and heavy workloads sometimes make it difficult to design authentic assessment activities and provide timely feedback. Regular moderation and continuous training in assessment practices would help improve the credibility of continuous assessment."

(P5, Teacher)

The findings demonstrate that continuous assessment is widely implemented within competency-based secondary schools and is generally regarded as an important mechanism for monitoring learner progress and supporting competency development. However, the validity of continuous assessment is influenced by the degree of alignment between assessment tasks and curriculum outcomes, teachers' understanding of assessment validity, and contextual factors such as assessment literacy, moderation practices, workload, and resource availability. These findings provide the basis for the discussion presented in the following section, where they are interpreted in relation to the theoretical framework and existing literature.

6 Discussion of Findings

The findings demonstrate that continuous assessment is widely recognised as a fundamental component of competency-based education, providing multiple opportunities to monitor learner progress and support competency

development through diverse assessment methods. Participants reported using classroom tests, assignments, projects, presentations, practical activities, and observations to evaluate learners' knowledge, skills, and competencies. These findings are consistent with previous studies, which argue that continuous assessment enhances formative feedback, learner engagement, and authentic competency development when implemented effectively (Black and Wiliam, 2021; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Wiliam, 2022).

A central finding of this study is that the validity of continuous assessment depends on effective alignment between curriculum learning outcomes, instructional practices, and assessment tasks. Participants emphasised that assessment activities should directly measure the competencies prescribed in the curriculum to produce credible evidence of learner achievement. This finding supports Constructive Alignment Theory (Biggs and Tang, 2011) and Messick's Unified Theory of Validity (Messick, 1989; AERA et al., 2018), both of which emphasise that meaningful assessment requires strong alignment between intended learning outcomes, teaching, and assessment. Weak alignment was perceived to reduce the credibility of assessment decisions and compromise the validity of learner performance.

The study further revealed that teachers' assessment literacy plays a crucial role in ensuring valid classroom assessment. Although participants generally understood the importance of fairness and curriculum alignment, differences in assessment design, feedback, and interpretation of assessment evidence highlighted varying levels of professional competence. These findings corroborate previous research indicating that assessment literacy is essential for designing valid assessment tasks, making sound professional judgements, and providing meaningful feedback to learners (Brookhart, 2022; Brown, 2023). Participants also identified contextual challenges, including large class sizes, heavy workloads, limited instructional resources, and inconsistent moderation practices, as factors that undermine assessment validity. Similar concerns have been reported in the literature, suggesting that stronger institutional support, moderation mechanisms, and continuous professional development are necessary to strengthen the credibility of continuous assessment (OECD, 2023; Pellegrino, 2024).

Overall, the findings are consistent with international evidence demonstrating that continuous assessment is most effective when supported by curriculum alignment, teacher assessment literacy, and robust quality assurance systems. By examining these issues within the context of Namibia's competency-based secondary education system, this study extends existing literature by highlighting how curriculum alignment, teacher competence, and contextual factors collectively influence the validity of continuous assessment. The findings provide practical evidence to inform assessment policy, teacher professional development, and the improvement of classroom assessment practices within competency-based education.

7 Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have significant implications for educational practice, particularly within competency-based secondary education. They demonstrate that the validity of continuous assessment depends on effective curriculum alignment, teachers' assessment literacy, and supportive institutional practices. Strengthening these areas will enhance the credibility of assessment decisions and improve the quality of learner competence measurement.

For classroom practice, the findings suggest that teachers should integrate continuous assessment into daily teaching by using diverse and authentic assessment methods that are aligned with curriculum learning outcomes. Assessment activities should extend beyond written tests to include projects, presentations, practical investigations, portfolios, and classroom observations, thereby providing learners with multiple opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, values, and problem-solving abilities. Such practices support learner-centred pedagogy, timely feedback, and continuous improvement in learning (Biggs and Tang, 2011; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

The study further highlights the importance of strengthening assessment practice through clear assessment criteria, effective moderation, and systematic quality assurance mechanisms. Schools should promote consistency in assessment design and implementation to ensure that assessment evidence is valid, reliable, and fair. Regular moderation of assessment tasks and learner evidence, together with constructive feedback, can enhance confidence in continuous assessment as a credible measure of learner competence (Messick, 1989; AERA et al., 2018 ; Brookhart, 2022).

Finally, the findings underscore the need for sustained teacher professional development in assessment literacy. Training programmes should focus on curriculum alignment, assessment design, rubric development, feedback strategies, moderation procedures, and the principles of validity and reliability. Enhancing teachers' assessment competencies will strengthen professional judgement, improve the quality of classroom assessment, and support the successful implementation of competency-based education (Brown, 2023; Pellegrino, 2024).

8 Policy Implications

The findings of this study underscore the need for policy reforms that strengthen the implementation of competency-based education by improving the validity and quality of continuous assessment. Effective policy frameworks should promote coherent curriculum implementation, robust assessment systems, and sustained teacher professional development to ensure that classroom assessment provides credible evidence of learner competence.

Curriculum policies should emphasise constructive alignment between learning outcomes, teaching practices, and assessment activities. Curriculum developers should provide clear assessment guidelines that support authentic, competency-based assessment and ensure that learners are evaluated on their ability to apply knowledge, skills, values, and higher-order thinking in meaningful contexts. Furthermore, regular curriculum review and monitoring should be institutionalised to maintain the relevance and consistency of assessment practices with evolving educational priorities (Biggs and Tang, 2011; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

The findings also highlight the need for comprehensive assessment policy reforms that strengthen the validity,

reliability, fairness, and consistency of continuous assessment. National and school-level policies should establish clear standards for assessment design, moderation, quality assurance, feedback, and record management while promoting the use of diverse assessment methods that capture the full range of learner competencies beyond traditional written examinations (Messick, 1989; AERA et al., 2018; Brookhart, 2022). In addition, teacher education policies should prioritise assessment literacy through both pre-service preparation and continuous professional development. Institutionalising training in curriculum alignment, assessment design, moderation, feedback, and assessment validity will enhance teachers' professional competence and improve the credibility of classroom assessment within competency-based secondary education (Brown, 2023; Pellegrino, 2024).

9 Strengths and Limitations of the Study

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on educational assessment by examining the validity of continuous assessment practices within the context of competency-based secondary education in Namibia. A key strength of the study lies in its qualitative design, which enabled an in-depth exploration of teachers' and school administrators' experiences and provided rich contextual insights into classroom assessment practices. In addition, the use of Messick's Unified Theory of Validity and Constructive Alignment Theory provided a strong theoretical foundation for interpreting the findings and explaining how curriculum alignment, teacher assessment literacy, and professional judgement influence the validity of continuous assessment. The study further offers practical recommendations that can inform curriculum development, assessment policy, and teacher professional development.

Despite these strengths, several limitations should be acknowledged. The findings are based on a purposively selected sample drawn from a limited number of secondary schools and therefore cannot be generalised to all educational contexts. As with most qualitative studies, the findings reflect participants' experiences and perceptions, which may be influenced by contextual and individual factors. Furthermore, the study focused primarily on teachers and school administrators, excluding other important stakeholders such as learners, curriculum specialists, and policymakers whose perspectives could have enriched the analysis. Future research should employ mixed-methods or large-scale quantitative approaches involving a broader range of stakeholders and educational settings to validate and extend these findings while examining the long-term impact of continuous assessment on learner competence and educational outcomes.

10 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen the validity and effectiveness of continuous assessment within competency-based secondary education. These recommendations are directed towards teachers, school leaders, policymakers, and researchers to support evidence-based improvements in classroom assessment and curriculum implementation.

Teachers should ensure that assessment tasks are systematically aligned with curriculum learning outcomes and competency standards to provide valid evidence of learner competence. Schools should promote the use of diverse and authentic assessment methods, including projects, portfolios, presentations, practical investigations, and classroom observations, while institutionalising regular moderation, collaborative assessment planning, and timely formative feedback to enhance the fairness, reliability, and credibility of continuous assessment. Continuous professional development in assessment literacy should also be prioritised to strengthen teachers' competencies in assessment design, curriculum alignment, moderation, and the interpretation of assessment evidence (Biggs and Tang, 2011; Brookhart, 2022; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

At the policy level, education authorities should strengthen curriculum and assessment frameworks by establishing clear standards for assessment design, quality assurance, moderation, and feedback. Investment in teacher capacity building, adequate assessment resources, and effective monitoring systems is essential to support the consistent implementation of competency-based assessment across schools. Furthermore, future research should validate these findings through mixed-methods and large-scale quantitative studies involving a wider range of stakeholders, including learners, curriculum specialists, and policymakers. Longitudinal and comparative studies are also recommended to examine the long-term impact of continuous assessment on learner competence and to identify best practices for improving assessment validity within competencybased education (AERA et al., 2018; OECD, 2023; Pellegrino, 2024).

11 Conclusion

This study examined the validity of continuous assessment practices in measuring learner competence within competency-based secondary education in Namibia. The findings demonstrate that continuous assessment has considerable potential to provide comprehensive and authentic evidence of learner competence when assessment practices are systematically aligned with curriculum learning outcomes, implemented through diverse assessment methods, and supported by teachers with strong assessment literacy. However, the study also revealed that the validity of continuous assessment is influenced by contextual factors, including inconsistencies in assessment design, limited moderation practices, resource constraints, heavy teacher workloads, and varying levels of assessment expertise.

Drawing on Messick's Unified Theory of Validity and Constructive Alignment Theory, the study demonstrates that valid classroom assessment depends on the integration of curriculum objectives, instructional practices, assessment activities, and professional teacher judgement. Strengthening these interconnected components enhances the credibility, fairness, and educational value of continuous assessment while supporting the objectives of competency-based education. The findings therefore contribute to the growing body of knowledge on educational assessment by providing empirical evidence on the factors that influence assessment validity within the Namibian secondary school context.

Overall, the study concludes that continuous assessment can serve as a credible measure of learner competence when supported by coherent curriculum policies, effective quality assurance systems, and sustained teacher professional development. Strengthening assessment literacy, promoting authentic assessment practices, institutionalising moderation, and ensuring alignment between curriculum, instruction, and assessment will enhance the quality and validity of classroom assessment. These measures will not only improve educational decision-making but also contribute to the successful implementation of competency-based education and the development of learners equipped with the knowledge, skills, and competencies required for lifelong learning and national development.

Figure 2 synthesises the relationships among curriculum outcomes, instruction, assessment tasks, teacher assessment literacy, moderation, assessment validity, and credible evidence of learner competence.

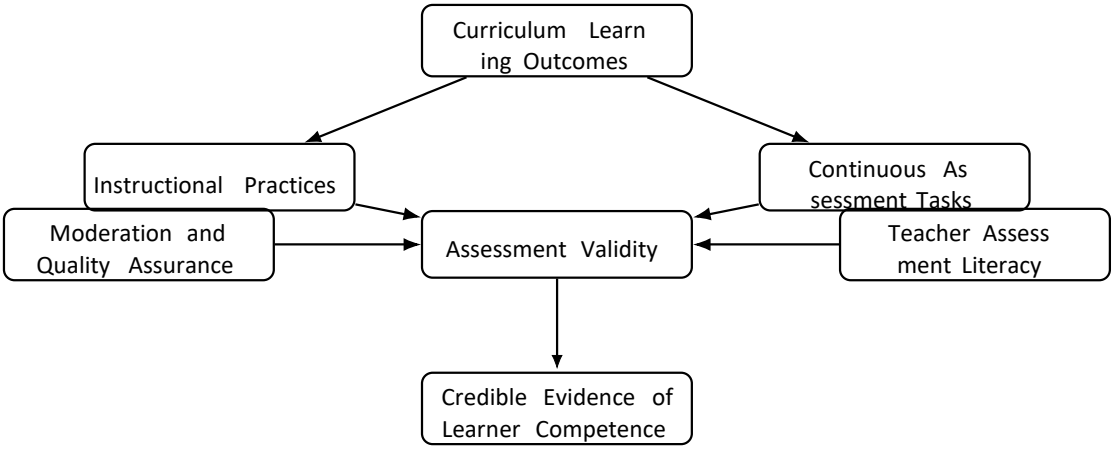


Figure 2: Conceptual summary of factors supporting valid continuous assessment.

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Author Contributions

The authors' contributions are described according to the Contributor Roles Taxonomy.

Kapumburu: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal Analysis, Data Curation, Validation, Visualization, Writing–Original Draft, Writing–Review & Editing, Project Administration.

Kaliki: Conceptualization, Supervision, Methodology, Validation, Writing–Review & Editing.

Mahongo: Methodology, Validation, Investigation, Writing–Review & Editing.

Katakula: Validation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Writing–Review & Editing.

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, critically reviewed the manuscript for important intellectual content, approved the final version of the manuscript, and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Declaration of Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. To protect participants' confidentiality and comply with ethical requirements, the data are not publicly available.

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