

The Perceptions of Middle School Teachers of English on the Learning Outcomes Framework and Continuous Assessment

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Abstract

This research paper investigates how teachers of English teaching in state middle schools around Malta perceive the Learning Outcomes Framework and the introduction of Continuous Assessment. This study identifies the teachers' opinions on these phenomena and their implications on teaching and learning. Data was collected through qualitative online questionnaires and a semi-structured interview with an Education Officer (EO). This research identified that teachers are aware of the advantages of the Learning Outcomes Framework and Continuous Assessment on learning; however, they also acknowledge the added workload and extra preparation they entail. The data analysis revealed that teachers are familiar with what Continuous Assessment and Formative Assessment imply, yet have difficulty with defining differences. In conclusion, both the number of Learning Outcomes and the teachers' workload must be reduced.

Keywords

Learning Outcomes Framework, Learning Outcomes, Formative Assessment, Continuous Assessment, Phenomenology

Introduction

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) recommended a reform in the syllabus in 2012 which focused mostly on a thematic approach to promote students' abilities through an improved way of Continuous Assessment (CA). The Learning Outcomes Framework (LOF) was introduced in 2018/2019 in Middle Schools. This change was expected as it had already been implemented in Primary Schools as a way to create a more integral teaching and learning experience for teachers, students and parents through the use of qualitative feedback of their progress (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012).

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Background Context

According to The Education Act present in Chapter 327 of the Laws of Malta (Government Gazette, 1988), education is compulsory for all children and youths between five to sixteen years of age. This period covers six years of primary education, two years in middle school and three years in secondary school. All schools, be it state, church, or independent schools, must follow the NCF and the regulations listed in the Education Act. At the end of compulsory education, students have the possibility to further their education in higher, post-secondary and tertiary educational institutes.

The introduction of the Learning Outcomes Framework affected heavily the different educational sectors. It not only brought about a change in syllabus, but it also affected the teachers' pedagogy, the students' learning process, and the parents' positionality in education and their children's schooling. Such changes will be broken down in the following sections, which also include the aims of the study, the Research Questions and the Literature Review.

Purpose of Study

The researcher investigated the experiences of English language teachers using the Learning Outcomes Framework and Continuous Assessment. This sheds light on the advantages and disadvantages these two concepts have on teaching and learning.

Positionality

The author is an inside practitioner so it was vital to identify what other teachers are experiencing and to study this shared interest. This research attempts to answer the following main research question: What are the perceptions of teachers of English teaching in Maltese state middle schools regarding the newly implemented LOF and the new assessment system?

Literature Review

Learning Outcomes Framework and Continuous Assessment in the Maltese Educational System

In 2012, the National Curriculum Framework introduced the concept of outcomes-based teaching and learning which was then implemented in a reform in 2018. This change also introduced the LOF with the aim "to free schools and learners from centrally imposed knowledge-centric syllabi and instead give

them freedom to develop programmes that fulfil the framework of knowledge, attitudes and skills-based outcomes that are considered national education entitlement of all learners in Malta" (MEDE, 2015, p. 5). This new document focuses on the four skills (writing, listening, speaking, reading), and for each skill there are learning outcomes (LO) that the student works on and reaches. Each broad LO is further divided into three tracks according to students' level.

Schembri (2020) claims that the LOF was intended to promote an environment conducive to learning between learners and teachers and to give individual attention to all learners to reach their highest potential, while supporting educational institutions to fulfil expectations both of learners and their parents. He adds that this transition helped to reduce subject content and include 21st-century skills, which are pivotal today. This is possible if students are faced with a wider selection of learning programmes and learning pathways (Attard Tonna & Bugeja, 2016, as cited in Schembri, 2020) and if schools are freed from strict and imposing syllabi, replacing them with ones that offer "a degree of flexibility to design their own learning programmes" (Schembri, 2020, p. 111).

Half-yearly examinations were also exchanged with a 50-hour increase in teaching time and the introduction of Continuous Assessment (CA). This was done to promote students' learning and to give autonomy and freedom to teachers. The aim was that teachers would provide formative Continuous Assessment which students could use to improve on future tasks.

Students receive their feedback of specifically chosen tasks on set dates through four feedback options: Fully Achieved, Satisfactorily Achieved, Partially Achieved and Not Achieved. Students do not receive a grade but one of these options, because the same learning outcome can be re-assessed throughout the year and the feedback can be improved. However, teachers use other learning outcomes throughout the year and can reuse and reassess them multiple times to show the learning journey of the student. This new system complements the national Summative Assessment done at the end-of-year exams where students are given a global mark made up of the exam mark and CA tasks.

The Role of Assessment in Education

Assessment determines how well students are meeting their objectives and provides information for the teacher to design and implement specific programs to help students improve (National Research Council, 2008). There are different types of assessment, with the main distinction being Continuous Assessment (CA) and Summative Assessment (SA), which differ in their functions: the former supports learning, the latter is used for validation and accreditation (William & Black, 1996). It can be agreed upon that both are valid tools in the classroom; however, the choice of assessment for a specific task is vital for the student's learning progress. A description of the main types of assessment is given below.

Summative assessment focuses on acquiring student learning data to determine their academic progress at the end of a unit or period. In fact, its purpose is to identify whether or not the learning has occurred in order to produce a grade at the end (Harlen & Deakin, 2002, as cited in Vahed et al., 2023) and thus, "determine whether students have met performance requirements on aspects of a module in a specific study period" (Vahed et al., 2023).

The second type of assessment is continuous assessment. Definitions encapsulating continuous assessment vary; however, summative assessment and formative assessment resonate in defining continuous assessment. For example, Miller et al. (1998, as cited in Holmes, 2018, p. 25) defines it as "the use of tests over a learning unit, and the accumulation of results in a final grade", and Vahed et al. (2023) claim that this concept "implies an ongoing purpose of formative assessment input in facilitating and guiding learning towards the formal demonstration of achieved learning in summative assessment" (p. 269). SA might give a clear-cut picture of the students' marks on that specific task or exam; however, it does not give any indications, especially to the students themselves, about their actual learning process. Contrastingly, FA can be described as picking out the components that are giving trouble to the student and giving formative feedback to help with the learning process by adapting lessons to the students' needs (Scriven, 1979) or to optimise student strength and stretch their abilities for greater potential.

In fact, Black and William (1998) highlight that "frequent assessment feedback helps [low achieving students and students with learning disabilities] enhance their learning" because the "ways in which assessment can affect the motivation and self-esteem of pupils and benefits of engaging pupils in self-

assessment deserve careful attention" (p. 3). Additionally, Clark (2010) suggests that for FA to work successfully, it is crucial that formative feedback is provided together with scaffolded instruction or thoughtful questioning to close the gap between the student's current level of understanding and the desired learning goal. This can be done through FA tasks such as in-class discussions, group work and pair work, writing tasks drafts, peer assessment and self-assessment. Through these and appropriate use of formative feedback, students should be able to overcome difficulties in their learning and reach an anticipated outcome.

A study by Said Pace (2018) identified that primary teachers in a Maltese state college had very limited understanding of *Assessment for Learning* but concluded that after a collaborative action research approach, prospective teacher participants had a better understanding of FA and agreed on its importance, but believed that it is more for the highflyers and the motivated ones. Satariano (2015) suggests that teachers might understand what FA requires but do not really implement it, as FA was observed in fewer than 21% of the cases. Giordimaina (2020) claims benefits to using FA in the classroom; however, challenges also arose in this study, including teachers' difficulty in changing their pedagogy.

Hence, by providing continuous assessment formatively, students receive a form of assessment that assesses their ongoing learning in conjunction to their attainment of outcomes in each module or chapter. The rationale behind this continuous assessment is to ensure that the students work consistently and thus, it provides early indicators of their performance through feedback and support (Peterson, n.d.).

Methodology

Research Design

This investigation was built upon one main research question: "What are the perceptions of teachers of English teaching in Maltese state middle schools regarding the newly implemented Learning Outcomes Framework (LOF) and the new assessment system?". This study collected data through online questionnaires due to time constraints and the large number of participants which produced a large amount of data that needed to be coded and analysed (Adams & Cox, 2008). The study was distributed to 92 teachers teaching English in state middle schools. The researcher opted against one-to-one interviews or

focus groups because of time constraints; both the researcher and the teachers would have found it difficult to find the time to do this (Adams & Cox, 2008). In addition, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the English Education Officer (EO) who oversaw the Middle School that the researcher was placed in. The researcher had spoken to all the English EOs before the interview and it was agreed that the EO in charge of that college would take part in the interview. The EO was made aware at the beginning of the interview, and accepted, that her name would be included in the transcription.

The researcher is an inside practitioner and bias was a major concern, so the researcher started off by engaging in *epoche*, which Moustakas (1994) describes as launching the study, “as far as possible free from preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experiences and professional studies” (p. 22). By placing *epoche* at the beginning of the inquiry, the researcher is able to separate past knowledge and experience and connect with respondents’ meanings without being subjective (Bednall, 2006). Through this detachment, the researcher was able to analyse the answers to the RQs without any prejudice.

The first part of this two-phase study was launched by distributing the online questionnaires to all three college network clusters around Malta, which contain a total of 9 colleges. During the scholastic year 2022–2023 there were 92 teachers of English in all middle schools, and 34 of them participated in the study by answering the online questionnaire. This added up to 37% of the total cohort and could be considered valid. Each college network contains one middle school made up of Year 7 and Year 8 students (11–12-year-olds). The second phase was launched after the questionnaires were received. Both the online questionnaires and the interview focused on the new syllabus and assessment system, paying particular attention to their effects on teaching and learning. The only difference was that the online questionnaire shed light on the teachers’ use, experiences and points of view of these two new systems in relation to the time they spent using them in class, whereas the interview focused on the advantages and disadvantages of these systems and how they should be included and executed in class. Discussing and comparing these two highlighted whether teachers are appropriately using the new systems in class and if they are feasible or not. Excerpts and examples from questionnaire answers and the interview will be given in the coming sections.

Phenomenology is the study of phenomena that arise from the experience of being in the world (Smith, 2013). In fact, Moustakas (1994, p. 47) claims that, “[i]n phenomenological studies, the investigator abstains from making suppositions, focuses on a specific topic freshly and naively, constructs a question or problem to guide the study, and derives findings that will provide the basis for further research and reflection”. Therefore, the researcher chose phenomenology to detach from the phenomenon, which is the use of the LOF and assessment system, and to identify teachers’ perceptions of such systems without prejudice.

Transcendental phenomenology, as Moustakas (1994) adds, is about, “the challenge [...] to explicate the phenomenon in terms of its constituents and possible meanings, thus discerning the features of consciousness and arriving at an understanding of the essences of the experience” (p. 49). In simpler terms, the researcher identifies any presuppositions of the topic and does away with them to be able to understand the direct insight given by the respondents about their perceptions of the experiences being investigated.

Thus, in order to acquire in-depth answers about the phenomenon and experience being investigated, the qualitative method was chosen. The questionnaires included open-ended questions where respondents could easily explain themselves. Qualitative approach has to do with finding out about people’s experiences, which help in understanding what is important for them (Silverman, 2020) and aids in gathering teachers’ perceptions of their lived experiences with the phenomena, which in this case are the LOF and Assessment system.

Online Questionnaires

Using an open-ended questionnaire was imperative because teachers had the possibility to write in-depth answers about their experiences. Also, the study focused on all teachers teaching English in state middle schools around Malta, and interviewing all 92 teachers was not feasible. Hence, sending open-ended questionnaires made it possible to reach all the respondents while still focusing on their own lived experiences. Additionally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the questionnaires were completed remotely for easier and safer distribution and collection.

Given (2008) argues that an open-ended question provides the participants “with the opportunity to choose the terms with which to construct their

descriptions and highlight the topics that are meaningful to them" (p. 2) and the freedom to "elaborate on self-selected aspects related to the researcher's topic of examination" (p. 2). Also, these questions do not make any presumptions about the responses that will be given by the participants (Given, 2008) but allow the participants to write about their own experiences and opinions about the topic being discussed. Cohen et al. (2017) argue that "open-ended questionnaires may be more appropriate as they can capture the specificity of a particular situation" (p. 321), and "where rich and personal data are sought, then a word-based qualitative approach might be more suitable" (p. 321).

The questionnaires were distributed online using Microsoft Forms. A copy of the questionnaire was given to the English EO who, in turn, distributed it to all the teachers of English currently teaching in the state middle schools in Malta by sending a copy to their iLearn email account. The form informed the participants about the aim of the study and about confidentiality and anonymity of the data collected, and then displayed the questions.

Semi-Structured Interview

The second data collection instrument used was a semi-structured interview to find out about the EO's point of view on the new systems and identify any discrepancies between what the EOs expect and what the teachers are delivering. A semi-structured interview was chosen "to address specific dimensions of [the] research question while also leaving space for study participants to offer new meanings to the topic of study" (Galletta & Cross, 2013, p. 2). Interviews are a conversation between the interviewer and an interviewee where "knowledge is produced through the interaction between [the two]" (Given, 2008, p. 2). A semi-structured interview, in turn, is "a consequence of the agenda being set by the researcher's interests yet with room for the respondent's more spontaneous descriptions and narratives" (Given, 2008, p. 2). The semi-structured interview was conducted via Microsoft Teams and recorded. The EO was chosen after contacting all three English Education Officers to notify them about the interview.

Results

Results of Online Questionnaires

The following are the results from the online questionnaires. Open-ended questions were used so respondents were able to explain their answers. These

answers were then analysed and coded, and the codes were added to produce a table. There were 34 respondents, and the numbers represent how many answers from these respondents included those specific codes.

Participants' Teaching Experience. The first section focused on the confidence level of the respondents' use of the LOF and the new assessment system, and in fact, most of the respondents claimed that they are very confident when it comes to their usage (Table 1). They also answered that the reasons behind such confidence were mostly experience, support and teamwork, the supporting document (LOF), practice and preparation (Table 2).

Table 1

Level of Confidence in Using the Learning Outcomes Framework

Level of Confidence	Number of Respondents	Share of Respondents
Very confident	20	59%
Slightly confident	13	38%
Not confident at all	1	3%
Total Number of Respondents	34	100%

Table 2

Factors that Contributed to Teachers' Confidence Level in Using the Learning Outcomes Framework in Teaching

Factor	Number of Respondents	Share of Respondents
Experience	14	41%
Support/Teamwork	12	35%
Supporting Document	11	32%
Practice	9	26%
Preparation	9	26%
Sharing resources/Teamwork	6	18%
Technology	2	6%
Scaffolding	2	6%
Flexibility	2	6%
Not practical	2	6%
Imposing Outcomes	2	6%
Frustrating Structure	1	3%
Total Number of Respondents	34	100%

Note. Respondents were asked to list three factors that had contributed to their confidence level in using the Learning Outcomes Framework

Table 3*Teachers' Perception of Role of Assessment in Teaching and Learning*

Respondents' Perception	Number of Respondents	Share of Respondents
Progress / Improvement	16	47%
Initial knowledge	7	21%
Lesson planning	4	12%
Formative feedback	4	12%
Feedback	2	6%
Objectives	1	3%
Increased Workload	1	3%
Not Standardised	1	3%
Ongoing Process	1	3%
Total Number of Respondents	34	100%

Note. Thematic coding of respondents' perception of the role of assessment (open-ended question)

Teachers' Perceptions of Summative Assessment and Continuous Assessment and Their Roles in Assessment. When asked about the role of assessment, most teachers claimed that it is used to keep track of progress and student improvement (Table 3). It was also clear that the respondents have a clear idea of what summative assessment and continuous assessment are, even though the answers are indicative of their experience rather than a clear-cut definition of the difference between the two (Table 4). Also, teachers clearly know that continuous assessment and formative assessment are important but do not really know the relationship between the two. Almost 41% know they are both important, but 24% do not know what the relationship is, which is quite a high percentage (Table 5). It was also clear that most teachers used SA before the implementation of the LOF as a preferred method of assessment (Table 6). However, as they are currently using CA/FA, most teachers indicated that the most important strategy to use is "to understand where learners stand", even though most tend to include five to six strategies in their lessons (Table 7).

Table 4*Teachers' Perception of the Difference between Continuous and Summative Assessment*

Assessment	Respondents' Perception	Number of Respondents	Share of Respondents
Continuous Assessment	Throughout the year	22	65%
	Cumulative Mark	5	15%
	Shapes Teaching	4	12%
	Checks learning	3	9%
	Different tasks	3	9%
	Formative	2	6%
	Feedback	2	6%
	Student Abilities	1	3%
	Planning Lessons	1	3%
	Total Number of Respondents	34	100%
Summative Assessment	Annual Exams	18	53%
	Final Mark	13	38%
	Tests Achievement	4	12%
	Formal	1	3%
		Total Number of Respondents	34

Note. Thematic coding of respondents' perception of the difference between Continuous and Summative Assessment (open-ended question)

Table 5

Teachers' Perception of the Relationship between Continuous and Formative Assessment

Respondents' Perception	Number of Respondents	Share of Respondents
Both are important	14	41%
Do not know	8	24%
Feedback purposes	2	6%
Summative testing	2	6%
Multiple methods of assessment	1	3%
Assessing different aspects	1	3%
Formative Assessment determines Continuous Assessment	1	3%
Affects Workload	1	3%
No answer	4	12%
Total Number of Respondents	34	100%

Note. Thematic coding of respondents' perception of the difference between Continuous and Formative Assessment (open-ended question)

Table 6*Teachers' Use of Assessment Prior to the Implementation of the Learning Outcomes Framework*

Assessment used	Number of Respondents	Share of Respondents
Summative Assessment only	17	50%
Continuous Assessment only	7	21%
Both Summative Assessment and Continuous Assessment	5	15%
Formative Assessment	2	6%
No answer	3	9%
Total Number of Respondents	34	100%

Note. Thematic coding of respondents' use of assessment prior to the implementation of the Learning Outcomes Framework (open-ended question)

Table 7

Strategies Adopted by Teachers When Implementing Formative/Continuous Assessment

Strategies adopted	Number of Respondents	Share of Respondents
Understanding where learners stand	11	32%
Clear and Shared Success Criteria	7	21%
Feedback	6	18%
Questioning	5	15%
Clear and Shared Learning Intentions	3	9%
Self-Assessment	1	3%
Peer Assessment	1	3%
Total Number of Respondents	34	100%

Note. Multiple choice question

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Learning Outcomes Framework and New Assessment system. According to respondents, the benefits of the LOF and the New Assessment System are to monitor progress throughout the year and to monitor students' abilities (Table 8), whereas the disadvantages are the added paperwork and that it is time consuming (Table 9). However, even so, the respondents agreed that both SA and FA should be used to best assess students' learning.

Therefore, teachers understand what the benefits of the LOF and new assessment system are, yet they feel that there are no additional benefits over the old syllabus. In fact, this change in perception might be linked to the fact that 54% of the respondents claimed that training given before the implementation was only somewhat effective, and 69% agreed that the workload was affected by such implementation. Just under half (49%) claimed that the introduction of the new assessment system was somewhat easy, while 50% claimed that it was

somewhat true that there are a lot of available resources that helped them in planning their lessons.

Table 8

Benefits of the Learning Outcomes Framework and the New Assessment System

Benefits	Number of Respondents	Share of Respondents
Progress assessed not only during exam	9	26%
Students' abilities	8	24%
Reflect on Learning	6	18%
Skills Focused	4	12%
Assessment	3	9%
Student Effort	2	6%
Less Stressed	2	6%
Scaffolding	1	3%
Importance of Continuous assessment	1	3%
Interactive	1	3%
Holistic Approach	1	3%
Immersive	1	3%
Inclusive	1	3%
No answer	5	15%
Total Number of Respondents	34	100%

Note. Thematic coding of respondents' perception of the benefits of the Learning Outcomes Framework and the New Assessment System (open-ended question)

Table 9

Disadvantage of the Learning Outcomes Framework and the New Assessment System

Disadvantages	Number of Respondents	Share of Respondents
More paperwork	7	21%
Time Consuming	7	21%
Subjectivity	6	18%
Absenteeism	5	15%
Stress on Students	5	15%
No disadvantages	3	9%
Resources	2	6%
MySchool	2	6%
Training	2	6%
Students not serious	1	3%
Lack of Freedom	1	3%
No answer	4	12%
Inclusive	34	100%
No answer	5	15%
Total Number of Respondents	34	100%

Note. Thematic coding of respondents' perception of the disadvantages of the Learning Outcomes Framework and the New Assessment System (open-ended question)

Table 10*Strategies / Techniques used in Formative / Continuous Assessment*

Strategies / Techniques	Number of Respondents	Share of Respondents
Learning Intentions	5	15%
Self-Reflection	4	12%
Feedback	4	12%
Success Criteria	3	9%
Peer Review	3	9%
Mind Maps	2	6%
Checklists	1	3%
Critical Thinking	1	3%
Technology	0	0%
Total Number of Respondents	34	100%

Note. Multiple choice question

Strategies and Techniques Implemented in English Lessons. Most teachers agreed that they use learning intentions preferably (Table 10) and the reasons given were that such strategies help with collaboration, focused lessons, response for learning, and engaging students. However, at the end of the questionnaire, teachers added that they liked the new syllabus and assessment system, yet it includes a lot of added work. They suggested to include fewer learning outcomes and more help with the necessary resources.

Results of Semi-Structured Interview

The Learning Outcomes Framework – The Advantages, Disadvantages, and its Implementation in the Classroom. During the interview, the EO started off by explaining the importance and reasons behind the introduction of the supporting document (LOF). The EO claimed that the main aim of this document is to “shift focus from teaching to learning to make it a more learner-centred environment”. The idea behind the learning outcomes is to make “goals and expectations clear to the learners from the beginning to help them identify what

is expected of them and what goal they need to reach by the end of the lesson”.

However, the EO mentions that there should be a mind shift when it comes to teaching and learning. Using the LOF requires teachers to incorporate new strategies and techniques in their lessons to “facilitate, to draw out, to start with what the student already knows; the student is not an empty vessel to be filled with something that I know but that the students, that they know a lot of things already because of their world knowledge”. Two disadvantages that were mentioned were absenteeism and the difficulty with using the new reporting system.

Notwithstanding the number of disadvantages, the EO also highlighted that teachers had a number of consultation and training sessions before the implementation of the LOF and should have been well prepared to use the supporting document, as “the publication of the supporting document for Year 7 and Year 8 was definitely key in the preparation for the introduction of the learning outcomes”. However, the EO also added that there should be a process of learning how to properly use the Learning Outcomes Framework supporting document as effectively as possible.

New Assessment System – The Transition from Mostly Summative Assessment to Continuous Assessment. The EO pointed out that the most important transition of the new assessment system is that assessment occurs not only during the end-of-year exam but throughout the scholastic year, and this “gives the teacher opportunity to assess certain things that with SA are a bit more difficult to assess. The fact that students are being assessed not only at the end of the year, but at various points, sort of throughout the scholastic year, it encourages, it lends itself.” This gives more opportunities for feedback and creates a cycle of improvement where feedback is given and lessons are adapted accordingly. There is now a number of subskills which can be easily assessed with CA, which were not previously acknowledged before, such as presentations.

Consequently, parents can easily monitor the progress of their children throughout the year and also, CA has brought about an awareness in teachers when they set tasks. They can pick a task to assess with a specific learning outcome, which makes it less standardised.

The Education Officer's Perceptions of the Implementation of the Learning Outcomes Framework and the New Assessment System by Teachers of English. Teachers have always given some kind of feedback; however, with CA/FA, formative feedback creates a cycle where the students know what they need to do to improve, and the teachers adapt lessons to help accordingly. This cycle is what makes CA/FA effective and also gives opportunities for teachers to be as creative and adventurous as they want in their lessons.

However, the EO also shed light on the most important thing to remember when using the LOF, which is the learning outcome. "The destination has to be clear", both for the teachers and for the students right from the start, and "what they should remember is what the destination is, what they want by the end of the lesson". Planning lessons is subjective; however, they must have clear learning intentions and each task has to feed into the following one to make the lesson progress smoothly. The most effective strategies and techniques to do so, according to the EO, are questioning techniques, giving them a reason to do the task, peer assessment and pair work.

Summary of Findings

In order to discuss the summary of findings, it would be more viable to remember what the research question was: identifying the perceptions of English language teachers on the newly implemented Learning Outcomes Framework and the new assessment system. In the previous section, these two systems were analysed and coded, and the following are the findings that have been produced.

Firstly, the most prominent finding was that the new syllabus and assessment systems that have been in place since 2018 have a lot of advantages and disadvantages according to the teachers and Education Officer; however, they all acknowledge the fact that even though there has been a lot of support, teachers were not fully prepared for the overload of work expected of them. From the data collected, teachers know that these systems are beneficial both to teaching and learning, yet the work has drastically increased and disadvantages have started outweighing the advantages. Nevertheless, the teachers said that they still try to incorporate as many strategies and techniques as possible in their lessons.

Another important finding included continuous assessment and summative

assessment. Teachers who have been teaching for a number of years and used to use the old syllabus, which included the additional use of summative assessment and half-yearly exams, claim that, even though students might have been stressed by exams, they felt summative tests were more effective than continuous assessment. Notwithstanding the fact that these same teachers acknowledge the benefits of continuous assessment and formative assessment, they still feel that they were better off using the old system. One reason for this might be, as Attard Tonna and Bugeja (2016) claim, that this has to do with the introduction of a number of policies in a short period of time and putting additional external pressures on educators to adapt to these changes. The Education Officer identified the same challenges, yet proposed that the teachers, especially those who have experienced the old syllabus, should change their mindset to cater for the new systems.

Hindrances that might have affected the introduction of the two systems are an increase in paperwork, more time necessary, more subjective strategies, absenteeism, added stress on students, and lack of training. All these were discussed with the Education Officer as well and were acknowledged as able to affect the implementation of the new systems; however, it was also concluded that the new systems are still a work in progress. A small number of teachers were able to produce a number of benefits, which included assessing students in different opportunities throughout the year, focusing on students' abilities, and reflection on learning. Even though there were fewer advantages than disadvantages, both the respondents and the Education Officer agreed that there were still a number of advantages to the new systems which should be mentioned.

Additionally, when it comes to the impact of this transition on teachers, it should have been an ideal teaching and learning experience; however, in reality, it introduced great difficulties for teachers, as the majority of respondents were unable to produce any benefits of the new syllabus over the old one which appears to have offered teachers some sort of structure and standardisation. The LOF was expected "to allow for flexibility, lifelong learning and a new outlook on how assessment is devised in Malta" (Schembri, 2020, p. 111), but most teachers criticised this, claiming that such changes produced more problems than they solved. When discussing this issue with the Education Officer, it was claimed that before the introduction of the new systems, there were a number of training sessions for teachers, which, according to the teachers themselves,

were not enough. Teachers' perceptions of the LOF and the new assessment system are that they are beneficial for students but not for teachers. They shed light on students' abilities but further burden teachers.

Conclusion

There is a list of recommendations in the actual study, but the most important recommendations are threefold. Teachers are urged to follow stand-alone courses targeting CA and use of digital tools to ease the problem with resources. EOs and Heads of Departments should increase the number of training sessions before and during the implementation of any new concept. And the number of LOs in the supporting document should be decreased.

In conclusion, this research served to identify if the LOF and CA have served their intended purpose, which on the whole has been reached, but further investigations and improvements are needed. Teachers and EOs agree that the system should be advantageous for both teachers and students; however, when putting it into practice, teachers identify that it is highly beneficial for students but greatly challenging for teachers. Policymakers must make sure that they are aware of such difficulties, including decreasing the number of LOs, changing/removing topics mentioned, amongst others, and amending the supporting document. Taking these changes into consideration, together with the recommendations presented in the paper, teachers should be able to identify great benefits and improvements from both the LOF and the assessment system.

Notes on Contributor

Linette Chircop Zahra has been teaching English since 2012 after following a B.A. in English and Psychology at the University of Malta. She has taught English in both middle and secondary state schools around Malta and has witnessed great changes including the introduction of the College Network System, Co-education, a new supporting document and a new assessment system. She enrolled in the Master of Education programme offered by the Institute for Education in 2019. Inspired by all this, she has focused on the supporting document for English that includes the new assessment system that is a combination of continuous assessment (CA) and summative assessment (SA), and how these are affecting teaching and learning.

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