



## STUDENTS VIEWS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF 16 COURSEWORK CUT-OFF POINT AT UNIVERSITY

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this study was to explore the current practice when implementing coursework cut-off point (CWCP) to undergraduate students in the Dodoma region of Tanzania, specifically at the University of Dodoma. The mixed approach was employed with the help of convergent research design. The study involved 379 undergraduate students, the respondents were selected through simple random and purposive sampling. Furthermore, data were collected through questionnaire and semi-structured interview. Quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics and presented in frequency and percentage while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The results that most of students were positive minded on the use of 16 CWCP for enhancing students learning at the university*

**Keywords:** continuous assessment, coursework cut-off point, undergraduate students

### INTRODUCTION

The academic guidelines and regulations form a fundamental aspect of the University regulatory structure for teaching, learning and mode of assessment (TCU, 2019; Ogachi, 2018; University of String, 2019). Due to that, regulations are essential point of reference for both learners and facilitators. One of the sections found in the regulations for most of universities is that which guide the assessment procedures, of which there are two components of assessment in learning namely continuous assessment (CA) (test, assignment and seminars) and end of semester examination (Munoz, 2015; Santos & Shieh, 2016).

Globally the regulation guiding ratings for CA and end of semester examinations varies from one University to another, depending on the policy guiding a particular country as each University should state and implement guidelines and regulations for assessing students' (European Union, 2014). For instance, in the United Kingdom, the University of Manchester and the University of Liverpool in particular, regulations and guidelines guiding undergraduate student's assessment learning have not indicated coursework cut-off point in marks allocated for continuous assessment rather they set pass mark as the combination of the scores from both continuous assessment and final examination which is at least 40% and above (University of Liverpool, 2021; University of Manchester, 2020). Likewise, University of Auckland in New Zealand coursework assessment constitutes 30% and the end of course exam constitutes 70%. A student should score a pass mark

of 50% from the combination of coursework and end of semester examinations (University of Auckland, 2021).

On the other hand, Saskatchewan University in Canada CA constitutes not more than 50% and final University examination constitutes not less than 50% while the pass mark required is at least 60% (University of Saskatchewan, 2019). This implies that some of Universities in the world have not indicated cut-off points in CW as compulsory criterion required for student to sit for the end of semester examination, rather they set pass mark which a student is required to score from the combination of both CA and the end of semester examinations.

In Africa states, African Union has synchronized the quality of higher education to make it both locally appropriate and worldwide competitive, this mean that in order to have university graduates who are competent to serve the community and worldwide it depends on how well were assessed, how effective were tools used for assessment and how competent were facilitators (HAQAA Initiative, 2017). Therefore, in African universities the situation is not quite different such as taking an example in Kenya, Uganda and Ghana in continuous assessment there in no prescribed coursework cut-off point which a student is required to achieve so as to be qualified for sitting for final exam rather student is allowed to take final exam after completing all the tasks assigned for continuous assessment. For example, taking a case of Kenya, Clark (2015) and Pwani University (2014) indicated that in most of universities CA constitutes 30% to 40% and end of semester examinations 60% to 70%. Whereby, majority of the universities each unit or course, a pass mark is 40% out of 100% which combines CA and end of semester examinations.

In Uganda, Cavendish University (2020) and Ukurut (2006) in particular found that the system used in Uganda is not quite different from that of Kenya. In Ghana, most of universities' regulations for undergraduate studies states that, CA carries a weight of 40% where a student is required to score at least 50% from the combination of CA and end of semester examinations (UEW, 2018). Failure to attain a pass mark in any course compels students to sit for the supplementary examinations (Nyanchama, 2018). From this understanding Students are allowed to take end of semester examinations after taking all Continuous Assessment Tests (CATS).

However, Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) standard numbers 3.12 and 3.13 on the other hand indicate that, every higher learning institution has an autonomy to establish institutional regulations and guidelines guiding students on the mode of assessment for CW and examinations (TCU, 2019). This implies that there are no common Coursework Cut-off Point (CWCP) indicated

by Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) rather it is set by institutions. Furthermore, most of Tanzanian university continuous assessment constitutes 40% while final exam has 60%, in most of public universities they use 16-score out of 40 marks in continuous assessment as one of conditions for undergraduate students to sit for end of semester examination (SUA, 2014; SAUTI, 2018; MoCU, 2015; UDSM, 2020).

So far, at the University of Dodoma (UDOM) there have been four undergraduate regulation editions. The first edition existed in 2007; the second edition was put into operation in 2012, the third edition 2016 and the fourth edition of 2019 replaced the undergraduate studies regulation of 2016. Considering all these four editions, the second edition of 2012 CWCP was suspended to be used as compulsory criteria to be fulfilled by students in order for them to be allowed to sit for University examination (UDOM, 2012). However, in the fourth edition of Undergraduate studies regulation of 2019 number 11.0, page number 9 indicates that; “A student is required to score at least 16 marks out of 40 with exception of students from the college of health sciences”. A student whose coursework (CW) will be below sixteen shall be regarded as unsatisfactory marks hence will not be allowed to sit for end of semester examination. Instead shall automatically have a carryover of the particular course and no any kind of makeup for coursework assignment shall be allowed” (UDOM, 2019).

It is well noted that there is a positive correlation between coursework obtained from continuous assessment (CA) and performance of students in the end of semester examinations (Gonzalez de Sande *et al*, 2010). Reboredo (2017), pointed out that a student with higher coursework is likely to score higher in the end of semester examinations and students with moderate or low coursework tend to perform the same or below in their end of semester examinations. There is a need to conduct this study which will address specifically students views on the implementation of 16-CWCP. Hence this will provide a room for more understanding on how CWCP contributes toward undergraduate students learning.

The study aims at exploring opinions of undergraduate’s students on the implementation of 16-coursework cut-off point towards learning

Explore student’s opinions on the use of 16-coursework cut-off point as compulsory criterion to sit for end of semester examination in university

What are student’s opinions on the use of 16-coursework cut-off point as a compulsory criterion to sit for end of semester examination in university?

## METHOD

### Approach, design, study area, target population, data collection methods

The study employed mixed method approach since it allow to get more and in-depth details from different respondents concerning the study topic both numeral and explanations because the combination of qualitative approach and quantitative approach complement each other when one approach becomes weaker the other strengthens it Dawadi *et al* (2021). in addition convergent design was used because it allow the combination of two data set to get a comprehensive picture of the topic explored and to validate the results obtained through qualitative and those from quantitative approach (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Furthermore, the study was conducted at the University of Dodoma in Tanzania, The purpose for selecting this location lies in the idea that, at the University of Dodoma students are subjected to CWCP. Besides, in previous years for instance in 2016, coursework cut-off point was not used as one of the conditions required for students to sit for the end of semester examinations at the University of Dodoma. Nevertheless, later on, in 2019 the system was reintroduced for use (UDOM, 2019). The target population were undergraduate students (class representatives, students minister of education & undergraduate students) whereby sample size of 379 students were involved in this study and data were collected through questionnaire and semi-structured interview. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically while quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics and findings were presented in table in terms of frequency and percentage.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study focused on exploring students vies on the use of 16-CWCP as compulsory criterion in university, Data were collected from undergraduate students through questionnaire and interview. The findings on the incidence are summarized on table 1 below.

**Table 1:Open-Ended Questionnaire by Students my own thinking on Opinions  
 Towards Coursework Cut-off point for Improving Learning**

<b>Students Opinions</b>	<b>Frequency (N = 368)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Makes student to study hard	339	91.9
Contributes towards uplifting students' performance	312	84.6
Measures ability of students	305	82.7

Does not reflect students' effort in studying	95	25.7
Creates anxiety and depression to students	108	29.3
Increases number of carryover and discontinuation	175	47.4

**Source:** Field data (2022)

**Key:** N= Total number of respondents

Study findings indicated in Table 1 above specifies that, majority of students have positive attitude towards the use of CWCP with the reason that it helps them to study hard as 339 respondents, equivalent to (91.9%) depict, 312 respondents, equivalent to (84.6%) pointed out that it uplift student performance and 305 respondents, equivalent to (82.7%) argued that, it measures student's ability to grasp what was taught in class. On the other hand, some of students had negative opinions such as, CWCP does not reflect student's efforts in studies as 95 respondents, equivalent to (25.7%) depict. Other respondents said that CWCP creates anxiety among students as 108 respondents, equivalent to (29.3%) and 175 respondents, equivalent to (47.4%) argued that it increase number of carryover and discontinuation cases. On the other side responses from interview, one of student reported that;

The system is good let it be used not only as a motivational factor but also as a tool for enforcing learning. However it should not be as a tool for punishing students, just because it influences most of students to study hard and avoid carryover cases  
(Interview, SME from college X, July 2022)

For further verification of the findings, one of the student representatives commented that;

CWCP should continue to be used but it should not be the main criterion to prevent the student from completing end of semester examinations, in the view of the fact that students have big dreams but they are not realized for not reaching 16 points in the coursework (Interview, CR 8, July 2022)

In addition, another student explained that;

Coursework cut-off point should be above 16-scoresfor the reason that it motivates students to learn and perform better. The absence of it may lead to poor performance of students as most of them can forget even their learning

responsibility at University which is the major aspect of the students to make them through the University (**Interview, CR 6, July 2022**)

The above quotes shows that the University initiatives to introduce CWCP helped to enforce students learning and they are positive minded on its implications towards learning. On the same matter one of the respondents commented that;

During first year orientation, coursework cut-off point should be part of it since it will encourage students to study hard and become self-motivated after knowing the implication of scoring below 16-scores. But on the other hand my opinion, students should not be discontinued because of not scoring as per the coursework cut-off point set, they should be given another chance, at least once (**Interview, SME from College X, July 2022**)

The above quotations indicate that setting of CWCP is more significant to University students in order to facilitate effective learning process. On the contrary, learning should not be tied only on attainment of required coursework cut-off point rather than focusing on learning. This is due to the fact that when a student is self-centred even with absence of CWCP they are able to score 16-marks in coursework and above and increase their efforts towards end of semester University examination regardless of attaining below the coursework required by the University. It has to be noted that in measurements and evaluation in CA is more important for both facilitators and students as it provides feedback on what the student has learned. For facilitators, cut-off point in coursework informs them where to improve and personal ability of students while to students it tells them their pace of learning and better way of learning and where to improve.

The findings concurs with findings from Rawlusk (2018) which revealed that, the use assessment tasks in higher education is of great potential for enhancing comprehensive understanding of the concept taught to students , therefore it is essential to focus on how the assessment tasks are organized and delivered. The scholar argues that, tests and examination enhance thoughtful learning which could help students comprehend the concepts of the study. The use of limited CA activities and the focus on achieving the 16 coursework marks, forces students to only concentrate on passing exams or scoring higher in tests and understanding what has been taught.

Furthermore, study findings concurs with findings from Popkova (2018) which revealed that, continuous assessment done in HLIs, have been a subject of debate among scholars. End of the semester examinations, tests and quizzes are seen as assessment tools designed to stiff deep

learning among students and promote cramming. Students tend to engage in studies only when examinations are due. Most students focus on retaining information until when they have done examinations. Such tendency has detrimental impacts which could be observed as majority of graduates lack the relevant and practical skills despite having sufficient qualification. In this study the use of 16-CWCP fosters the above argument and confirms what students have revealed.

## CONCLUSION

It is concluded that students are positive minded towards the implementation of CWCP since it increases concentration in learning throughout the semester and the students need to bear in mind that CWCP set by university is not for the sake of university rather for helping undergraduate students to focus and concentrate in learning. Though there are some modifications are needed such as concentration of CWCP to first year students during orientation, also more tasks should be provided when carrying out continuous assessment.

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