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Achieving Accountability and Quality Education through Assessments: A Comprehensive Exploration of Assessment Practices in Zambia

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of assessments in achieving accountability and quality education provision in Zambia. The attainment of quality education is dependent upon the establishment of systems that ensure transparency, efficacy and accountability within the education system at all levels. Assessments play a crucial role in achieving accountability and ensuring quality education provision. Despite efforts to provide a comprehensive assessment system that has evaluation procedures that can assess more intellectual capacities, attitudinal and dispositional outcomes in areas of innovation, problem solving, self-initiated and self-sustaining, Zambia grapples with issues of equity and inclusivity in assessment practices which pose significant obstacles to achieving fair and meaningful evaluation of assessment system that promotes accountability and enhances quality education provision. Employing descriptive survey design and desk review of different collections of literature, policies, frameworks and reports, the study aims to illuminate both the strengths and weaknesses inherent in the current assessment practices within the Zambian context. Furthermore, the study endeavours to unearth the challenges impeding effective

assessment practices, while simultaneously proposing strategic recommendations aimed at enhancing the existing shortcomings. The findings underscore the importance of robust assessments practices in augmenting accountability and ensuring quality education outcomes, providing valuable insights for policymakers, educators and stakeholders invested in advancing accountability and quality education provision through assessments. In addition, the study recommends incorporation of teacher training and all stakeholders involved in assessment practices, improve of existing infrastructure, construction and equipping of laboratories with equipment and apparatus, enhancing monitoring and supervision, re-thinking stipulated guidelines on assessment implementation and utilization of funds in schools. Additionally, re-consideration of resource allocation and material provision, coupled with feedback provision and analysis of capacities should be implemented in order for Zambia to develop a pathway towards a more equitable, inclusive and high-quality education system that empowers all learners to realize their maximum potential.

Keywords: Accountability, Assessments, School Based Assessments, Examinations, Quality Education

Introduction/ Context and Imperatives

The education system in Zambia has been a cornerstone of national development since 1964, focusing on producing graduates with the competencies and skills needed to address societal needs (ESA, 2018; Mwamba, Musonda, Daka and Mulenga, 2021) [40]. Education plays a pivotal role in socio-economic development and individual empowerment, with a strong emphasis on providing relevant, quality, and inclusive education that fosters essential life and work competencies. The effectiveness of the education system is largely measured by the performance of its learners at all levels. Zambia, like many countries, seeks an education system that meets societal challenges and is suited for survival in the 21st century, with a focus on creating a skilled and innovative workforce crucial for social, cultural, and economic growth (Miti & Ndhlovu, 2018; Mwamba, Musonda and Daka, 2021) [27, 39]. However, achieving quality education relies on systems that promote transparency, efficacy, and accountability at all levels of the education system. Assessments play a critical role in not only evaluating student learning but

also gauging educational outcomes, ensuring accountability, and informing instructional strategies for evidence-based decision-making (ADEA, 2008; Daka, 2023).

In Zambia, evaluation and assessment systems are categorized into internal and external systems. Internal assessments focus on evaluating curriculum implementation, instructional methods, and materials to ensure learners achieve the desired outcomes and meet performance standards in specific subjects. External assessments, such as high-stakes examinations, serve purposes like selection, certification, and evaluating the education system's effectiveness. They also aim to equip school leavers with the knowledge and skills necessary for livelihood (READ, 2010; Daka, Minjale, Kakupa, Kaani, Tembo, Mulenga and Musonda, 2023)^[47, 15]. However, the effectiveness of these assessment systems is influenced by challenges, including resource limitations and inconsistencies in assessment practices across schools and regions (Changwe, Mwanza, Daka and Ng'onomo, 2023)^[8].

The Educating Our Future policy document (1996) outlines key goals for assessment and evaluation in Zambia:

1. Ensuring the curriculum is well understood, effectively taught, and aligned with the needs of learners and society.
2. Guaranteeing mastery of essential literacy and numeracy skills at the lower and middle basic education levels.
3. Establishing school-based assessments and feedback as integral components of the teaching and learning process in every school (MoE, 1996; READ, 2010)^[30, 47].

The policy emphasizes a comprehensive assessment system that evaluates not only intellectual abilities but also attitudinal and dispositional outcomes, such as innovativeness, problem-solving, and self-directed learning. While internal school-based assessments and external evaluations by the Examinations Council of Zambia (ECZ) are conducted independently, they complement each other. To align with global practices and promote 21st-century assessment standards, the ECZ collaborates with regional, continental, and international assessment bodies, fulfilling its mission to "efficiently and innovatively conduct educational assessments and award certificates of comparable international standards."

The introduction of School-Based Assessments (SBAs) in Zambia reflects the evolving educational landscape, emphasizing the need for a broader skill set among learners. This shift aligns with the goals of human capital development, aiming to produce graduates who are not only academically proficient but also equipped with practical skills required in today's world. Competencies fostered through SBAs, such as critical thinking and collaboration, are essential for navigating complex challenges, contributing to society, and succeeding in diverse professional contexts (Mulenga - Hagane, Daka, Msango, Mwelwa and Kakupa, 2019)^[36].

The implementation of SBAs represents a transformative change in Zambia's secondary education, focusing on continuous assessment and teacher-led evaluations. By aligning with international standards and best practices, SBAs have the potential to enhance teaching and learning, empower educators, and improve student outcomes (Daka, 2021)^[13].

This study employs a descriptive survey design and a desk review of relevant literature, policies, frameworks, and reports to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of current assessment practices. By identifying key challenges and offering strategic recommendations, the study aims to provide a roadmap for creating a more equitable, inclusive, and high-quality education system in Zambia.

Statement of the Problem in Context

Despite efforts to establish a comprehensive assessment system in Zambia that evaluates a wide range of intellectual capacities, attitudinal, and dispositional outcomes, significant obstacles remain in achieving fair and meaningful evaluations. Issues of equity and inclusivity in assessment practices pose major challenges, hindering the ability to promote accountability and ensure quality education provision (Bwembya and Daka, 2024; Daka, 2023; Daka, Chipindi and Mwale, 2020)^[7, 16, 12]. The current system struggles with inadequate infrastructure, insufficient resource allocation, and limited capacity among implementers, exacerbating these challenges (Mwamba, Musonda and Daka, 2021)^[39]. This study aimed to highlight the inherent strengths and weaknesses of the current assessment practices a descriptive survey design and a desk review of various literature, policies, frameworks, and reports. By identifying the key challenges and proposing strategic recommendations, the study seeks to provide a roadmap for enhancing assessment practices and ultimately achieving a more equitable, inclusive, and high-quality education system in Zambia.

Objectives

This study sought to achieve the following objectives;

1. Examine the Role of Assessments in Quality Education Provision.
2. Analyze how assessments contribute to achieving accountability and quality education in Zambia.
3. Identify the barriers to equitable and inclusive assessment practices in the Zambian education system.
4. Assess the effectiveness of existing policies and frameworks in addressing accountability and quality education.

Justification of the Study

The study might contribute to the formulation of policies by the Ministry of Education that can help improve the assessment practices. The study may also provide some insights to Examination Council of Zambia on how to improve the SBAs and the external assessments. The findings may also inform the subject teachers with the knowledge on how to improve the formative assessments in teaching.

Theoretical framework

This study was guided by the Critical theory which critiques existing power structures and advocates for transformative practices that address systemic inequalities and, Policy Implementation Theory which looks at the process of putting the policy to effect and involves the interactions between implementers and various stakeholders, such as service users, partners, and superiors, in this study, integrating critical and policy implementation theory provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing and improving the Zambian education system. Critical theory's

focus on equity and empowerment complements policy implementation theory's practical approach to executing educational reforms. Together, they emphasize the need for:

- Equitable resource distribution to address systemic inequalities.
- Clear, actionable policies with stakeholder involvement.
- Continuous monitoring and adaptive strategies to ensure effective implementation.
- An educational approach that not only meets economic demands but also fosters critical thinking, practical skills, and societal transformation.

By applying these theories, the researchers better understood the multifaceted dimensions of educational assessments and work towards a more inclusive, accountable, and high-quality education system in Zambia.

Related Literature

This section presents literature related to this study, focusing on the role of assessments in achieving accountability and quality education provision in Zambia.

Importance of Assessments and Evaluation in Quality Education Delivery

Assessments and evaluations play a pivotal role in effective teaching and learning. As Sutton (1991)^[50] and Daka (2019)^[11] highlight, assessments establish a framework for setting educational objectives and tracking pupil progress. Evaluations support planning for learners' needs, enabling teachers to refine curriculum delivery strategies. They also serve to determine the effectiveness of school programs, motivating teachers and students to achieve high educational standards (ADEA, 1998)^[1]. Systematic evaluation of national and school-based assessment (SBA) policies is essential for measuring effectiveness, addressing challenges, and ensuring accountability in the provision of quality education.

Current Scenario Surrounding Assessments in Zambia

The "Educating Our Future" (EOF) policy of 1996 serves as Zambia's foundational education framework, guiding the development of key documents such as the *Zambian Curriculum*, the *National Competency Assessment (NCA)* by the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), and the *Examinations Syllabus* by the Examinations Council of Zambia (ECZ). The ECZ has also produced the *Standardized Literacy Framework* for primary education and *School-Based Assessment (SBA)* manuals, supporting teachers in administering assessments effectively.

The policy promotes a comprehensive assessment system combining internal assessments (SBAs) and external evaluations (national examinations) to improve education quality (READ, 2010)^[47]. Teachers, as primary implementers, interact with learners directly, while Education Standards Officers at national, provincial, and district levels ensure quality assurance through monitoring. National examinations are managed by the ECZ, covering planning, setting, marking, and funding, while teachers oversee their administration.

For SBAs, schools must employ standardized tests and maintain structured performance-monitoring schedules. The ECZ supports this by equipping teachers with the necessary assessment skills and methods (MoE, 1996)^[30]. The shift from a content-based to an outcome-based curriculum has

underscored the need for robust assessment systems and feedback mechanisms at all educational levels (Education Sector Strategic Plan, 2003-2007; MoE, 2003).

The Fifth National Development Plan (FNDP) and the National Implementation Framework (NIF) 2008-2010 further emphasize assessments as essential tools for enhancing education quality. They advocate for developing and implementing a comprehensive assessment system aligned with an outcome- and demand-based curriculum (READ, 2010)^[47].

Policies and Frameworks on Quality Education Provision in Zambia

Zambia's education system is primarily guided by the "Educating Our Future" (EOF) policy, which evolved from the 1992 "Focus on Education" policy. This framework mandates an adaptable education system that aligns with changing societal needs and global trends (MoE, 1996)^[30]. The policy direction is further supported by the 2011-2017 Education Sector Extended National Implementation Framework III and the 2021 Free Education Policy, which introduced the "Guidelines for Utilization of Funds in Schools under the Education for All (EFA) Policy" to ensure efficient resource use and stakeholder accountability in promoting quality education.

The EOF Policy and the Standards and Evaluation Guidelines (2015) assign Education Standards Officers the responsibility of ensuring quality across all schools. These officers, in collaboration with the Examination Council of Zambia (ECZ) and other directorates, oversee the innovation of assessment and examination practices. They conduct lesson and classroom observations, providing feedback to improve teaching and learning processes.

A comprehensive understanding of the objectives, aims, and purposes of educational programs is critical for effective feedback and benchmarking against global standards. Regular analysis of examinations, assessment practices, and results is essential to measure whether national standards are achieved. This includes evaluating learners' achievements, curriculum coverage, and teaching quality (ADEA, 1998)^[1]. Evaluation processes and accurate record-keeping help identify factors influencing effective and ineffective teaching. They also support tracking all students' learning progress, with special attention to those requiring additional support, ensuring equitable and inclusive education.

Opportunities and Challenges of School-Based Assessments (SBAs)

The introduction of School-Based Assessments (SBAs) in Zambia offers significant opportunities for a more holistic approach to assessment, fostering active student engagement and promoting continuous evaluation. SBAs enable the measurement of diverse competencies, such as critical thinking and collaboration, essential for modern education. However, this shift also poses notable challenges, including the need for substantial investments in teacher training, infrastructure, and monitoring mechanisms. Education Standards Officers play a pivotal role in ensuring the successful implementation of SBAs by conducting classroom observations and evaluating their administration. The Inspectorate is tasked with monitoring schools' SBA programs and ensuring that educators effectively utilize them to improve teaching and learning quality.

Close supervision during SBA administration is essential to uphold the validity and credibility of results. This rigorous oversight ensures that SBAs achieve their intended purpose of enhancing quality education provision and maintaining accountability within the education system.

Evaluation of Assessments: School-Based and National

A thorough evaluation of Zambia's assessment system is critical to ensure its alignment with national education standards, identify areas for improvement, and enhance accountability in education provision. This process should assess the quality of assessment practices, the effectiveness of teacher training programs, and the impact of these assessments on student learning outcomes. Rigorous evaluations will help improve both School-Based Assessments (SBAs) and National Assessments, ensuring they contribute meaningfully to the delivery of quality education for all learners.

Hamidi (2010) and Bwembya and Daka (2024)^[7] emphasize that the aim of assessments should be to:

- Support, not disrupt, teaching and learning.
- Provide information for continuous improvement, not merely for compliance or judgment.
- Function as tools for student selection and certification based on clear criteria, not norms.
- Act as accountability measures while fostering educational growth.
- Integrate curriculum and instruction to assure quality and relevance.

This shift from a product-oriented to a process-oriented approach to assessment has created higher demands on all stakeholders, including learners, teachers, parents, teacher trainers, curriculum developers, and education administrators. By meeting these demands, assessments can serve as powerful tools for fostering continuous improvement, inclusivity, and excellence within Zambia's education system.

Challenges in Accountability and Quality Education Provision

The Zambian education system faces critical challenges in ensuring accountability and delivering quality education. These obstacles stem from inadequate monitoring and supervision, resource constraints, and infrastructure deficiencies, which hinder the effective implementation of educational policies and assessments.

1. **Limited Oversight Capacity:** The insufficient number of Education Standards Officers (ESOs), with only four per district, creates a high ESO-to-school ratio. This constraint limits effective monitoring, timely feedback, and corrective measures necessary for maintaining education quality (ADEA, 1998)^[1].
2. **Resource Constraints:** Schools frequently lack essential resources, including books, teachers, equipment, and apparatus, which directly impact teaching and learning quality (Kapambwe, 2010; Bwembya, Daka, & Tembo, 2022^[6]; Daka, Mugala, Mukuka, & Kalimaposo, 2022^[14]).
3. **Inadequate Infrastructure:** Poor facilities for School-Based Assessments (SBAs) hinder the reliable and valid conduct of assessments. This infrastructure gap undermines the entire assessment framework, which is essential for tracking learners' intellectual and personal

development (ADEA, 1998)^[1].

4. **Gaps in Policy Implementation:** Despite robust policies such as the "Educating Our Future" (EOF) and the Education Sector Extended National Implementation Framework III, implementation is hampered by limited oversight and resources (MoE, 1996^[30]; Education Sector Strategic Plan, 2003-2007).
5. **Need for a Comprehensive Assessment Framework:** Reports, including those by Zambia National Education Coalition (ZANEC), highlight the need for a National Learning Assessment Framework (NLAF). This would address systemic issues and improve assessment practices. Support from initiatives like Zambia Education Sector Support Technical Assistance (ZESSTA) is vital for driving necessary changes (ZANEC, 2018)^[53].

These interconnected challenges demand coordinated action from policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to address oversight, resource allocation, and infrastructure issues. Developing a comprehensive assessment framework is critical for achieving equity, accountability, and quality in Zambia's education system.

Identified Gaps in the Literature

The gaps in the literature reveal significant areas where further exploration is necessary to bridge the gap between policy frameworks and practical implementation, particularly in the context of accountability and quality education through assessments.

1. **Challenges in Implementation:** While the literature identifies systemic issues like insufficient monitoring and resource allocation, it lacks in-depth exploration of the implementation challenges schools face, particularly with School-Based Assessments (SBAs). A key gap lies in understanding the practical difficulties educators encounter in adapting to these assessment frameworks.
2. **Teacher Training for SBA:** There is limited empirical evidence on the effectiveness of teacher training programs for SBA implementation. Research should investigate how training prepares teachers to design, administer, and utilize SBAs effectively and its impact on student learning outcomes.
3. **Infrastructural Needs** the lack of adequate infrastructure for assessments, particularly SBAs, is highlighted in existing studies but is not fully analyzed. Further investigation is needed to identify specific infrastructural requirements and propose solutions that address these deficiencies, ensuring assessments are both valid and reliable.
4. **Practical Execution of Policy Frameworks:** While policies like "Educating Our Future" (EOF) and frameworks such as the National Learning Assessment Framework (NLAF) provide a solid foundation, there is insufficient analysis of their practical implementation. Understanding how these policies translate into measurable improvements in educational quality is crucial.
5. **Impact on Educational Outcomes:** A significant gap exists in evaluating the direct impact of assessments on educational outcomes. Future research should explore how assessments—both SBAs and national exams—affect learners' academic achievements, skill acquisition, and preparedness for societal and

professional demands.

6. **Strategies for Addressing Systemic Challenges:** Existing studies do not fully address strategies for overcoming systemic challenges, such as enhancing ESO capacity, improving teacher training, or optimizing resource distribution. Research focused on context-specific, actionable solutions could significantly inform policy and practice.

Achieving accountability and quality education through assessments in Zambia requires a comprehensive approach that addresses these research gaps. Future studies must prioritize:

- Investigating the effectiveness of teacher training for SBA implementation.
- Identifying and addressing infrastructural deficits in schools.
- Evaluating the practical application of policies and their impact on educational outcomes.
- Developing strategic interventions to overcome systemic challenges.

By addressing these areas, Zambia can move closer to a robust and equitable assessment system, fostering accountability and quality education for all learners.

Methodology

A descriptive survey design was utilized to provide a comprehensive understanding of assessment practices in Zambia. This approach combined data collection from diverse stakeholders—including educators, education administrators, policymakers, students, and parents—across various education levels.

The study employed two data collection methods:

1. **Interviews:** These were conducted to capture a broad range of perspectives on assessment practices, the challenges faced, and the effectiveness of existing policies and frameworks.
2. **Desk Review:** This involved analyzing existing literature, academic papers, policy documents, frameworks, and government reports to contextualize historical and contemporary challenges and successes.

Qualitative data collected through these methods were analyzed thematically, identifying common themes and insights regarding the strengths and weaknesses of current assessment practices. The findings were synthesized with evidence-based information, guided by the theoretical frameworks of the study, to provide a holistic overview of the assessment landscape in Zambia.

A key limitation of the study was the restricted time frame, which constrained the scope of in-depth research and analysis. Despite this, the methodology ensured a rich and contextual understanding of the issues, offering valuable insights into the state of assessments in Zambia.

Findings and Discussion

This study examined the critical role of assessments in fostering accountability and delivering quality education in Zambia. Building on global research that underscores the impact of assessments on educational outcomes, the analysis explored the current assessment practices in Zambia, identifying their strengths and weaknesses. The findings highlight how barriers to effective assessments affect

fairness and meaningfulness while offering evidence-based recommendations for improving accountability and educational quality.

Strengths of Current Assessment Practices

1. **Policy Framework and Guidelines:** Zambia's assessment system is anchored in a robust policy framework, notably the *"Educating Our Future" (EOF)* Policy of 1996. Subsequent policies, including the National Implementation Framework (NIF) and the *Guidelines for Conducting School-Based Assessments (SBA)*, further reinforce structured approaches to internal and external assessments.

The Examination Council of Zambia (ECZ) and Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) have developed comprehensive manuals and syllabi that provide clear guidelines for implementing SBAs. These resources help standardize assessment practices, ensuring consistency across schools while promoting a balance between formative and summative evaluations. This alignment of policies with global best practices marks a progressive step in Zambia's education sector.

2. **Collaborative Efforts:** Zambia's education stakeholders, including the ECZ, Curriculum Development Centre, and Education Standards Officers (ESOs), work collaboratively to ensure assessments align with the national curriculum. ESOs monitor the implementation of SBAs through classroom observations and teacher evaluations, ensuring adherence to guidelines and fostering accountability. This structured monitoring system enhances the credibility of assessments and promotes a culture of continuous improvement.

Integrated Assessment System- A Shift towards Competency-Based Assessment

Zambia employs an integrated assessment system comprising both School-Based Assessments (SBA) and National Examinations. This dual approach allows for continuous monitoring of student progress (through SBAs) and a summative evaluation of student learning outcomes (through national exams). SBAs, implemented in all practical subjects since 2019, emphasize developing a comprehensive skill set in learners, including critical thinking and collaboration, aligning with 21st-century educational demands. The integration of SBAs into the education framework demonstrates a shift toward competency-based assessments, focusing on learners' development of critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills. As noted in the *Guidelines for Conducting SBA (2020)*, this approach allows for flexibility, enabling learners to progress at their own pace and adapt to diverse learning styles.

Flexibility and Student-Centric Approach

The SBA system offers flexibility, allowing students to progress at their own pace. This approach accommodates diverse learning speeds and styles, ensuring that students only move to new topics after mastering the current material, promoting a deeper understanding.

Challenges Hindering Effective Assessment Practices

1. **Resource Constraints:** A recurring challenge is the insufficient allocation of resources, including instructional materials, infrastructure, and trained personnel. Many

schools lack the necessary facilities to conduct reliable SBAs, which limits their effectiveness in measuring learners' intellectual and personal growth (Kapambwe, 2010; Bwembya & Daka, 2024^[7]).

2. Limited Oversight Capacity: Limited Monitoring and Supervision

The small number of ESOs poses a significant challenge limiting the capacity for effective monitoring and supervision. With only four Education Standards Officers (ESOs) in each district, comprehensive oversight becomes a challenge leading to inconsistent implementation of assessment policies. This inadequate feedback hinders timely corrective measures to address issues in assessment implementation (ADEA, 1998) ^[1], which are essential for maintaining the quality of education.

3. Gaps in Teacher Training

Despite the availability of SBA manuals, there is limited empirical research on the effectiveness of teacher training programs in equipping educators with the necessary skills for internal assessments. This gap impacts the consistency and reliability of SBAs across schools.

Infrastructure Deficiencies

Insufficient Resources and Infrastructure: Many schools face infrastructural challenges, including inadequate classrooms and laboratories, which hinder the successful administration of SBAs. Schools often lack the necessary resources, such as books, teaching materials, and proper facilities, to conduct effective assessments. This scarcity directly affects the quality of teaching and learning. The poor infrastructure for SBAs further exacerbates the issue, making it challenging for schools to conduct reliable and valid assessments. Without proper facilities, the validity and credibility of assessments are compromised, affecting their role in promoting accountability and educational quality (Musonda, Trinity, Mulenga and Daka, 2023) ^[38].

This deficiency undermines the assessment framework, which is pivotal for setting educational objectives and tracking learner progress. One participant had this to say; *"Whenever there is a change of government, programmes especially projects to do with infrastructure are suspended"* Another participant said *"it is difficult to follow through a system and advise correctly as you may be deemed to be working against the government"*

The question as to why certain areas are underfunded and how power structures within the government and educational authorities influence these decisions. One participant said that *"we lack long term plan that binds governments to laid down policies which would force succeeding government not to deviate from the country's say 50 years plan."* These responses underscored the need for Zambia to come up with a long term plan as a nation which should be followed strictly.

Inconsistent Policy Implementation

Despite comprehensive policy documents, the practical implementation of these policies often falls short due to limited oversight and resource constraints. The gap between policy and practice affects the overall effectiveness of the education system. Reports indicate that while policies like the EOF and the NIF outline clear objectives and strategies, their execution is impeded by systemic issues, leading to suboptimal educational outcomes.

Impact on Fair and Meaningful Evaluations

The barriers identified, such as inadequate supervision, resource constraints, and infrastructural deficiencies, significantly impact the fairness and meaningfulness of evaluations. Without proper oversight, assessments may not accurately reflect students' abilities and learning progress. The lack of resources and infrastructure hampers the ability to conduct comprehensive and unbiased assessments, leading to potential disparities in educational outcomes across different regions and schools.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study's findings reveal a complex landscape of assessment practices in Zambia, characterized by a robust policy framework and an integrated assessment system designed to support continuous and summative evaluations. However, significant challenges impede the effectiveness of these practices, notably the inadequate monitoring and supervision due to a shortage of Education Standards Officers, insufficient resources and infrastructure, and inconsistent policy implementation. These barriers compromise the fairness and accuracy of assessments, leading to disparities in educational outcomes. The study underscores the critical need for enhanced oversight, better resource allocation, and consistent policy execution to ensure that assessments can fulfill their role in achieving accountability and improving the quality of education. Additionally, the necessity for a long-term national educational plan that transcends political changes is emphasized to maintain continuity and uphold educational standards across successive governments.

Recommendations for Enhancing Accountability and Quality through Assessments

1. **Invest in Resources and Infrastructure:** The government and stakeholders must prioritize resource allocation to address gaps in materials and infrastructure. Ensuring all schools have adequate facilities will strengthen the credibility of assessments and support holistic learner development.
2. **Expand Oversight Mechanisms:** Increasing the number of ESOs per district and enhancing their capacity through training and resources will improve the monitoring and evaluation of assessment practices.
3. **Strengthen Teacher Training:** Implementing targeted training programs for educators on SBA methodologies will enhance the reliability and effectiveness of internal assessments, fostering consistency across schools.
4. **Develop a Comprehensive National Learning Assessment Framework (NLAF):** As recommended by the Zambia National Education Coalition (ZANEC, 2018) ^[53], the development of an NLAF will help align assessments with national standards and ensure systematic monitoring of learning outcomes across all schools. This framework should include clear guidelines for conducting and evaluating assessments, as well as mechanisms for continuous improvement.
5. **Strengthening Policy Implementation:** Ensure that the policies outlined in documents like the EOF and the NIF are effectively implemented through robust oversight mechanisms. Regularly review and update policies to align with changing educational needs and global trends. Promoting Evidence-Based Strategies

6. **Encourage the use of evidence-based strategies in assessment practices:** Provide training for teachers on innovative assessment methods and the use of data to inform instructional strategies. Foster a culture of continuous improvement by regularly evaluating assessment practices and outcomes. Use the findings to inform policy decisions and improve the education system.

By addressing these challenges and implementing these recommendations, Zambia can enhance the role of assessments in achieving accountability and quality education provision, ultimately leading to better educational outcomes for all learners.

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