

Examining Classroom Assessment Practices of Secondary School Teachers in Shiwang’andu District, Muchinga Province, Zambia

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate the classroom assessment practices of secondary school teachers in Shiwang’andu District, Muchinga Province, Zambia. The objectives were to: describe the assessments that were being used by teachers in sampled schools; determine teachers’ use of classroom assessment results; as well as establish viewpoints of teachers about classroom assessments. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and targeted 62 respondents from 10 selected secondary schools including the District Education Board Secretary (DEBS) office. Simple random sampling was used to sample the teachers, while the Heads of Department and Head teachers were selected conveniently. Purposive sampling was used to sample the District Education Standards Officer (DESO) and the District Resource Centre Coordinator (DRCC). Questionnaires and key informant interviews were used as data collection tools with descriptive statistics and narrative analysis used as data analysis methods for quantitative and qualitative data respectively. The study established that there were more secondary school teachers that use traditional assessments (71%) as compared to those that use contemporary assessments (29%) in sampled schools. Additionally, most respondents (42%) said that they used classroom assessment results to point out the difficult learning areas, identifying what pupils think and how they think and what they understand. 34% of the respondents use classroom assessment results to diagnose the effectiveness and drawbacks of teaching methods.

24% of the respondents indicated that they use classroom assessment results to make decisions regarding pupils' grade retention and promotion. The results also indicate that the majority of the respondents (48%) were of the view that pupils should only recognize rather than generalize their own answers in classroom assessment tasks and the teacher should only evaluate the pupils based on mastery of skills and knowledge. 29% of the respondents indicated that pupils must be assessed in diverse modes and the teacher must give assessments that match with pupils' development level. 23% of the respondents said that pupils must be assessed beyond classroom environment and the teacher to give assessments that promote higher learning skills and problem solving. The Zambian Ministry of General Education and school administrators in Shiwangandu District should ensure that all teachers with teaching certificates go for further training and take more courses in assessment to improve their skills and use of up-to-date desirable classroom assessment practices.

Keywords: Context-Based Learning, Academic Achievement, Learning Retention, Meta-Analysis

1. Introduction

Classroom assessment practices (CAP) are as old as classes for learning purposes. Each region developed its assessment practices to meet its intended purpose. In Africa, classroom assessment practice took different forms from the inception of Western education to the present. During the formative years of missionary education, learners were exposed to assessment by asking them to recite from memory or to reproduce by writing what had been taught to them. Other dimensions of assessment that were not based on reciting were them (Haladyna, Downing & Rodriguez, 2012).

For a long time now, educators have had divided opinions on the best methods of assessing pupils. Although some educators advocate for the use of traditional assessments such as multiple choice test items, matching test items, short answer test item, true/false test items and other forms of objective test items, others advocate for more contemporary approaches to assessments such as portfolio test items, journal critique test items and research essay test items (Mcmillan, 2001, 2008). During the period between 1980 and 1993, educational researchers were urged to focus on improving assessment practices with the argument that the quality of teacher-made assessments had declined during the early years of the 1980s (Gullickson, 1999; Kleinert, 2009).

In a synthesis of over 250 studies, Black and William (1998) concluded that improvement of learning occurs when teachers use classroom assessment information to establish knowledge, skills and attitudes possessed by their pupils. This points to the incorporation of that information in planning for lessons. The major purpose of conducting classroom assessment is to obtain information about learners' progress in learning, performance and achievement attained (Gronlund & Waugh, 2005; Mcmillan, 2008; Jin, 2010; Black & Wiliam, 2018).

During the 1990s alternative assessment methods were developed and implemented in order to enhance educational practices. Such urge for change often comes as a result of new discoveries and changing theories in the field of student learning. These new methods of learners' assessment have brought a lot of changes in the way educators perceive pupils learning and assessment (Elango, Jutti & Lee, 2008; Black & Wiliam, 2018).

Quality of classroom assessment practices can affect the quality of learning and material retention by learners (Zhang & Burry-Stock, 2003; Gonzales & Fuggan, 2012). This indicates that the nature of assessments and the way they are administered play a significant role in determining the effectiveness of teaching, learning and material retention by pupils. Tilema (2009) also contends that the way classroom assessments are delivered by teachers could highly affect pupils learning. Past research has shown that there are many problems associated with teachers' classroom assessment practices, that:

Teachers viewpoints and values on assessments are not directly linked with assessment practices (McMillan & Nash, 2008); some teachers lack adequate knowledge base regarding the basic testing and measurement concepts (Daniel & King, 2008; Schafer & Lissirz, 2013; Stiggins, et al., 2005); some teachers have limited teacher training in measurement (Stiggins & Bridgeford, 2008); some teachers fail to employ *and* adhere to measurement guidelines they learned in measurement courses (Campbell & Evans, 2000); some teachers maybe administer already-made tests without making modifications to them and they are not contextual (Cooney, 2015; Garet & Mills, 1995); some teachers have challenges in interpreting standardized test scores (Black & Wiliam, 2018; Glaser & Silver, 2014; Linn, Baker and Dunbar, 2001); some teachers fail to communicate test results (Plake, 58, 2013).

In a related study, Mcmillan, Myran & Workman (2011) describe the nature of classroom assessments practices and observe a strong influence of textbook publisher's assessment materials on classroom assessment practices, as most teachers tend to book-lift assessments (from there). This corroborates with the findings by Kapambwe (2013) that teachers have had challenges in formulating quality assessment items to be used for School-based assessment graded by the Examination Council of Zambia. The following were objectives for this study:

1. To describe classroom assessments used by teachers in the sampled schools.
2. To establish teachers' use of classroom assessment results.
3. To establish viewpoints of teachers about classroom assessments.

2. Rationale

This paper may present the need for education standard officers at various levels to consider organizing capacity building workshops for teachers in schools on the orientation in classroom assessment practices. Such assists teachers who might have

graduated from teacher training institutions where classroom assessment knowledge was not sufficiently covered. In addition, the information gathered from this study may influence some teacher training institutions (colleges and universities) to consider adding more courses relating to classroom practices so as to equip teachers with relevant modern knowledge in classroom assessment. This shall help in meeting the modern demands of educational measurement and evaluation. Furthermore, findings of this study may enable the education standard officers to pay increased attention on the monitoring of proper implementation of classroom assessment practices by teachers in various schools.

3. Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Title's (1994) theory of classroom assessment practices (CAP). This theory emphasizes the following dimensions about CAP: Interpretation and knowledge, viewpoints, intents, actions, assessment characteristics, embeddedness in practice, format, mode, scoring, evaluation and preparation.

Teachers' knowledge of CAP plays a major role in informing this study. Teachers have construed meanings about their personal effectiveness regarding CAP. Teachers' viewpoints were found to be an integral part of informing their general assessment practices, these include: teachers are likely to hold viewpoints about classroom assessments on pupils even before assessment i.e. provide a focus of assessment, teachers' knowledge about assessment effects on pupils during assessment i.e. provide a sense of accomplishment, challenge, failure, or inadequacy and teachers' knowledge about assessment effects on pupils after assessments i.e. as fair, meaningful, useful, providing information for continuing development or lack of it. (Title, 1994:52). The new demands in education reform, such as Free Education which results in over enrolment, have over the years placed more pressure on teachers' classroom assessment practices. Most of the teachers continue to struggle and are reluctant to accept the new policies on the basis that they conflict with their values, assumptions and viewpoints (O'Day & Smith, 2015).

Based on Title's theory of classroom assessment practices (CAP), Vandeyar (2005) conducted a study with a sample of South African teachers to establish how they cope with conflicting demands on their assessment practices, values and viewpoints about pupils' classroom assessment. What came out was that, teachers continued to give attention to their viewpoints and personal interests, regardless of the professional requirement to adopt changes in assessment policy meant to serve the interest of pupils. These are the dimensions that informed this study.

4. Literature Review

This section evaluates the various literatures on classroom assessment practices (CAP) school teachers; the review of the literature is presented under the three main themes corresponding to the three objectives including studies on teachers' classroom assessment practices from across the world, classroom assessments used by teachers, teachers' use of classroom assessment results as well as teacher's viewpoints about classroom assessments.

4.1. Studies on Classroom Assessment Practices from Across the World

Historically, teachers have used classroom assessments instruments to transmit to pupils and their parents what content and skills are really important for the pupils to know (Haladyna, Downing & Rodriguez, 2012; Mutumba, Muyoba & Mpolomoka, 2016). Classroom assessment practices are capable of pointing out pupils' acquisition of learning materials, retardation and progression of pupils' academic performance, if properly managed.

Countries such as Finland, Germany, Sweden and Spain emphasize the importance of classroom assessments and the necessity of constant assessments for each student using different forms of assessment (Looney, 2011; Swaffield, 2011; Klinger, Volante & Deluca, 2012).

The practice of classroom assessment is an official policy in the United States of America. This confirms that classroom assessment practices are key elements in the provision of quality education (Altman, 2010). Well formulated policies on classroom assessment practices have helped in improving teaching and learning. However, improper implementation and lack of policy monitoring may defeat the purpose of a good policy on classroom assessment practices.

In December 1948, in Washington D.C., the United Nations General Assembly adopted a Universal Declaration of Human Rights specifically to help address problems faced by most of the underdeveloped countries, including African countries like Zambia and problems such as poor quality of education, poverty; low health status and quality of life were discussed. Emphasis was placed on the attainment of Millennium Development Goals targets in education because they were seen as critical for human development. Noted was that quality education can be attained by employing modern teaching and learning skills such as implementing relevant classroom assessment practices (United Nations Development Program, 2002).

Vandeyar and Killian (2013) points out that nearly all African countries including those in the Southern African Region (that is Zambia, Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe among others), subscribed to the declaration on attainment of targeted educational goals that emphasis on the provision of quality education, which come as a result of employing modern teaching, learning and assessment skills. Hence, all were mandated to improve the quality of their educational systems and ensure that access to basic education to all was provided.

Many countries reacted to these expectations by improving their educational policies (Price, 2011). For example, Botswana revised its National Policy on Education in 1994 and implemented a ten-year basic education plan. Emphasis was placed on the need for improvement and management of an educational structure that promoted students' learning outcomes and higher

achievement through the use of quality assessment methods. The previous National Curriculum did not sufficiently spell out quality assessment practices and quality student learning outcomes hence the revision.

Equally, Zambia revised the National Curriculum in 2013, which gave birth to the issue of two career pathways (vocational career pathway and academic career pathway). Such a move eliminated the bias on academic (theoretical) content, injecting in a vocational (practical) content in the previous National Curriculum. Additionally, the revised National Curriculum (2013) revisited the proper assessment practices in order to meet the modern educational demands.

In South Africa, the Revised National Curriculum of 2009 proposed new assessment practices in schools too. The main emphasis was to enhance and monitor students learning progress and to provide teachers with guidelines that link assessment practices with an Outcome-based Education (OBE). The purpose was to help teachers adopt new, better, and improved methods of planning, teaching and assessment practices. In addition, this was done to maintain consistence and logic with regard to the content that is taught and how it must be assessed. For instance, Nenty (2007) argues that in order to be able to achieve the expectations set and past by Education for All (EfA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), teachers were expected to be competent with assessment methods and this could only be achieved through quality assessment practices.

Nenty (2007) suggests that in order to achieve the Education for All goals, the following were to be taken into serious account.

1. There must be efficient use of classroom assessments
2. Instruments used in classroom assessment must not have a bias against any group of examinees
3. Classroom assessment practices must be curriculum driven and not examination driven
4. There must be no examination malpractices
5. Learners' performance must not just be dependent on a single particular testing instrument

Teachers' competence on classroom assessment practices attained by pursuing quality training in classroom assessment practices seems to be key in achieving Education for All goals on classroom assessment practices. However, teachers need to be cautious on being practical and honest when implementing classroom assessment practices.

4.2. Classroom Assessments That Are Used by Teachers

Discussions regarding pupils' assessments have always been on top of the agenda in many educational sittings (Goodrum, 2011). Academicians and educators such as Stiggins, et al., (2005), Stiggins, et al (2008), Gronlund & Waugh (2005), Zacharos, Koliopulos, Dokimaki & Kassoumi (2017), O'Day & Smith (2015), Reynolds, Livingston & Willson, (2009) have had divided opinions on the best forms of assessing pupils learning outcomes, among themselves, others have been advocating for the use of traditional assessments such as multiple choice test items, matching test items, short answer test items, true/false test items, fill in-blanks. Literature also shows others (Kubiszyn & Borich, 2013) advocate for contemporary assessments such as portfolio test items, journal critiques test items, and research essay test items.

The supporters of traditional assessments believe that such test items are more focused on improving the cognitive side of instruction, i.e. the skills and knowledge that pupils are expected to develop within a short period of time and have higher content coverage (Shepard, Penuel & Pellegrino, 2018; Segers & Dochy, 2010; Linn, Baker & Dunbar, 2001; Banda, Phiri, Kaale, Banda, Mpolomoka, Chikopela & Mushibwe, 2023). Teachers mostly use short – answer tests for assessment because they find it easy to prepare, administer and mark (Cooney, 2015).

In support of the contemporary modern assessments, Kumbiszyn & Borich (2013) argued that traditional assessments (multiple-choice test items, true-false test items among others) test facts and skills in isolation, rarely requiring pupils to apply what they know and can do in real-life situations. He also indicated that traditional assessments do not match the emerging content standards. Over-reliance on traditional assessments often leads to instruction that stresses basic knowledge and skills.

If teachers want to measure students' ability to engage in some form of a debate, write a poem, tune an engine, prepare a meal, contemporary assessments are the only ones that can measure such skills rather than traditional assessments (O'Day & Smith, 2015; Reynolds, et al., 2009). The road from theory to practice seems to be a rocky one, as both forms of assessments have acceptable qualities and in particular traditional assessments cover an acceptable range of curricular content, indicating high levels of content and construct validity.

Even though contemporary assessments are still at their infancy stage; there is an emerging body of literature that indicates their benefits in teaching and learning (Angelo & Cross, 2012; Kleinert, 2009). This confirms that as the curriculum changes, teachers are encouraged to change their focus and adopt up to date approaches of classroom assessments. Buhagiar (2007) suggested that in order to provide every pupil with the best learning opportunity, traditional ways of assessment should be replaced by contemporary assessments. Contemporary classroom assessment practices have been known to provide educators with a wealthy of knowledge and skills on the different approaches that should be used to assess student learning in the classroom (Zacharos, Koliopulos, Dokimaki & Kassoumi, 2017).

A number of studies have been conducted to ascertain teachers' perceptions about the use of contemporary assessments. Carter (1994) carried out a study with secondary school teachers to find out teachers' accuracy in identifying particular skills being tested in a widely used criterion referenced reading test, teachers' perception of personal ability to write items similar to those written for formal tests, teachers practice in developing items for classroom tests. Findings of the study showed that many teachers were unable to recognize particular skills being tested by individual items that they used for testing pupils and that teachers had more problems in constructing test items that test higher order skills such as essay test items but felt more skilled in constructing items that test basic skills such as objective items.

A study conducted by Kleinert, Kennedy and Kearns (2009) revealed that teachers expressed levels of frustration in the use of contemporary assessments. They indicated that contemporary assessments require a lot of time for pupils to complete writing, for teachers to supervise and score. Teachers were also concerned about competencies they have in reliably grading contemporary assessments and that such assessment are more teacher based than pupil based.

Kubiszyn & Borich (2013) Observed that traditional assessments are more effective in assessing subject knowledge, skills acquisition and mastery of content. Whereas contemporary assessments prove to be more effective when assessing deeper understanding of subject content and application of skills.

It seems none of the proponents of either traditional or contemporary assessments indicated, embraced or supported the need for integration and simultaneous use of the two forms of assessments. Each cluster of proponents is seems to be egocentric towards their form (traditional/contemporary) of assessment. Now this is in conflict with the classroom assessment paper designs currently being followed by many education systems in the world.

4.3. Teachers' Use of Classroom Assessment Results

The purpose of classroom assessments is to make the school and pupils accountable. Preparation and administering of classroom assessments enable teachers to collect information that is used for decision making. The responsibility of teachers is to collect information through various assessment methods that can be used to make informed decisions about pupils' learning progress (Brown, Lake & Matters, 2011; Muyoba, Mutumba & Mpolomoka, 2016). Classroom assessment results inform teachers whether the pupils have understood what they have learnt or not and they give a guide how the teachers should plan for their next lessons (Wuest & Fisette, 2012).

McMillan (2008) found that assessing pupils at classroom level is very critical because effective decision making on pupils grade retention or promotion is based to some extent on the ability of teachers to understand their pupils for them to match actions with accurate assessments. Yet, Zhang and Burry-Stock (2003) argue that to be able to communicate assessment results more effectively teachers must use proper terminologies as they use assessment results to inform stakeholders like parents concerning the decisions about pupils' learning. In a related study, Stiggings (2004) establishes that in the past, schools were designed to use assessment results to sort pupils from the lowest to the highest achievers, when assessment information was used this way, many pupils did not perform well and had a sense of hopelessness in learning.

However, over the past few decades the mission of sorting pupils in rank order has evolved into missions of "no child left behind" where teachers are held accountable for ensuring that all pupils are accorded the chance to meet their educational potentials. Teachers used assessment information to identify pupils' learning needs "As teachers diagnose pupils needs, design and implement instructional interventions, evaluate pupils work and assign grades, they need continuous access to evidence of pupils' learning arising from high-quality classroom assessment practices" (Stiggings, 2004: 25-26).

Teachers depend on classroom assessment information to improve their instructional methods, and as such, that information plays an important role in pupils learning. It is apparent that teachers should be competent in the collection, analysis and use of assessment information.

In 1990 some professional bodies such as the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education came up with a set of standards that could guide teachers' assessment practices (Glaser and Silver, 2014). These bodies recommended that teachers should be skilled in the following aspects:

1. Choosing classroom assessments that are appropriate for making instructional decisions,
2. Administering, scoring, analyzing and interpreting assessment results developed from teacher-made assessment procedures
3. Developing assessment procedures needed to make informed academic decisions on pupils' grade retention and promotion.
4. Developing justifiable and fair assessment procedures, for grading pupils' work,
5. Communicating assessment results to pupils, parents and other relevant stakeholders.

The impact of classroom assessment arises from the strength of the feedback provided to students about their learning and to teachers about their teaching (Andrade, Lui, Palma & Hefferen, 2015; Sampa, Sitali, Mpolomoka, Lubungu, Kangwa, Nyirenda & Chitondo, 2022). According to Rea-Dickens (2004) assessment is an integral component of classroom instruction where teachers facilitate pupils learning and gather information on pupils' progress towards learning targets to keep track of pupils learning and decide on the next step in learning and instruction.

4.4. Teachers' Viewpoints about Classroom Assessment Practices

McMillan and Nash (2008) held a discussion with teachers regarding their viewpoints, values and purpose of classroom assessments as well as their grading practices. This discussion showed that teachers' viewpoints and values were not directly linked with assessment principles. Interestingly Rubie-Davies, Flint & McDonald (2011) note that even though teachers' viewpoints have been found to play a major role in influencing (their) thoughts and behaviours which impact pupils' learning outcomes, they are less studied compared to pupils' (viewpoints). Comparatively, McMillan (2001) and Popham (2008) contend that research on teachers' viewpoints about assessments must be intensified and conducted on a continuous basis, particularly because understanding teachers' viewpoints can lead to better ways of understanding their classroom assessment practices.

Teachers' viewpoints play an integral role in teaching and learning that include classroom assessment practices that teachers adopt (Fang, 2006; Mpolomoka, Mpasela & Chikopela, 2022). Thus, based on their viewpoints, teachers adopt various assessment practices, indicating that such practices are not constant, but keep on changing, making it pertinent to study those

on continuous basis (McMillan, 2008; Popham, 2008). According to Yin & Brandon (2010) teachers' viewpoints about pupils' performance affect the way they plan and implement assessment practices.

The complexity of "teachers' viewpoints" has led to many ways of understanding assessment practices adopted by different groups of teachers (Cantu, 2011; Mpolomoka, Mpasela & Chikopela, 2022). Based on teachers' viewpoints about classroom assessments, teachers can be classified into three main sub-categories namely; Realists, Contextualists and Relativists (Mansour, 2015). Realist teachers believe in the use of paper and pencil types of assessments where learners are expected to recognize rather than generate their own answers (Segers & Dochy, 2010; Brookhart & Nitko, 2009). Realist teachers by nature believe in norm-referenced assessment, where pupils' mastery of core knowledge and skills of the curriculum are emphasised, assessments are evaluated relative to the performance of others (Brookhart & Nitko, 2009). Realists' teachers tend to rely more on paper and pencil objective assessments that can be scored easily and be used to compare students.

Contextual teachers believe that there is a changing perspective in classroom assessments; the changing perspective is driven by the need to use classroom assessments that recognize, teach and assess knowledge, skills, and abilities that pupils need beyond classroom environments (Reynolds, et al., 2009). Contextual teachers believe that overreliance on the use of traditional assessments such as multiple choice tests, true or false and other related types of tests only measure the recall of knowledge instead of higher level learning skills. Contextual teachers advocate for the increased use of performance assessment that seem better suited for assessing complex mental abilities like extended writing and problem solving skills (Haladyna, Downing & Rodríguez, 2010; Banda, Phiri, Kaale, Banda, Mpolomoka, Chikopela & Mushibwe, 2023). Contextual teachers are more likely to use criterion based testing evaluation to determine what students know and don't know based on a set criterion (Tzuriel, 2014; Brookhart & Nitko, 2009).

Relativists base their assessment practices on the developmental theory; they believe that pupils learn best in classrooms or environments where instruction is developmentally appropriate, taking into account that pupils' developmental levels vary accordingly (Shunk, 2012). Relativists teachers: believe that pupils have opportunities to learn and be assessed in different ways to address the learning mode that is most appropriate for each pupil's unique developmental level (Schunk, 2012; Siegler, Deloache & Eisenberg, 2003); use multiple assessment practices that accommodate pupils' diverse needs (Wilson, 2018; Mpolomoka & Sakai, 2021); understand pupils' learning progression in the content area, so as to interpret pupil's work and focus (Brookhart, 2011, 2013; Mulambia, Mpolomoka, Lufeyo & Muyendekwa, 2023). A study by Brown, Hui, Yu & Kennedy (2011) showed that teachers' viewpoints about assessment practices reflect their societal and cultural differences and affect their teaching and assessment practices.

5. Methodology

This study used a descriptive research survey design, employing both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Descriptive survey seeks to describe the state of affairs as it exists and can be used when collecting information about people's attitudes, opinions, habits or any of the variety of education and social issues (Tromp & Kombo, 2006; Banda, Mpolomoka, Mbono & Sampa, 2017). A survey usually involves collecting data by interviewing a sample of people selected to accurately represent the population under study. The researchers chose a descriptive survey design over other designs because it allows collecting facts and studying the relationships of one set of facts to another and it was capable to produce quantifiable and relatable conclusions.

The target population for this study consisted of all teachers, heads of departments and head teachers from 10 selected Secondary Schools in Shiwangandu District. Included were the District Resource Centre Coordinator (DRCC) and the District Education Standards Officer (DESO) for Shiwang'andu District.

The total sample consisted of 62 participants: 40 secondary school teachers, 10 heads of department, 10 head teachers, 1 DRCC and 1 DESO. From a list of 10 selected schools in Shiwang'andu District and the DEBS' office, respectively. Specifically 4 teachers, 1 head of department, 1 head teacher were sampled from each of the 10 selected schools. In addition, 1 DRCC and 1 DESO from the DEBS' office were sampled.

The researchers used simple random sampling to select 40 teachers, 10 heads of department, 10 head teachers having in mind that they all bear similar characteristics having been trained in the same way and having undertaken the same curriculum as set out in the universities and teacher-training colleges. Purposive sampling was used to select 1 District Resource Centre Coordinator (DRCC) and 1 District Education Standards Officer (DESO) from the District Education Board Secretary's (DEBS) office; these participants were purposively sampled so as to exclude them from officers like the Accountant, Human Resource officer, the Statistician and other officers that do not directly deal with classroom assessment practices from DEBS' office.

Data was collected using the questionnaire and key informant interviews. The questionnaires were administered to participants involved in classroom assessment practices and these include, secondary school teachers; heads of departments and head teachers. The questionnaire was semi- structured containing closed and open-ended questions. Questionnaires were administered to elicit data on classroom assessments that are used by teachers in selected schools, teachers' use of classroom assessment results and teacher's viewpoint about classroom assessments.

Key informant interviews were conducted with teachers, heads of department, head teachers, the DESO and the DRCC. These interviews enabled follow up questions hence provided more detailed accounts on classroom assessment practices of secondary school teachers.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze quantitative data from the questionnaire in which data was presented in form of percentages and frequencies. This descriptive analysis was done with the aid of windows Microsoft excel and SPSS to generate tabulation in form of tables and columns. Qualitative data from the key informant interviews and some of the qualitative responses from the questionnaires were analyzed using narrative analysis by directly narrating the actual research responses thereby providing trusted first-hand information as it was given in the field.

5.1. Ethical consideration

Before embarking on the study, the researchers obtained permission from the Ministry of General Education; the District Education Board Secretary's (DEBS) office; and the head teachers of the respective schools where the data collection took place. In addition, a pre-trip was also taken by the researchers to schools where data collection was carried out in order to make appointments and arrangements for data collection as well as explain to the respondents/informants about the study. The respondents needed not to write their names on the questionnaire and interview schedule sheets. On one hand, this is how confidentiality was ensured; and on the other, it was attained by anonymity of participants through coding. Informed consents were signed by respondents assuring them that their responses were to be treated confidentially.

6. Findings

The findings are divided into the three major themes that directly correspond to the three research objectives earlier set in this paper.

6.1. Social-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1.0 Distribution of respondents by gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Female	28	45
Male	34	55
Total	62	100

Source: Field Data (2019)

Table 1.0 above indicates that the majority of the respondents 55% (n=34) were males. While 45% (n=28) of the respondents were females. The results indicate that there may be more male teachers than female teachers teaching secondary school pupils in Shiwangandu District, particularly there are a lot of male teachers that are teaching in the remote parts of the District, this may be attributed to female teachers not being comfortable to work in remote areas, hence they opt for transfers and move to "better" areas.

Table 2.0 Distribution of respondents by age

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Under 25 years	7	11.2
25-29 years	17	27.4
30-39 years	22	35.4
40-49 years	10	16
50 years and above	6	10
Total	62	100

Source: Field data (2019)

Table 2.0 above shows that the majority of respondents were aged 30-39 (35.4%, n=22) while those aged 50 years and above accounted for the least number of respondents 10% (n=6). The age group 25-29 years accounted for 27.4% (n=17) of the respondents. The age group 40-49 accounted for 16% (n=10) of the respondents and the under 25 years age group only accounted for 11.2% (n=7) of the respondents. This scenario shows that there could be a lot of youth teachers that teach secondary school pupils in Shiwangandu District, this may be attributed to massive teacher deployment that took place between the year 2011 and 2018 that constituted of many youths.

6.2. Qualification (Level of Education) of Respondents

Table 3.0 Qualifications of respondents

Education/Level of Qualification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Certificate	7	11
Secondary Teacher's Diploma	19	31
Bachelor's Degree	31	50
Master's Degree	5	8
Doctor of Philosophy	-	-
Other Qualifications	-	-
Total	62	100

Source: Field Data (2019)

Table 3.0 shows that the majority of the respondents were Degree holders accounting for 50% (n=31) of the respondents, 8% (n=5) of the respondents were masters' degree holders while Diploma and certificate holders accounted for 31% (n=19) and 11% (n=7) respectively of the respondents. It is also worth noting that none of the respondents had a Doctoral Degree. The

results show that most of the secondary school teachers now possess Bachelor's degrees (n=31 out of the n=62), this may be attributed to the policy in the ministry of general education that requires a secondary school teacher, more especially those teaching senior (10, 11, 12) classes to have a Bachelor's degree.

6.3. Teaching Experience of Respondents

Table 4.0 Distribution of respondents by experience in teaching

Period of teaching	Frequency	Percentage %
Less Than 1 Year	3	5
1-4 Years	15	24
5-10 Years	25	40
Above 10 Years	19	31
Total	62	100

Source: Field Data (2019)

Table 4.0 shows that the majority of the respondents have been in service for a period of between 5-10 years accounting for 40% (n=25) of the respondents while the period 1-4 years and above 10 years accounted for 24% (n=15) and 31% (n=19) of the respondents respectively. And the respondents that served for less than 1 year accounted for 3 out of 5 of the respondents. The results show that a lot of secondary school teachers in Shiwang'andu District have served for a period ranging from 5-10 years this may be attributed to recent massive teacher deployment that characterized the period between 2011 and 2018.

6.4. Distribution of Respondents According to the Class Size They Teach

Table 5.0 Class sizes taught by respondents

Class Size	Frequency	Percentage %
Below 20 pupils	6	10
20-25 pupils	8	13
25-30 pupils	16	25
30 and above pupils	32	52
Total	62	100

Source: Field Data (2019)

Table 5.0 indicates that the majority of the respondents teach classes that have 30 or more pupils accounting to 52% (n=32) of the respondents. While respondents with class size ranging 25-30 and 20-25 accounted for 25% (n=16) and 13 % (n=8) respectively. 10% (n=6) of the respondents teach classes sizes with below 20 pupils. The results indicate that a lot of secondary school teachers in Shiwang'andu District teach classes with enrolment ranging from 30 pupils and above, this may be attributed to few secondary schools in the district being supplied with pupils by numerous surrounding Basic and primary schools.

6.4. Classroom Assessments That Are Used by Teachers

From table 6.0 below, the results show that the majority of the respondents accounting for 71% (n=44) use traditional assessments that include; multiple choice test items, true/false test items, matching test items, fill in-blanks test item and short answer test items.

Findings show that 29% of the respondents (n=18) use contemporary assessments such as journal critique test items, research essay test items, portfolios test items, project test items and practical test items. The results show that there were many teachers that used traditional assessments; this may be because traditional assessments are perceived to be "easy" to handle.

Table 6.0: Distribution of classroom assessments used by teachers

S/N	Classroom Assessments	Scores for each of the Assessments	Cumulative Frequency	Percentage %
1.	Traditional Assessments			
	• Fill-in blanks test items	4		
	• True/False test items	11	44	71
	• Matching test items	7		
	• short answer test items	6		
	• Multiple choice test items	16		
2.	Contemporary assessments			
	• Practical test items	6		
	• Research essay test items	3	18	29
	• Portfolios test items	2		

• Projects test items	5		
• Journal critique test items	2		
Total		62	100

Source: Field Data, (2019)

The most common form of assessment that is used by secondary school teachers is traditional assessment (multiple choice test items, true/false test items, matching test items, fill in-blanks test item and short answer test items) which accounted for 71% of the total respondents. There were various but similar narratives brought forward by respondents with regard to traditional assessments as the mostly used form of assessment by secondary school teachers. Education standards officers remarked as follows:

During the routine monitoring of secondary school teachers regarding how they assess pupils, I have discovered that most of them assess the pupils using traditional assessments as opposed to contemporary assessments. (ESO, General)

There are some teachers, very few though, who are trying to integrate contemporary modes of assessing learners for leaning and learners' learning achievement. What we need to do as the teaching fraternity is encourage them and support them. Providing schools with technology is one way of supporting teachers, especially that we have diverse learners, learners with special education needs (SEN), we have inclusive schools and classrooms. (ESO, Special).

The teachers said traditional assessments are easier to prepare, they have a shorter seating duration so teachers don't take a lot of time to invigilate the tests and they are able cover complex topical content at once. (DESO, Shiwang'andu District).

Another respondent commented as follows when she was asked to explain why she preferred traditional assessments to contemporary assessments:

I teach seven classes of secondary school pupils with the enrolment above 45 pupils per class, when it is time for assessing them, i usually use simple and fast form of assessment (Traditional assessment i.e. true-false questions and multiple choice questions) because I always ask my fellow teachers to help me mark the pupils' scripts within a short period of time. All I do is just to prepare a marking key. (Female Teacher, School 1).

With regard to contemporary assessments, 29% of the respondents agreed that they used contemporary assessments (journal critique test items, research essay test items, portfolios test items, project test items and practical test items). In this light, the respondents narrated various related sentiments with regard to the reasons why they use contemporary assessments:

In my first thirteen years of teaching and assessing secondary school pupils, I used both traditional and contemporary assessments. After comparing the two forms of assessments, I discovered that contemporary assessments are an ideal way of assessing pupils' knowledge and skills. (HoD, School 3).

Our teachers test the deep understanding of a topical content since pupils are asked to write/practice what was learnt and internalized, not just mere memorizations of content by comparing answer options on multiple choice questions, matching questions or true –false questions. (Head Teacher, School 2).

I like using contemporary assessments because they have similar test paper designs with the various assessments that lecturers give to college and university students in tertiary institutions. This helps me to prepare my secondary school pupils for tertiary education. (HoD, School 4)

6.5. Teachers' Use of Classroom Assessment Results

In this category the respondents were asked to tick once in order to indicate their major use of classroom assessment results. From the table 7.0 above, the minority of the respondents 24% (n=15) indicated that they use classroom assessment results to make decisions regarding grade retention and promotion. The majority of the respondents (42%, n=26) use classroom assessment results to point out the difficult learning portions, identifying what pupils think and how they think and what they understand. While 34% of the respondents (n=21) said that they use classroom assessment results to discover the effectiveness and drawbacks of teaching methods.

Table 7.0 Teachers' use of classroom assessment results

Use of classroom Assessment results	Frequency	Percentage (%)
• To diagnose the effectiveness and drawbacks of teaching methods.	21	34
• To point out the difficult learning portions, identifying what pupils think and how they think and what they understand.	26	42
• To make decisions regarding pupils grade retention and promotion.	15	24
Total	62	100

Source: Field Data (2019)

The following was stated on using classroom assessment results to point out the difficult learning portions, identifying what pupils think and how they think and what they understand:

I feel teachers should use classroom assessment results to check and measure the cognitive abilities of their pupils in the way they cope with topics in the syllabi, classroom assessment results should be used to point out challenging topics and how the pupils find those topics challenging and the way out must be found. (DRCC, Shiwangandu District).

Another teacher said the following on using classroom assessment results to diagnose the effectiveness and drawbacks of teaching methods:

After doing a critical analysis of the topic test results for my secondary school pupils, am able to tell whether the method(s) of teaching I used on each of the sub-topics was appropriate or not, this helps me to better my preparation in the next topic. (Male Teacher, School 4).

The use of classroom assessment results to make decisions regarding pupils' grade retention and promotion received the following response:

As a secondary school, at the end of each year we gather together all the classroom assessment results, for each of our pupils in non-examination (grades 8, 10, 11) classes and compute the mean in order for us to check the academic performance of our pupils for those below average, average and above average. (Head Teacher, School 3)

Often, as a school, we make a decision of informing pupils who perform below average not to progress to the subsequent grades the following year. This helps us to produce excellent results during national examinations because we only allow above average pupil to seat for national examinations. (Head Teacher, School 5)

6.6. Teacher Viewpoints about Assessment Practices

From table 8.0 below, the majority of the respondents (48%; n=30) believe that learners should only recognize rather than generalize their own answers in a classroom assessment and the teacher should only evaluate students based on their mastery of knowledge and skills. With 23% of the respondents (n=14) believe that students should have their knowledge, skills abilities assessed beyond the classroom environment and the teacher should give assessment to the learners that promote higher learning skills and problem solving.

Findings of the study revealed that 29% of the respondents (n=18) believed that a student must be assessed in diverse mode (i.e. drama, tests, oral presentation, visual technology) due to different learning needs and the kind of assessment must match the student developmental levels.

The following narrations were brought forward relating to how teachers conduct classroom assessments:

As a secondary school teacher, I passionately feel that assessments such as multiple choice test items and matching test items that gives an opportunity for pupils to compare and choose the answers from the given options, are mostly liked by both pupils and teachers, since they are able to favour all pupils in terms of mental abilities i.e. pupils who can't write essays can at least choose answers from the given options, thereby motivating all the categories of pupils. This removes the notion from the pupils that examinations are a form of punishing them. (Female Teacher, School 2)

Pupils should only recognize rather than generalize their own answers in classroom assessments given. This shall give chance for teachers to only evaluate the pupils based on mastery of knowledge and skills. (Male Teacher, School 1)

Furthermore, the caption below depicts a finding regarding to how teachers administer assessment to learners in a bid to promote higher learning skills and problem solving:

I always remind and encourage secondary school teachers that teach practical subjects like Geography, Agricultural sciences Physical education, Biology among others to be assessing the pupils with both theory and practical knowledge/skills, pupils must be assessed beyond the classroom environment, by doing so, teachers will be promoting/imparting problem solving skills among the pupils.

(DEBS, Shiwang'andu District)

Teachers observed the following regarding assessment of learners in diverse modes (i.e. Drama, tests, oral presentation, and visual technology):

What I understand is that, intelligent pupils are not only those that have mental abilities of writing good essays or rather calculating figures but also pupils who possess excellent skills in drama, oral presentation and visual technology must be regarded as intelligent, hence they must be assessed by using those modes that suit them considering their cognitive developmental/capacity levels. (Female Teacher, School 6).

Because of having different learning needs, the kinds of classroom assessment must match with pupils' developmental levels. (Female Teacher, School 3)

7. Discussion of Findings

7.1. Classroom Assessments That Are Used by Teachers

The finding that there are more secondary school teachers that use traditional assessments than Secondary School teachers that use contemporary assessments (Table 5) is in tandem with the observations by Segers and Dochy (2010), Lin, et al., (2001), Cooney (2015) and Kubiszyn, et al., (2013) that secondary school teachers believe that traditional assessment are able to improve the cognitive side of instruction (i.e. Skills and knowledge that pupils are expected to develop within a shorter period of time), they have higher content coverage (Shepard, Penuel & Pellegrino, 2018). This is in addition to being easier to prepare,

administer and mark. This explains why Banda, et al., (2023) recommend that teacher training institutions should intensify equipping teachers with assessment models that are based on Blooms Taxonomy.

With these ‘easy to handle’ assessment characteristics possessed by traditional assessments, it could be the reason why most secondary school teachers prefer to use traditional assessments as opposed to contemporary assessments. However, teachers need to be cautious by using relevant and appropriate classroom assessments.

Kleinert, et al., (2009) in their study revealed that teachers expressed high levels of frustration in the use of contemporary assessments, teachers indicated that contemporary assessments require more time for pupils to complete writing an assessment task, for teachers to invigilate/supervise. The pupil-teacher ratio has become imbalanced with the enactment of the free education policy (FEP), which has seen high enrolment ratios and its effects on teacher workload. Teachers were also concerned about competencies they had in reliably grading assessments such as research essay and journal critique. They indicated that such assessments have high degree of biasness and are more teacher based, despite the teachers being trained in educational measurements.

7.2. Teachers' Use of Classroom Assessment Results

One of the interesting findings is that the majority of the secondary school teachers use classroom assessment results to point out the difficult learning portions; identify what pupils think, and how they think; and what they understand concerning a particular learning material. This is in line with findings of a study by Stiggins (2014) who pointed out that teachers use classroom assessment results to diagnose pupils' ‘learning needs’. For teachers to diagnose pupils' learning needs, they need to have continuous access to pupils' classroom assessment results arising from high quality - classroom assessment tasks. Literature confirms that classroom assessment results inform teachers on whether pupils have understood the learning material or not and enables teachers to have a clear guideline on how they should plan for their next lessons (Mainde, Mtonga, Magasu & Mpolomoka, 2023; Wuest & Fisset, 2012; Brookhart, 2003, 2011, 2013; Earl & Katz, 2015). This corroborates with the finding by Mpolomoka, Banda & Dube (2017) who advocate for contemporariness among 21st century teachers.

When teachers diagnose the learning difficulties encountered by pupils, it becomes easy for them to make appropriate academic decisions such as instructional methods to use (Stiggins, 2014; Mpolomoka & Sakai, 2021; Wilson, 2018; Mulambia, Mpolomoka, Lufeyo & Muyendekwa, 2023). Usually, wise academic decisions are those that are based on investigations such as an action made upon analyzing the classroom assessment results for pupils.

7.3. Teachers' Viewpoints on Classroom Assessments

The researchers recall two findings of this study namely, (1) that pupils should only recognize answers rather than generalize their own answers in classroom assessment tasks given; and (2) that the teacher should only evaluate the pupils based on mastery of knowledge and skill; and contend that the two fall in the realist perspective. Literature abounds that agrees with this observation. For example, Segers & Dochy (2010) and Thompson, Braaten, Windschitl, Sjoberg, Jones & Martinez, (2009) established that “realist teachers” believe in the use of paper and pencil type of assessment, where pupils are expected to recognize rather than generate their own answers. This is not surprising because realist teachers by nature tend to rely more on paper and pencil objective tests that can be scored easily and be used to compare pupils. In addition, realist teachers believe in norm-referenced testing. In norm referenced testing the pupils' mastery of core knowledge and skills of the curriculum is evaluated relative to the performance of other pupils.

8. Conclusion

The study sought to examine the extent to which secondary school teachers apply classroom assessment practices, which has been confirmed to vary. The study also explored the classroom assessments teachers use, how they use classroom assessment results as well as their viewpoints on classroom assessments. Findings of this study show that most of the secondary school teachers were not moving at the same pace with the current demands (need for integration of contemporary assessments) of classroom assessment practices. Some teachers are mainly focused on assessing pupils' memorization of learning materials. Other teachers' involvement in contemporary classroom assessment practices seems to be steady slow and their dexterity is not matching with the fast growing modern demands of classroom assessment practices in this 21st century.

Regarding teachers' use of classroom assessment results and teachers' viewpoints on classroom assessments, the study shows that there were a lot of irregularities in the manner teachers handled the issues pertaining to classroom assessment practices. Findings also point to some elements of retrogression in handling of classroom assessment practices by some teachers. It could be that a fraction of teachers banked their understanding of classroom assessment practices on archaic literature materials. Now this has implications on the purpose, relevance and appropriateness of classroom assessment practices.

This implies that there is need for some secondary school teachers to be sent for capacity building activities in classroom assessment practices on regular basis to keep them abreast with up to date classroom assessment practices. In addition, there is need for teacher training institutions (colleges and universities) to redesign classroom assessment practices as a subject in the curriculum in order to increase awareness about efficient classroom assessment practices. This study can be a point of reference to bring a change in classroom assessment practices and policy making.

9. Recommendations

1. The school administrators in Shiwang'andu District should:

- a. develop a mentoring program to match new and experienced teachers to share reciprocal knowledge and skills on classroom assessment practices.
- b. work with other stakeholders and ensure that teachers are sent for workshops, short-term courses, or seminars in classroom assessment on regular basis to keep them abreast with up to date classroom assessment practices
2. The Zambian Ministry of General Education should consider a policy shift from “assessment measurement” to assessment as an inquiry that emulates the 21st century thinking.
3. The Zambian Ministry of General Education and school administrators in Shiwangandu District should ensure that all teachers with teaching certificates go for further training and take more courses in assessment to improve their skills and use of up-to-date desirable classroom assessment practices.
4. Teacher training institutions (colleges and universities) should design, and in some instances enhance, classroom assessment practices as a subject in the curriculum of higher education in order to increase awareness about efficient classroom assessment practices.

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