ASSESSMENT PROBLEMS IN ZIMBABWE’S PRIMARY SCHOOLS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO GWERU DISTRICT SCHOOLS

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Assessment of learner learning is integral to effective instruction and learning in the education system of Zimbabwe. Teachers administer their own assessment and report the results to pupils, parents and the public in general. Assessment has been found to be an effective method for the improvement of learners' learning in schools (Faleye & Ojerinde-Dibu, 2005). It provides opportunities for independent practice (Boston, 2002), thus providing good ground for self-assessment. Teachers are expected to use the assessment to guide effective decision-making particularly with respect to the identification, remediation and ongoing evaluation of learners (Black & William, 1998b).

Classroom assessment is seen as helpful because it gives a more immediate measure of progress and achievement of learners; guides and improves instruction, diagnoses learners' knowledge of a topic (Hurley & Tinajaro, 2001); provides day-to-day help with teaching and learning, which is the core and base for attaining excellence in education and school improvement (Stiggins, 1999), as well as help teachers find the weaknesses and strengths in their instruction and encourage them to continuously search for ways to improve teaching (Shepard, 1995).

Teachers are expected to be assessment literate and capable of using such knowledge to inform instructional practice, yet despite these expectations, limits in teachers' assessment, knowledge and training are well documented (Bookhart,
Airasian (1991) concludes that for many people, the words “classroom assessment” evoke images of pupils taking paper and pencil tests, teachers scoring them and grades being assigned to learners based on their test performance. There is a misleading tendency to equate assessment with tests and examinations. Some teachers are hesitant to use different types of assessment because the teachers feel they do not know enough to assess learners fairly using them (Airasian, 1991). High quality assessment is so relatively rare that most teachers do not know how well to engage in such assessment.

A research carried out by the Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (2006) on continuous assessment practices of primary and junior secondary schools in Nigeria, revealed that teachers hardly used a variety of instruments such as the tests, class work, home work, projects, observations, questionnaires, anecdotal reports, checklists, rating scales inventory and practicals. Ojerinde-Dibu (2000) also highlighted that assessment presented problems to Nigerian teachers due to too many responsibilities on the teacher. The teacher has too many learners to teach, which means that he/she has many scripts to mark. Furthermore, a teacher has to perform the roles of surrogate parent, liaise with learners’ homes where necessary and perform other duties as counsellor. The New Zealand Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture funded research (2004-2005), Comparing Apples with Pears: Teachers’ knowledge on assessment and its impact on their practices also revealed that a lack of teachers’ expertise in assessment knowledge caused road blocks for evidence based improvement of teaching and learning.
A research carried out by the Kenya National Examinations Council (2000) on using feedback from public examinations and teacher assessment to improve classroom teaching also revealed that high enrolment and scarcity of facilities in many public schools made it difficult to effectively carry out continuous assessment. They went on to say that even where teachers use tests, many of the tests they develop are found wanting in originality of style, clarity of language and abilities to be tested. Some teachers do not bother to develop their own tests; instead they simply lift questions from past examinations or from commercial publications. Rather than help improve learning processes, these practices seem to encourage rote learning, which both the teacher and the pupils believe would improve performance in public examinations (Hill, 2000).

Black & William (1998) highlight that there is a wealth of research evidence showing that the everyday practice of assessment in classrooms is beset with problems. The following are some of the problems highlighted:

- Marking is usually conscientious but often fails to offer guidance on how work can be improved. In a significant minority of cases, marking reinforces underachievement and under expectation by being too generous or unfocused. Information about pupil performance received by the teacher is insufficiently used to inform subsequent “work”, according to a United Kingdom inspection report on secondary schools.
- To primary teachers particularly, there is a tendency to emphasise quantity and presentation of work and the neglect of quality in relation to learning.
• The collection of marks to fill records is given higher priority than the analysis of pupils’ work to discern learning needs; furthermore some teachers pay no attention to the assessment records of their pupils’ previous records.

Assessment in Nigerian schools is tailored towards examinations especially public examinations (William & Black, 1998b). This is because Nigerian Society like in any other developing country places premium on certificates. The quality and effectiveness of schools and teachers are judged by the performance of learners in public examinations.

Ndalichako’s research (2004) towards an understanding of assessment practices of primary school teachers in Tanzania revealed that, the teachers relied heavily on traditional methods of assessment that were homework, tests, classroom exercises and quizzes. Assessment practices that require extended time to accomplish, like projects and observations were rarely used. The findings further revealed that teachers tended to emphasize the knowledge domain with the affective and psychomotor domains virtually ignored.

The Zimbabwean education system is highly competitive, academic and examination driven. A summary of inspection reports all over the country indicated that generally the amount of written work administered by teachers in their classes was inadequate (Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture Circular, 2006). Assessment reports in the Midlands region are silent about the quality of assessment, but place premium on the quantity and the layout of learners work as evidenced by the Director’s circular of 2006. (See appendix, 18 and 19).
The researcher presented a paper on assessment, measurement and evaluation to fourteen schools in the Midlands Region. During the visits to schools, it was observed that there was a casual approach to testing, measurement and evaluation in most schools. Some teachers would set tests that would address only one level of the taxonomy of objectives, while others would duplicate items from past examination papers. It was also observed that some test items were poorly structured and that assessment procedures lacked variety. Interviews with heads of schools visited indicated that assessment was a grey area’, meaning that there is little knowledge on assessment amoung teachers.

The observations above were also made during the researchers’ sixteen years of experience in the primary schools. Summarising research findings published between1990-2000, Boohart (2001) concluded that teachers needed additional instruction in assessment. Metler (2000), recommended professional development and improved teacher preparation. Stiggins (1991) argued that testing and measurement courses have not met the day-to-day assessment needs of the classroom teacher.

The above experience and observations presented a fertile ground for the researcher to carry out a research on Assessment problems in the Zimbabwe Primary Schools with special reference to Gweru District Schools.
1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Classroom assessment poses a number of problems in the primary schools. During the course of my duties as a school teacher, Acting Deputy Head teacher and Acting Head teacher, of primary schools respectively, I observed that some teachers had a casual approach to assessment. Some teachers would set tests that would only address one level of the taxonomy of objectives while others would duplicate items from past examination papers. It was also observed that some test items were poorly structured and that assessment procedures lacked variety.

I presented papers on classroom testing, measurement and evaluation to fourteen primary schools in the Midlands Region. During the visits, interviews with the head teachers of schools visited indicated that assessment was grey in primary schools. These problems needed to be identified and solutions to the problems suggested. Research has been carried out in other countries, but it was worthwhile to substantiate the results and discover more insights, particularly in the Zimbabwean context. It was important to do so because assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning. Poor assessment practices are detrimental to effective decision-making as well as the teaching-learning situation. This study, therefore, sought to unravel the problems and seek solutions.

As indicated in the preceding paragraphs, the problem which triggered this study is that assessment in the primary schools is bedevilled by an array of problems and it is the purpose of this study to unravel these problems and suggest possible solutions.
1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this study were to:

- determine classroom teachers perceptions on assessment;
- establish what schools and colleges are doing to equip teachers with classroom assessment skills.
- determine whether any resources are put in place by schools to support classroom assessment efforts; and
- explore the influence of public examinations on classroom assessment.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The researcher attempted to find answers to the following research questions:

- What sort of assessment skills do classroom teachers have to enable them carry out classroom assessment?
- Do teachers' perceptions influence their assessment procedures?
- How do classroom procedures influence classroom assessment?
- How do public examinations affect and influence poor assessment procedures?
- How does lack of resources affect poor assessment procedures?

1.5 ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY

The study assumed that the participants, who included teachers, primary school head teachers, college lecturers, Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture officers and ZIMSEC staff either lacked or had insufficient assessment skills to carry out classroom assessment.
Further the study was based on the assumption that participants would be conversant with assessment procedures in the primary schools.

The study was also based on the assumption that teachers encountered problems during assessment and that teachers’ knowledge on assessment was limited.

1.6 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study was confined to Gweru District schools in the Midlands Region in Zimbabwe. Its focus was on primary school teacher-made classroom assessments. It sought to utilize responses from qualified school teachers, head teachers, college lecturers, ZIMSEC staff and Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture Officers.

1.7 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Assessment is at the heart of effective teaching and learning in the Zimbabwean schools. Without assessment teachers are not able to identify the gap between what was taught and what is actually being learnt. Teaching without learning is just talking (Angelo & Cross, 1993:3). Assessments are created, administered and analysed by teachers themselves on questions that are important to them. In other words teachers are expected to be literate and capable of constructing valid and reliable assessment instruments in order to inform the instructional process. Despite these expectations, limits in teachers’ assessment knowledge and training are well documented (Bookhart 2001; Campbell 2000; Melter & Campbell 2006). Hill (2000) reported that teachers experienced difficulty in designing school systems assessment, in which assessment was used mainly for improving learning through focused teaching rather than where summative reporting dominated. Given the
above background and the general notion held on the importance of assessment, it has been found necessary to investigate assessment problems in primary schools.

1.8 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
The purpose of this study was to investigate the problems of assessment in the primary schools and to suggest possible solutions to these problems.

1.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY
Assessment is pivotal to successful teaching and learning. Poor assessment procedures may result in poor decision making in the teaching-learning situation. The study, should therefore, be significant in as far as it may shed more light on the problems encountered by teachers in assessment in Zimbabwe.

It should also be relevant to Teachers College Curriculum Developers, school staff development programmes, and policy makers, leading to changes in primary school assessment methods. Teachers, Teachers Colleges and schools should be sensitized about the inadequacies of teachers’ skills in assessment. This should enable Teachers’ Colleges and schools to equip teachers with relevant skills. Finally the findings should stimulate further research on assessment in order to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the subject.

1.10 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
Assessments are conducted for a range of purposes by a large number of people in different contexts. In other words, assessment is a wide topic, which encompasses everything from statewide accountability tests to district benchmark tests or entry tests to everyday classroom tests. Teachers should frame the view of testing as
assessment and that assessment is information. The more information obtained about the learner, the clearer the picture about the learners’ achievement. According to Lin & Gronlund (1995:5), “Assessment is a general term that includes a full range of procedures used to gain information about learner learning (observations, rating of performances on projects, paper and pencil tests), and the formation of value judgment concerning the learning progress”. Assessment thus, is an integrated process of determining the nature and extent of learner learning and development. Classroom assessment uses a variety of techniques to provide information for instructional improvement and for monitoring learner learning (Angelo & Cross, 1993). Classroom assessment techniques provide useful feedback on what, how much and how well their learners are learning (Torrance & Pryor, 2001). Torrance & Pryor (2001) go on to say that teachers can use this information to re-focus their teaching to help learners make their learning more efficient and effective. Classroom assessment seeks to empower both teachers and learners to improve the quality of learning in the classroom (Angelo and Cross, 1993).

Assessment can be roughly divided into two, formative and summative assessments (Fair Test, 2001). Formative assessment occurs when teachers feed information back to learners in ways that enable learners to know better, or when learners can engage in similar, self-reflective processes. Thus results of formative assessments are used to modify and validate instruction. On the other hand summative assessments are used to summarise learners’ learning at some point in time, say the end of the course. The goal of summative assessments is to make a judgment of learners’ competence after an instructional course. Classroom assessment encompasses teacher observation, classroom discussion, analysis of learners’ work
including homework and tests. Tests are assessments but not all assessments are tests (Black & William, 1998). Classroom assessment is a formative approach (not summative) because its purpose is to improve the quality of learner learning and not to provide evidence for evaluating or grading pupils (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Stiggins, 2002).

Classroom assessments are created by teachers themselves on the questions of teaching and learning that are important to them. The Canadian Technology Assisted Learner Assessment Institute (2001) suggested that assessment should follow the following three step Balanced Model of Assessment:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Collection Of Information} & \quad + \quad \text{Interpretation Of Results} & \quad = \quad \text{Effective Decision-Making} \\
\text{Data collection} & \quad \quad \text{Analysis} & \quad \quad \text{Evaluation}
\end{align*}
\]

*Figure 1.1 Balanced Model of Assessment*

In the first stage, the teacher utilizes a variety of measures such as observational techniques, projects, quizzes and teacher made tests to collect information. After the analysis of results in stage two, the teacher makes decisions in stage three. Decisions may involve a plan for remediation as for formative assessment or reporting a standing summative stage.

Angelo & Cross (1993) came up with the following characteristics of classroom assessment:

- **Learner Centered** - Classroom assessment focuses attention on teachers and learners on observing and improving learning rather than observing and
improving teaching. Classroom assessment can provide information to guide teachers and learners in making adjustments to improve learning.

- **Teacher Directed** – Classroom assessment respects the autonomy, academic freedom, and professional judgment of the school. The teacher decides what to assess, how to assess and how to respond to information gained through assessment. The teacher is not obliged to share the results of assessment with anyone.

- **Mutually Beneficial** – Classroom assessment requires the active participation of learners. By cooperation in assessments, learners reinforce their skills at self-assessment and teachers also sharpen their teaching skills.

- **Formative** – Classroom assessment’s purpose is to improve the quality of learner learning and not provide evidence for evaluating or grading. Assessment is done during pupils learning in order to provide feedback to the pupils.

- **Content Specific** – Classroom assessments have to respond to particular needs and characteristics of teachers, learners and disciplines, which they are applied.

- **Ongoing** – Classroom assessment is continuous.

- **Rooted in good teaching practice** - Classroom assessment is an attempt to build on existing good practice by making feedback on learners more systematic, more flexible and more effective, in order for teachers to bring about the most productive and beneficial learning.

Cognisant of the value of learning, Black & William (1998) contend that quality assessment is relatively rare in classrooms. They also found that most testing
encourages rote and artificial learning. Furthermore, there has been lip service, but little real attention to strengthening teachers’ assessment capabilities. They go on to say, worse still, there has recently been a proliferation of so called “benchmark” tests that are claimed to be formative but intended to predict how well the test taker will do in the end-of-year big test.

It was within this broad knowledge of the term 'assessment' that the research looked at assessment problems in the Gweru district primary schools.

1.11 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was confined to a few schools in Gweru District, hence the findings could not be generalised to the entire Zimbabwean education system.

Secondly, perceptions are quite difficult to quantify and qualify. Oppenheim (1992) argues that attitudes are part of a wider spectrum of values, beliefs and feelings; hence this could lead to measuring of the wrong perceptions.

The study was based on voluntary cooperation. As such, the lack of it would have weakened the study.

Furthermore, the findings were both specific and circumstantial due to different social contexts. Some aspects that occurred in one school did not occur in another school during the visits made by the researcher (see paragraph, 3.6.1 to 3.6.4).
While these confounding circumstances were likely to thwart the understanding of the results of the study, they were overcome and controlled by thoroughly observing what was raised on validation of the research design.

1.12 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research, a qualitative, interpretivist paradigm was preferred. The aim of this paradigm is to understand how people in everyday settings create meaning and interpret events in their world (Wimmer and Dominick, 2000). The phenomena of interest unfold naturally in that it has no pre-determined course established by research such as would occur in a laboratory. Observations take place in real world settings and people are interviewed with open-ended questions in places and under conditions that are comfortable and familiar to them (Patton, 2002) (see, 3.2)

1.12.1 Research Design: The Case Study Research

The researcher used the qualitative research methodology drawing largely on the case study, which allowed the researcher to go deeper into the assessment problems teachers’ encountered in schools. The case study allowed the researcher to use a variety of data gathering methods to facilitate triangulation (see 3.3).

1.12.2 Sampling Techniques

A comprehensive purposive sampling was adopted. In purposive sampling, the researcher sought individuals and sites that could best supply relevant information needed to answer the research questions raised (Creswell, 2008:214). Gweru district schools comprise ninety two (92) urban, rural, government and private schools which are found in all parts of Zimbabwe. The distribution of schools according to urban,
rural, government and private was also meant to enable the reader to apply the findings to a new situation (see paragraph, 3.6.3). Furthermore, grade seven teachers were able to show if the public examination has anything to do with assessment procedures in the primary schools. All the ninety two (92) head teachers of the selected schools were part of the sample. This sample of head teachers allowed for in-depth interviews. Grade 3 to 7 teachers were purposefully selected from each school to constitute eight focus groups. Focus groups helped the researcher to understand the perceptions and behaviours of respondents with regard to assessment. Furthermore, responses from head teachers were verified. Observations were also verified through focus groups. ZIMSEC Officers, Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture Officers were also purposively selected to participate in individual interviews. A focus group discussion was held with college lecturers that were randomly selected from lecturers who taught professional studies (see, 3.4.5).

1.12.3 Data Collection Techniques

The study used the multiple measure instruments to establish validity and reduce uncertainty of interpretation. Manion & Cohen (1980:208) define triangulation as, “the use of two or more methods in data collection.” The methods used in this study were, focus groups, interviews, document analysis and participant observation (see, 3.4.6).

1.12.4 Data Analysis Procedures

This research used grounded theory to analyse data (see, 3.5).
1.12.5 Validation

In ensuring internal validity, the following strategies were employed: triangulation of data, use of member checking, observing the situation over a long period of time in order to develop an in depth understanding of the phenomenon, peer examination and use of thick description to convey findings. The researcher also used audiotapes in interviews to augment field notes, wrote down all the questions asked in order to make sense at a later date, out of answers recorded earlier as well as to reduce distortions and to clarify the bias the researcher could bring to the study. This self-reflection creates an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with the readers. Audit trial was also employed to allow others to examine the thought process involved in the research and also enable them to assess the accuracy of the conclusions (see, 3.5).

1.13 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was confined to a few schools in Gweru District, hence the findings could not be generalised to the entire Zimbabwean education system.

Secondly, perceptions are quite difficult to quantify and qualify. Oppenheim (1992) argues that attitudes are part of a wider spectrum of values, beliefs and feelings; hence this could lead to measuring the wrong perceptions.

The study was based on voluntary cooperation. As such, the lack of cooperation would have weakened the study.
Furthermore, the findings were both specific and circumstantial due to different social contexts. Some aspects that occurred in one school did not occur in another school during the visits made by the researcher (see paragraph, 3.6.1 to 3.6.4).

While these confounding circumstances were likely to thwart the understanding of the results of the study, they were overcome and controlled by thoroughly observing what was raised on validation of the research design.

1.14 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Researchers have a responsibility to conduct their investigations and report their findings without harming research participants (Keyton, 2001: 251). In this research informed consent was sort from all the participants. Furthermore consent was sought from the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture, ZIMSEC, and the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education. Participants made the choice to be part of the research after some explanations pertaining to the study. The research results from all participants were summarised and given as a research report with no names. Any materials that were collected through document analysis, interviews, observations, audio tapes, were kept away from the data collection site to further enhance confidentiality. Participants were not deceived in order to take part in the research. The true nature of the research including procedures was spelt out (see, 3.7).

1.15 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

The study was organised into five chapters. Each chapter provided a specific aspect of the study. The content of each chapter was briefly explained below.
Chapter one is the orientation chapter. Its purpose is to provide the reader with an indication of what to expect in the research report. The chapter covers the Background of the study, Rationale for the study, Statement of the problem, Aims and Objectives of the study, Research questions, Assumptions of the study, Delimitation of the study, Definition of terms, Theoretical / Conceptual framework, Limitations of the study and Ethical considerations. Chapter two consists of a review and analysis of related literature, which provides a conceptual and theoretical framework of the study. The research methodology, design, and instruments used to collect data, were dealt with in Chapter three. It discusses how the study was designed and conducted. The Chapter also justifies the research design used. Research instruments used to collect data are also described and explained.

Chapter four presents data analyses and discusses the data collected in order to find answers to questions raised earlier in the study. Finally, Chapter five gives a summary of the whole study, draws conclusions based on the research findings and makes recommendations and suggestions for further research.

1.16 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Assessment: In this study, the key term assessment is used to mean the gathering and analysis of learners’ abilities, with the aim of improving teaching, learning and decision-making about learners. It is used in the sense in which Gronlund (2000) uses it. In the study of Formative Assessment: Mapping the Road to Success Marshall (2005) defines assessment as involving the gathering and interpreting of
information about learner performance to determine mastery toward defined learning objectives. Other terms that are in the study are explained as follows;

**Primary school**: A formal educational institute in Zimbabwe that offers learning from Grade zero to seven.

**Lecturer**: One who directs learners at an institution of higher learning?

**School Head Teacher**: Refers to the person in charge of the lives and welfare of teachers and pupils at a school and is accountable for the successes and failures of the institution under his/her counsel.

**Deputy Head Teacher**: A person, second in command to the school head teacher and assists the head in managing the activities of the school.

**Resources**: These are materials that can enhance effective assessment. These may include finances, time, equipment and human resources to facilitate assessment.

**Teachers’ College**: An institute of higher learning where teachers are trained

**Teacher**: Someone who guides and directs the learners. The individual is thus responsible for giving instructions and guidance to a specific class or classes.

**Assessment problems**: Impediments or hindrances that inhibit effective assessment procedures in the schools.

**Hot sitting**: A situation in the school where there are double sessions. Some pupils attend lessons in the morning from 8 o’clock to 12 o’clock while other pupils attend lessons during the afternoon from 12 o’clock 5’oclock in the same school and using the same facilities.

**Group A school**: A school in the low density area which used to cater for whites only before independence.

**Group B school**: A School in the high density area in town which used to carter for black pupils before independence.
**Officer:** One who occupies an official position within the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture or ZIMSEC.

**ZIMSEC:** An organisation in Zimbabwe which manages summative examinations in all schools in Zimbabwe.

**Special rooms:** These are classrooms used by specialist teachers when teaching pupils. Such rooms are for example the home economics room, music room just to name a few.

**Test:** A piece of classroom assessment information designed to measure skills, performance, capabilities, intelligents, and aptitude of an individual or group.

Chapter one is the orientation chapter. It provided the reader with an indication of what to expect in the research report. The chapter covered the Background of the study, Rationale for the study, Statement of the problem, Aims and Objectives of the study, Research questions, Assumptions of the study, Delimitation of the study, Definition of terms, Conceptual framework, Limitations of the study and Ethical considerations. Finally the chapter provided the organisation of the study. The next chapter focuses on Review of Related Literature.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Chapter one dealt with, among other things, the background to the study, rationale of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, assumptions of the study, significance of the study, delimitation of the study, definition of terms and theoretical framework. This chapter seeks to highlight and discuss issues related to works of authorities with regard to challenges of assessment problems in the schools. An attempt to define the term assessment will be made, the rationale for assessment and the different forms of assessment will be highlighted. Literature on teacher competencies, perceptions, emerging models of assessment and assessment paradigms will be exposed. Finally, the review of related literature will look at assessment procedures in the Zimbabwean schools as well as challenges that are encountered by teachers in carrying out assessment in schools.

2.1 WHAT IS ASSESSMENT?

Assessment is the bedrock of an effective teaching and learning environment. If we wish to discover the truth about an educational system we must look into its assessment procedures (Rowntree, 1977:1). Regular, reliable and timely
assessment is key to improving learning and enhancing the quality of education (UNESCO, 2005). Black & William (1998b) define assessment as broadly including all activities that teachers and learners undertake to get information that can be used diagnostically to alter teaching and learning. According to McMunn (2000:6)

Assessment is an ongoing process through which teachers and learners interact to promote greater learning. The assessment process involves using a range of strategies to make decisions regarding instruction and gathering information about learner performance or behaviour in order to diagnose learner problems, monitor their progress, give feedback for improvement. The classroom assessment process also involves using multiple methods of obtaining learner information through a variety of assessment strategies such as written test, interviews, observation and performance tasks.

Pellegrino et al (2001:25) argued, “Improvements in learning will depend on how well assessment, curriculum, and instruction are aligned and reinforce a common set of learning goals, and on whether instruction shifts in response to the information gained from assessment”. The use of a variety of techniques of assessment provides information for instructional improvement and for monitoring learner learning (Angelo & Cross, 1993). The central purpose of assessment is to provide information on learner achievement and progress and set direction for ongoing teaching and learning (North South Wales [NSW]-Department of Education, 2007).

The term assessment is derived from the Latin word ‘assidere’, which means, ‘to sit down beside’ (National Council Curriculum Assessment [NCCA, 2004:23]. If one combines this word with education which can be traced back to the Latin ‘educare’ (to bring out), educational assessment should be seen as sitting beside the learners and bringing out the potential that exists within them, creating an opportunity for them to demonstrate what they are able to do (Conner, 1991:xi). According to Mathematical Association of America [MAA] (2009), the word assessment did not
emerge from the classroom, it was derived from an idea in educators, that of sitting down beside or together with. They further to argue that, in the late seventeenth century, an assessor was one “who sits beside” or “who shares others’ position”. Early use of the word focused primarily on determining the worth or value of something in monetary terms, but underlying those uses was the idea of expert judgment made on the basis of careful observation (MAA, 2009). For the purposes of this research, assessment is used in the sense of judging the extent of learner learning.

Kizlick (2009) defines assessment as a process by which information is obtained relative to some known objective goal. It is a process of gathering, recording, interpreting, using and communicating information about a child’s progress and achievement during the development of knowledge, concepts, skills and attitudes (NCCA, 2004:23). Pollard & Bourne (1994:220) suggest the following principles of assessment:

- Assessment must be used as a continuous part of the teaching and learning process, involving pupils, wherever possible as well as teachers in identifying next steps.
- Assessment for any purpose should serve the purpose of improving learning by exerting a positive force on the curriculum at all levels. Assessment must provide an effective means of communication with parents and other partners in the learning enterprise in a way which helps them support pupils’ learning.
- The choice of different assessment procedures must be decided on the basis of the purpose for which the assessment is being undertaken. This may well mean employing different techniques for different assessment purposes.
Assessment must be used fairly as part of information gathering for judging the effectiveness of schools. This means taking into account contextual factors which, as well as the quality of teaching, affect the achievement of pupils.

Citizens have the right to detailed and reliable information about the standards being achieved across the nation through the educational system.

Gipps et al., (1995:10-11) summarise assessment as involving:

- A broad appraisal including many sources of evidence and many aspects of a pupil's knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes;
- Or to a particular occasion or instrument....any method or procedure, formal or informal, for producing information about pupils: e.g., [sic] a written test paper, an interview schedule, a measurement task using equipment, a class quiz. (pp. 10-11)

Pupils and probably many adults, see assessment as another word for testing which is designed to find out if they know something (Torrance & Pryor, 2001). A test is a special form of assessment but not all assessments are tests (Kizlick, 2009). A test is, “an instrument for measuring a sample of behavior” and measurement “the process of obtaining a numerical description of the degree to which an individual possesses a certain trait” Linn and Miller (2005:26). Tests are generally one piece of classroom assessment information, designed to measure skills, performance, capabilities intelligence, or aptitude of an individual or group (McMunn, 2011). Tests are constructed to meet a specific need or purpose, such as individual diagnosis, summative assessment, or individual achievement or school accountability.

Furthermore, some educators also conceive assessment to mean measurement and evaluation, and yet the terms are different as will be exposed. Assessment involves much more than testing. It is an on-going process that encompasses many formal
and informal activities designed to monitor and improve teaching/learning in all areas of the curriculum (NCCA, 2004:23). The term assessment refers to all activities teachers use to help learners learn and to gauge the learners’ progress. Thus, assessment is a process of collecting learner information in the classroom, it is the gathering of information and a tool that informs and encourages learner growth.

According to Lin & Gronlund (2000:3), “Measurement is a process of collecting quantitative data representing the degree of existence in any entity or characteristic by use of such approaches as multiple choice tests and essays”. They went on to argue that, evaluation is the decision on the value judgment of the measurement result in respect to pre-specified criteria. McMunn (2011:2) argues, “Evaluation is a judgment regarding the quality or worth of the assessment results”. This evaluation process goes beyond just collecting information; however, evaluation is concerned with making judgments about the collection”. The decision to pass or fail and grade assigning to learner learning outcomes is a function of measurement and evaluation.

Pate (2010:14) views evaluation as any systematic process of determining:

i. the extent to which specified educational objectives, previously identified, are attained;

ii. the effectiveness of the learned experiences provided in the classroom; and

iii. how well the goals of education have been accomplished.

Finally, Linn and Gronlund (2000:23) posit that, “Assessment is a full range of procedures used to gain information about learners learning through (observations, rating of performance, paper and pencil tests) and the formation of value judgments.” Evaluation is as good as the assessment information collected. It is important for the teachers to use both measurement and evaluation in order to thoroughly assess
pupils. Zimbabwean teachers are most likely unclear about this distinction; hence, the probability is high that they do not really know fully what they are doing during assessment. As such, an assessment problem may emanate from their misconceptions of these assessment terms.

Effective classroom assessment follows a cycle as suggested by (McMunn, 2011). The following diagram depicts the assessment cycle.

\[\text{Learner Involvement}\]

According to a McMunn (2011) the cycle forms a working design upon which teachers can build their assessment knowledge and it illustrates a thinking process that gets to the heart of formative assessment. The classroom assessment cycle is now explained in the following section.

1. Learning targets
The first step of the whole assessment for learning process is the establishment of learner learning goals (Wiggins & McTighe, 2000) what is worthy and requiring understanding (DeMeester & Jones, 2009: 5). Learning goals are clearly defined so that learners understand them. Learner understanding of goals has critical motivational and cognitive impacts (Brookhart, Andolina, Zuza, & Furman, 2004). As learners develop agency and self-worth (Covington, 1992) while accurately appraising their own work (Sadler, 1989). Assessment gathers and uses information about learners’ knowledge and performance to close the gap between learners’ current learning state and the desired state by pedagogical actions (Shavelson, 2006:3).

2. Gathering evidence

Assessment must collect quality evidence of learning in order to be effective. Teachers use a multiple and diverse assessment in order to produce a fuller and clearer view of how well learners meet the learning targets (McMunn, 2011).

3. Inference, analysis and interpretation of data

Teachers determine what assessment result means and what they say about how learners are learning and how learning might be improved (McMunn, 2011). Teachers’ skills in drawing inferences from learners’ responses are crucial to the effectiveness of formative assessment (Heritage, 2007:144). Cognisant of this, Heritage (2007:143) identifies the following five components of the learners’ previous learning.

- Learners’ level of knowledge in a specific content area.
- Their understanding of concepts in the content area.
- The level of their skills specific to the content area.
- The attitudes the learners are developing.
• Learners’ level of language proficiency.

A critical component of quality formative assessment is the teachers’ use of the evidence obtained from learners’ performance on assessment tasks to adjust instruction and to guide learners in adjusting their learning strategies (DeMeester & Jones, 2009:7). Teachers’ skills in drawing inferences from learners’ responses are crucial to the effectiveness of formative assessment (Heritage, 2007: 144).

4. Instructional plans and modifications

New or modified instructional plans are designed to meet learner’s needs revealed by inferences and interpretations made. According to Shute (2008:154), “Formative, or descriptive feedback is information communicated to the learner that is intended to modify his or her thinking or behaviour for the purpose of improving learning.” Black & William (2009:9) contend that, “since the responsibility for learning rests with both the teacher and the learner, it is incumbent on each to do all they can to mitigate the impact of any failures of the other.” To use assessment in the process of learning, Shepard (2000) asks educators to consider the changes necessary in classroom practices that would enable assessment to be used as part of the learning process. The assessment cycle may be affected by the framework within which assessment and evaluation are carried out. The next paragraphs explain the framework of assessment.

2.2 THE FRAMEWORK OF ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

Educational assessment and evaluation fall within the domain of social sciences. Haberman (1971:308) recognised that social sciences comprised of three different orientations, namely the empirical analytic, the interpretive and the critical theoretic.
Different paradigms will direct the teacher to assess different instructional outcomes. Assessment is used to make various decisions and concentrating on the empirical analytic makes it somewhat difficult for teachers to come up with proper teaching and learning methods, which ensure that their pupils are well catered for. Teachers should be able to design and administer more than summative end-of-unit tests and examinations if they are to realise improvement in schools (Green & Mante, 2002; Shepard, 2001).

Ryan (1988) described Haberman’s three orientations in terms of assessment and evaluation paradigms as follows.

- **Empirical analytic paradigm** – It is a western technical rationalism embodied in the logical positivist origins. This amounts to the traditional standardised approach to assessment and evaluation. The empirical analytic paradigms are important to consider certification and development of educational policy (Aikenhead, 1997).

- **Interpretive paradigm** – It involves understanding learner’s language, concepts and actions from the point of view of the learner. Alternative assessment techniques such as portfolio and concept making illustrate this paradigm. The issue of formative assessment is clearly interpretive because within this paradigm it is important to consider what knowledge, skills and values learners are actually learning (Aikenhead, 1997). This paradigm seeks to improve teaching by focusing on both process and product of learners’ work.

- **Critical theoretic paradigm** – The critical rhetoric paradigm would ask such questions as, “whose knowledge is privileged in assessment?” Whose cultural
interactions have cultural capital? Whose goal defines the criteria for
evaluation? (Toughline, 1992). For example families within a high social
economic status are privileged over lower economic status families. Thus the
context of assessment is embraced in the critical theoretic paradigm. The
culture and social context in which assessment takes place has a great
influence on both process and product of learners work (Aikenhead, 1997).
Different paradigms direct us to assess different instructional outcomes.
Teachers need to draw upon the entire paradigm as they seek to meet the
needs of that particular moment. The consideration of one paradigm
exclusively will not give an accurate picture on assessment. Teachers should
consider both the interpretive paradigm and the empirical analytic, in order to
strike a balance in assessment. In the Zimbabwean primary schools, it would
appear, the emphasis is on the empirical analytic and the interpretive
paradigms are ignored; hence, this research is on Assessment Problems in
the Primary Schools. Cognisant of the paradigms, it is important to realize
how assessment evolved in order to have a view of the position of the
Zimbabwean assessment practices. It might be devastating to find out that the
Zimbabwean assessment practices have not evolved in line of the current
practices leading to assessment problems.

2.3 EVOLUTION OF ASSESSMENT

Classroom assessment evolved from psychometrics, measurement and evaluation
to assessment. According to (Gipps, 1994; Lynch, 2001), assessment has undergone
a paradigm shift from psychometric to a broader model of educational assessment,
from testing and examination culture to an assessment culture. The rationale behind
the shift was to move from empirically driven psychometrics models towards models that reflect teacher's beliefs, practices and needs (Gipps, 1994). Historically the focus of classroom assessment has been on technical concerns such as validity, reliability, item development, analysis and a host of other empirically based issues (Anastas, 1988; Nitko, 2001). It should be noted that methods of assessment are determined by beliefs (Wiggins & McTighe, 2001) and these beliefs have led to the evolution of assessment worldwide.

2.3.1 Psychometric testing paradigm

This is where testing in education begins. Psychometrics involves the measurement of intelligence, aptitude, and achievement. The primary method for this kind of measurement is the standardised multiple-choice test. In the psychometric paradigm, the basic strategy for understanding learner achievement is comparison. According to Gipps (1994:114):

Psychometrics places emphasis on relative ranking, rather than actual accomplishment; the privileging of quantifiable displays of skills and knowledge, the assumption that individual rather than collaborative forms of cognition are the most powerful indicators of educational progress; the notion that evaluating progress is a matter of scientific measurement.

Therefore, in the psychometric paradigm, assessments are based on "on-demand" tests often containing selected response items, such as multiple-choice and standardised content, format, and administration.

The psychometric model resulted in traditional methods of assessment. Traditional assessment has been viewed as a means of verifying learner and occurs after learning has taken place (Rudder & Schafer, 2002). The authors went further to say
that, traditional assessment has been influenced by the positivist epistemology that assumes one can achieve objectivity and consequently uncover truths about real world. The goal of the curriculum is to teach by employing a transmission model of instruction and in turn assess whether the learner has learned these truths. This paradigm poses the following limitations.

- Interpreting scores in relation to norms and norm referenced grading.
- Measuring attributes which are thought to be fixed.
- Measuring a single attribute and yet tests are multi rather than one-dimensional (Gipps, 1994).

Traditional forms of assessment have been criticised for their failure to truly assess children’s learning. This brings us to the concept of educational measurement.

2.3.2 Educational measurement

Educational measurement, by contrast with psychometrics aims to revise test which looks at individuals as individuals rather than in relation to other individuals and to use measurement constructively to identify strengths and weaknesses. Individuals might have so as to aid their educational progress (Gipps, 1994). Woods (1980:194) observes that educational measurement,

- Deals with the individual’s achievement to himself rather than to others.
- Seeks to test for competence rather than intelligence;
- Takes place in relatively uncontrolled conditions and so does not produce well behaved data.
- Looks for best rather than typical competencies.
- Is most effective when rules and regulations characteristics of standardised testing are relaxed.
• Embodies a constructive outlook on assessment where the aim is to help rather than sentence the individual.

Because of this development educational measurement has now become educational assessment. This is because measurement implies a precise quantification which is not what educational assessment is all about (Gipps, 1994).

2.3.3 Educational assessment

With the reform in education and emphasis on criterion related measurement, the traditional type tests gradually lost their credibility. Instead, process oriented, task based, learner centred, and strategy driven teaching and testing became popular. The paradigm shift, called assessment paradigm, assumes a greater role in teaching learning process. Educational assessment with the reform in education and emphasis on criterion related measurement. This assessment paradigm looks for a more comprehensive qualitative account of learner’s ability through a multiple measure in multiple occasions.

According to Glaser (1990) assessment must be used to support learning rather than just to indicate current and past achievement. Assessments must focus on the learners’ ability to use knowledge and skills learned. It is therefore important to interrogate the rational of assessment.

2.4 RATIONALE FOR ASSESSMENT

The use of formative assessment for learning or other diagnostic efforts within the classroom provides information that should help facilitate improved pedagogical practices and instructional outcomes (Karee, Dunn & Scan 2009). Goodrum, Hackling & Rennie (2001:2) assert that, “an assessment is a key component of
teaching and learning process.” The assessment process fits into a variety of classroom decision-making contexts and serves as a means of conveying information to learners (Stiggins & Conklin 1992:179). Goodrum et. al (2001; 2), “Assessment enhances learning, provides feedback about learner progress, builds confidence and self esteem, and develops skills in evaluation”. Unfortunately research shows that high quality formative assessment is relatively rare in classrooms and most teachers do not engage well in such assessment (Fair Test, 2007). They go on to say, formative assessment facilitates improved instructional practices, identifies gaps in the curriculum and contributes to increased learner performance. Black & William (1998:10), define formative assessment as, “All those activities undertaken by the teacher, and or their learners which provide information to be used as feedback to modify teaching and learning activities in which they are gauged.”

Because assessment can be designed and packaged as formative and summative, summative assessments, by contrast are usually conducted at the end of a particular course or specific points. The purpose is to form a judgment about the effectiveness of a course or an instruction (The Teaching and Evaluation Guide, 2002:3). The judgment may be used to make decisions that include certification, award of scholarships, the curriculum or teaching adjustment. The purpose of assessment is to find out whether learners have benefited from instruction (Airasain, 1994). Stiggins & Conklin 1992:179 contend that, an assessment process fits in a wide variety of classroom decision making contexts and serves as a means of conveying information to learners and teachers in order to make decisions that include:

- Diagnoses of the strengths and weaknesses of individual learners.
• Diagnoses of class and group needs.
• Grouping learners for instruction within or across classes.
• Identifying and selecting learners who are in need of special services.
• Assigning grades on report cards.
• Evaluating the effectiveness of their instructional effort.
• Communicating instructional objectives or achievement expectations.
• Communicating social or interpersonal expectations.
• Controlling learner behaviours and motivation, and
• Enhancing test-taking skills.

Gipps & Stobart (1993) identify six uses of assessment below:

• Screening: this refers to the process of testing groups of learners, normally at primary level, to identify individuals who are in need of special help.
• Diagnosis: this involves the use of tests to identify children’s strengths and (more usual) weaknesses.
• Record-keeping: test scores and teacher assessments are put into learner records to then help in the transfer process from one school level to the next.
• Feedback: results provide feedback about the progress of individual learners and the teacher’s success. On the other hand, results of classes can provide information to the school administration about the progress and success across the school, and school results can be used by outsiders to ‘evaluate’ schools and teachers.
• Certification: a learner is provided with a qualification that signifies that he or she has reached a certain level of competence or knowledge.

• Selection: learners are selected into different institutions for further and higher education. They can also be allocated to different streams or sets within institutions.

The primary purpose of learner assessment is to support this learning, (Cameron et al. 1998: 6) hence the need for teachers to understand assessment processes. The introduction to Primary School Curriculum (1999) strongly supports that assessment contributes significantly to teaching/learning and states that,

Assessment is central to the process of teaching and learning. It is used to monitor learning process and to ascertain achievement in each area of the curriculum. Through assessment the teacher constructs a comprehensive picture of the short term and long-term needs of the child and plans future work accordingly. Assessment is also used to identify children with specific learning difficulties so that the nature of the support and assistance they need can be ascertained, and appropriate programmes put in place to enable them to cope with particular difficulties they are encountering.

Assessment assists the communication about children’s progress and development between teacher and child, between teacher and parent and between teacher and teacher (Primary Teacher Curriculum, 1999; 17)

Thus teachers are expected to use assessment to guide effective decision making, particularly with respect to the identification, remediation, and ongoing evaluation of learners with learning difficulties. From the foregone observations, the power of classroom assessment primarily resides in formative practices that allow adaptation of teaching and learning activities to learner needs, but appropriate forms of summative assessment can also be designed to support the teaching and learning process (Stiggins, 1992). Assessment provides evidence of performance relative to
content and performance standards. It provides teachers and learners with insight into learner errors and misconceptions and helps lead the teacher directly to action.

Classroom assessment informs teachers how effectively they are teaching and learner show effectively they are learning. Through classroom assessment, teachers get continual feedback on whether and how well learners are learning what teachers hope they are teaching. And learners are required, through a variety of classroom assessment exercises to monitor their learning, to reflect on it, and to take corrective action while there is still time left in the semester (Cross, 1998: 6).

Teachers are required to have a clear understanding of their learners’ abilities. Without a clear understanding of learners’ abilities, teachers have no definite idea whether or not learners are meeting standards. With little or no teacher education in assessment, the ability to define learner achievement becomes a daunting task for the teacher (Stiggins, 1992).

The foregone discussion indicates that assessment plays a pivotal role in the teaching and learning situation, however according to (Black and William1998a) in Butt, (2010:8) day to day assessment in classrooms reveal the following shortcomings;

- Superficial rote learning often takes place, with classroom assessment based on the recall of details of knowledge which learners soon forget.
- Teachers fail to review the forms of assessment used, do not discuss assessment practices with other teachers and rarely reflect on what is being assessed.
- There is an over-emphasis on grading and an under emphasis on learning.
- There is a tendency to use normative rather than criterion referenced assessment systems.
• Teachers emphasize competition through their assessment method rather than personal achievement and performance.

• Assessment methods tend to reinforce perception of failure among the less able leading to de-motivation and loss of confidence in their ability to learn.

• Dominance in external summative testing is still the norm.

Black et. al, (2003) have also found that the general problems related to assessment can be broadly divided into three categories; those concerned with effective learning; those concerned with negative impact and those concerned with the managerial role of assessment.

1. **Effective learning.** Effective learning is diminishing because testing encourages rote and superficial learning; assessment methods are not critically reviewed among teachers in schools, and the quantity and presentation of work are emphasised at the neglect of its quality.

2. **Negative impact.** This is exacerbated by the over emphasis on rewarding grades and under the provision of useful advice, reinforces a lack of emphasis on the role of learning

3. **Managerial role.** The managerial roles tend to dominate rather than relating assessment to learning. Often teachers can predict their learners’ likely performance on external test, usually because their own assessment regimes closely imitate these but are less aware of learners’ needs Butt (2010:8).

To sum it all (Delandshere, (2001: 130) finds it striking that in countries like the United States, the assessment situation is gloomy when he posits,

> In countries such as United States educational assessment practices still reflect for the most part the legacy of the past: the purposes are narrow and the methods used generate limited data. The assumptions and theories of learning are
implicit; examinees submit to the process without active and equal participation (e.g. critique, reflection, self-reflection), and secrecy, reward, and punishment remain key concepts.

In this view, Greaney & Kellaghan (2004:61) highlights that, despite the central role of assessment in the teaching and learning process there is evidence however, that quality of classroom assessment may be deficient in many ways. Problems that have been identified include the use of poorly focused questions, a predominance of questions that require short answers involving factual knowledge and the evocation of responses that involve repetition rather than reflection and a lack of procedures designed to develop higher order cognitive skills (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Madaus & Kellaghan, 1992). Greaney & Kellaghan (2004) also commented that, “Classroom assessment practices include the prevalence of poorly qualified teachers, large class sizes and poor facilities and shortages of learning materials (including books and places to store them.” In the Zimbabwean situation most of the teachers are qualified, but large class sizes and poor facilities are prevalent in most schools. These may pose as a hindrance to effective assessment. Furthermore the quality of teachers teacher education and the frequency of staff development will determine the nature of assessment in the schools. If teachers are not adequately trained and fail to receive the needed staff development then, this will adversely affect assessment in the schools resulting to assessment problems in the primary schools.

2.5 FORMS OF ASSESSMENT

There are many purposes for assessment currently in use but also with their advantages and limitations about assessment issues and concerns. It can be argued that the greater the diversity of the methods of assessment, the fairer the assessment is to the learner. According to Wragg (2001:6),
Assessment has so many purposes that it is not surprising that there are so many styles to go with them. No one form of assessment can suit all conceivable purposes and reactions. Assessment includes formative and summative, formal and informal, written and oral, criterion and norm referenced, ipsative and continuous assessment. Below is a brief discussion of the dimensions of assessment.

It would appear that in the Zimbabwean primary schools, all the other forms of assessment are used except continuous assessment and ipsative assessment. Continuous assessment would minimize any adverse effects of summative assessment. NCFOT, 1993:3 argue that there is evidence that summative assessment such as examinations adversely affect learners. Continuous assessment would be complementary to the national examination. Continuous assessment involves the use of a variety of assessment instruments, assessing various components of learning not only the cognitive process but including behaviours, personality traits and manual dexterity (USAID, 2003). It would also appear that in the Zimbabwean schools, assessment is centred on the cognitive processes and neglecting the other domains. It is therefore in the interest of this research to determine why assessment procedures in the primary schools mainly revolve around the cognitive domain.

2.5.1 Formative assessment versus Summative assessment.

Formative assessment

Formative assessment occurs when teachers feed information back to learners in ways that enable the learner to learn better, or when learners can engage in similar self reflective processes (National Center For Open Testing [NCFOT], 2007). Formative tests are not graded and are used as an on-going diagnostic tool, hence,
the teacher employs the results of formative assessment solely to modify and adjust practices, to reflect the needs and progress of learners (Swearing, 2002).

Sadler (1989) conceptualises formative assessment as being concerned with how judgment about the quality of learner’s response can be used to shape and improve the competence;

….continuous assessment cannot function formatively when it is cumulative, that is each attempt or piece of work submitted is scored and the scores are added together at the end of the course. This practice tends to produce in learners a mindset that if a piece of work does not contribute toward the total ‘it is not worth doing (1989; 141).

Harlen (2008:139) illustrates the key aspects of formative assessment as follows;

- Evidence is gathered about ongoing learning activities that can be used to make decisions about further learning.
- The evidence is judged in terms of progress toward the detailed lesson goals. These goals may vary for different individual pupils or for groups and so comparison between pupils are not sensible or justified.
- Pupils are aware of their lesson goals and can help in deciding their next steps toward the goals.
- The process is cyclical and ongoing; information gathered is used as an integral part of teaching and learning.
- No judgment of grade or level is involved, only the judgment of how to help a learner take the next steps in learning. Information gathered frequently by the teacher will be able to feed back to correct any mistake judgment.

Black et al (2003:2) also contends that classroom based formative assessment …can occur many times in every lesson. It involves several different methods for encouraging learners to express what they
are thinking and several ways of acting on such evidence. It has to be within the control of the individual teacher and for this reason; change in formative assessment is an integral and intimate part of the teacher’s daily work.

However, formative assessment is seldom used (Brookhart, 1999), a fact that led the NCFOT (1999:4) to conclude that, “Most teachers do not know well how to engage such assessment”. Wiliam & Black (1996) depicts the formative assessment scenario in many countries as generally one of weak practice. According to Black (1998). The main weaknesses are:

- Classroom evaluation practices generally encourage superficial and rote learning, concentrating on recall of isolated details, usually items of knowledge which pupils soon forget.
- Teachers do not generally review the assessment questions that they use and do not discuss them critically with peers, so there is little reflection on what is being assessed.
- The grading function is over-emphasised and the learning function underemphasised.
- There is a tendency to use a normative rather than a criterion approach, which emphasizes competition between pupils rather than personal improvement of each.
- The evidence is that with such practices the effect of feedback is to teach the weaker pupils that they lack ability, so that they are de-motivated and lose confidence in their own capacity to learn (Black, 1998:111).

Angelo and Cross (1993) highlighted the following advantages and disadvantages of formative assessment;

**Advantages**
• Allows for the identification of conceptual errors.
• Promotes active reflection of instruction.
• Encourages feedback that enhances learning.
• Prevents motivation for learner cheating.

Disadvantages
• May be difficult to motivate learners on low stake assignments.
• Time consuming for teachers to provide effective feedback.
• May not be practical for large enrolments.

2.5.2 Summative assessment

Black et. al, (2003:2) defines summative assessment as involving, “Tests that are frequent, isolated from learning, carried out on special occasions with formal rituals and often conducted by methods over which individual teachers have little or no control”. Summative assessments are given periodically at a particular point in time to determine what learners know, and what they do not know. For example;
• district benchmark or interim assessments
• end of unit or chapter tests
• schools that are used for accountability for schools and learners (Angelo and Cross, 1993).

Harlen (2008a:139-40) illustrates the key elements of summative assessment as follows;
• The process takes place at a particular time; it is not on going and cyclical.
• The evidence is interpreted according to terms of publicly available criteria.
• The judgment is reported in terms of levels which need to be underpinned by some quality assurance procedure.
• Pupils have a limited role in the process.
Summative assessments should use well designed tests which are valid, reliable and fit for the purpose to enable an accurate assessment of learner attainment (Butt, 2010:64). Butt went further to say that unfortunately summative assessment has developed into high stakes process through the use and abuse of public examinations. The high status of examination has become significant influence in policy and practice in the following aspects:

- The more important such results have become, the more likely they are to distort the process or try to monitor teaching through proxy of exam grade.
- The important test results become the more teachers teach to test.
- Examination technique is taught as is question spotting. These do not necessarily improve performance.
- When examination results are major of future life and education choices, pupils, employers, parents, educational institutions, and society treat these as an ultimate “end point” of education rather than a (flawed) indication of achievement (pp: 54).

The impact of high stakes formative assessment has been reviewed by Black & William, 1998; Stiggins, 1999 and Lin, 2000. Accordig to Helen (2005:208) “There are strong themes in findings from these reviews about the use of tests in ways that affect the status of the teacher or school’s future and of individual learners.” The authors went further to highlight that,

This high stakes use is universally found to be associated with teachers focusing on the content of tests, administering repeated practice tests, training learners in answers to specific questions or types of questions and adopting transmission styles of teaching (pp, 209).
In such circumstances teachers make little use of assessment formatively to help the learning process (Osborn et al., 2000; Pollard et al., 2000). The result of this focus on passing tests is that test scores rise, but the rise in scores is not the rise in achievement, rather, it is an indication that teachers can train learners to pass any kind of test even those tests intending to assess high thinking skills (Harlen, 2005). This undermines the claim that better tests will lead to better teaching and learning (Kellaghan et al., 1996; 53).

Kelleghan & Gleaney (2003) also observed further worrying issues about high stakes and reported that;

- Teachers align teaching with examinations in their instruction and yet only a subset or sample of an entire achievement domain is assessed in an examination. Teachers will strive to increase the overlap between instructional and test content leading to a narrowing of the curriculum and to a situation in which examination becomes the manifest of the domain (LeMahieu & Leinharrdt, 1985)

- High stakes tend to affect teaching strategies, learning strategies, learner involvement in learning and their attitudes to learning. Teachers will tend to drill and may expect learners to engage in learning strategies that are superficial or short term such as memorising, rehearsing and rote learning. It has been found that when high stakes are attached to performance, learners tend to be less successful in acquiring higher order and transferable skills; learning tasks are perceived as not inherently interesting and, if a reward is removed, learners are less likely to engage in a task.
A further problem that is associated with high stakes examinations is considerable effort and time will be put into drill dominated test preparation by teachers and learners (e.g. in sitting mock examinations). This focus on test preparation skills may also serve to make learners direct their efforts towards mastering strategies to help them over the examination hurdle, rather than towards developing mastery of subject matter and knowing lasting competencies.

The mock examination was also criticised for limiting the scope of instruction to what the teacher thought would be examined, and therefore leading to incoherent lessons Kellaghan & Gleaney (2004:48).

In the same vein, Herrera et al (2007:13) state that standardised tests,

- Limit and negatively affect the quality of content –area instruction;
- Prompt teacher to narrow curriculum taught in the classrooms;
- Encourage teaching to the test;
- Divert classroom instruction to an emphasis on low level content and basic skills;
- Increase the redundancy of instruction.

Yeh (2005) in Fisher (2007:127) also raised the following concern about standardised testing;

- Narrowing the curriculum by excluding subject matter not tested. For example, with a significant focus on reading and mathematics, the concern that social studies, music, and art are being neglected because they are not commonly tested.
- Excluding topics not tested or not likely to appear on the test even within tested subjects.
- Reducing learning to memorization of easily recalled facts.
- Devoting too much classroom time to test preparation rather than learning.

From this literature it is clear that if Zimbabwean teachers concentrate on high stakes examinations then it would be at the detriment of the proper teaching and learning situation.

Quality assessment information can shape how teachers organise their courses and what schools offer their learners (NCOFT, 1999: 3). There is research evidence that such examinations can adversely affect learners (Phi-Delta Kappan: 1998). Summative assessment is intended to summarise learner attainment at a particular time, whereas formative assessment is intended to promote further improvement (Crooks, 2001). Teachers commonly view assessment as apart from their regular teaching, serving the purpose of assigning grades (Shavels & Seal, 2003). However, in order for instruction to be effective teachers must also assess learners while learning is in progress (Banicky & Heidi, 2006). The thrust of Zimbabwean primary school assessment is on summative and quasi formative assessment.

Summative assessment would not give information that is necessary for assisting and guiding pupils during the learning process. Teachers need to strike a balance between formative and summative assessments in order to make a variety of decisions. Schools should reconcile both formative and summative assessment with a strong focus on providing feedback to the learner and teacher (UNESCO, 2005). The difference between formative and summative assessment is not in timing, but
purpose and effect; assessments made during the course of a unit or session may be used for summative or grading purposes rather than for truly formative purposes (Gipps: 1994). However, according to Sadle (1989:120) formative assessment is initially connected with feedback and feedback to the teacher and pupil are separated;

Teachers use feedback to make programmatic decisions with respect to readiness, diagnosis and remediation. Learners use it to monitor the strengths and weaknesses of their performances, so that aspects associated with success or high quality can be recognized and reinforced, and unsatisfactory aspects modified or improved on.

It is clear that both summative and formative assessments play a pivotal role in the teaching and learning situation. Formative assessment is considered to be “…assessment carried out during the instructional process for the purpose of improving teaching and learning,” while summative assessment is “assessments carried out at the end of an instruction unit or course of study for the purpose of giving grades or otherwise certifying learner proficiency” (Shepard, 2006: 627). However Croft, Strafford & Mapa’s (2000) research demonstrated that the majority of primary school teachers surveyed reported frequently or always altering their teaching as a result of information from standardised tests and diagnostic tools, an example of so-called ‘summative’ assessments being used for ‘formative’ purposes. More research is needed to determine the extent to which teachers’ conceptions allow them to see assessments as having multiple purposes.

Stiggins (2002) warns that teachers should not fall prey to pitting one kind of assessment against the other. Both formative and summative assessments are important and should be used. It becomes mandatory for teachers to have a clear
concept of the terms. Furthermore educational policies need to support the use of both summative and formative assessment if they are to be utilised. As the situation appears in Zimbabwe, there seems to be some gaps in knowledge in so far as assessment understanding is among the teachers. Teachers should be introduced to the concepts underlying assessment and should learn about their use and interpretation (Kelleghan & Gleaney, 2004:49). Thus, teachers need to understand issues like diagnostic assessment.

2.5.3 Diagnostic assessment.

Although some authors delineate diagnostic assessment as a component of formative assessment, most consider it a distinct form of measurement (McMillan, 2000). Learners’ knowledge, skills, or misconceptions are designed prior to planning instruction (McMunn, 2011:3). In practice the purpose of diagnostic assessment is to ascertain, prior to instruction, each learner’s strengths, weaknesses, knowledge and skills (Swearing, 2002). Establishing these permit the instructor to remediate learners and adjust curriculum to meet each pupil’s unique needs because the primary purpose of the diagnostic test is remediation, it is both ungraded and low stakes (Swearing, 2002).

2.5.4 Assessment of learning versus Assessment for learning and assessment as learning.

Assessment can recognise two principal functions namely, assessment for learning and assessment of learning. Instead of recognising the more familiar categories of formative and summative assessment, this new categorisation does not replace the more familiar description or the functions of assessment; they are subsumed into the
new categorisation (National Council for Curriculum Assessment [NCCA], 2004:23). The NCCA further recognises that this description of assessment is comparatively recent in the educational thinking and is related to educational theory and ideas that have come in the forefront during the last 25 years. These ideas arise from the view of learning that posits the child as an active agent in constructing his/her own learning in the context of social interaction with peers, the teacher and the wider community. Central to this view, the role of assessment is to establish the child’s stage of development in any aspect of learning and that assessment information will be used to ‘scaffold’ the next stage in the learning process (NCCA: 23). Both assessment for learning and assessment of learning are complementary and interrelated processes.

2.5.4.1 Assessment of learning.

Assessment of learning looks at a learner’s level of performance on a specific task or at the end of a unit of teaching and learning (Curriculum Support for Primary Teachers, 2007). The information obtained from this kind of assessment can be used for reporting to a variety of recipients, including parents, other teachers, other schools and other professionals associated with the education of the child. Assessment information in relation to assessment of learning will constitute a record of the child’s progress and attainment, whether at class level, at the end of a unit of work, at the end of term or at the end of the year. According to the NCCA Draft Document (2004:27) Assessment of learning may involve:

- Reviewing a child’s written work for a term, making an overall judgment according to agreed and specified criteria and assigning a grade.
• Administering a group of standardized tests of reading and generating a standard score and percentile rank for each pupil.
• Reviewing a child’s portfolio of work for a year, making an overall judgment and, after discussion with the child, assign a grade.

Summative records of achievement such as standardised test scores or overall grades for the term or the year, may be of some value in the context of assessment for learning, their primary value is in the area of assessment of learning (NCCA draft document, 2004: 28). Although information gleaned from this type of assessment can only help in evaluating certain aspects of the learning processes, summative assessments happen too far down the learning path to provide information at classroom level to make instructional judgment and interactions during the learning process. Summative assessments certainly have a place and a purpose in our system; however, they cannot diagnose learner’s needs as learning unfolds or provide minute-by-minute or day-by-day feedback that is needed to make critical instructional decision (Angelo & Cross, 1993). This can be effectively done through assessment for learning which will be discussed in the next paragraph.

2.5.4.2 Assessment for learning
Assessment for learning is an essential and integral part of the teaching/learning process that reflects the belief that all learners can improve (New South Wales [NSW] Education Department, 2007). Assessment for learning has come to refer to ‘any assessment for which the first priority is to serve the purpose of promoting learners’ learning (Black et al., 2003: 2). It helps learners understand and recognise
the standards they are aiming for. It also provides feedback that helps learners and teachers understand the next steps in learning and plan how to achieve the steps.

Assessment for learning is concerned with applying the information gained from the different modes of assessment to the learning/teaching process ACCA (2004:23). They continued to argue that, through assessment for learning, the teacher will gather extensive and continuous information about a child’s progress and attainment through observing his/her performance in, and engagement with the day-to-day learning activities in the classroom. Tasks and tests undertaken both in the classroom and at home will be directly related to learning objectives; and will add a further dimension of the teacher’s constructs of the progress of the individual children. Thus in using assessment for learning, the teacher keeps accounting for all the information about a child’s progress, attainment and possible areas of difficulty in providing regular and high quality feedback to the child and in planning for future learning experiences (NCCA 2004:24). Black and William (1998:61) drew from their review of more than 250 articles related to formative assessment; stated that formative assessment does improve teaching and that the gains in learner achievement were amongst the largest ever reported. Assessment for learning includes the function of assessment known as formative assessment, but is wider in scope since it also includes diagnostic and evaluation assessment. Chappus (2003:35) also argues that,

It is tempting to equate assessment for learning with the term formative assessment, but they are not the same. Assessment for learning is about far more than testing more frequently or providing teachers with evidence so they can revise instruction, although these are part of it, in addition, we now understand that assessment for learning must involve learners.
Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshal & William (2003) also make a distinction between the two and argue that, assessment for learning is any assessment for which the priority for its design is to serve the purpose of promoting learning compared to assessment design that serves to provide information to be used as feedback by teachers and pupils in assessing themselves to modify teaching. William and Thompson (2008:61) observe, “...an assessment is formative to the extent that information from the assessment is fed back within the system and actually used to improve performance of the system in some way”. According to Stiggins (2002:761)

When teachers assess for learning, teachers use the classroom assessment process and the continuous flow of information about learners that it provides in order to advance, not merely to check on the learner learning. They do this by,

- Understanding and articulating in advance of teaching, the achievement targets that their learners are to hit.
- Inform learners about those learning goals from the beginning of the learning process.
- Become assessment literate and be able to transform their expectations into assessment exercises and scoring procedure that accurately reflect learner achievement.
- Using classroom assessment to build learner confidence in them as learners and help them take responsibility of their learning so as to lay a foundation for life learning.
- Translating classroom assessment results into frequent descriptive feedback (versus judgemental feedback) for learners, providing them with specific insights as to how to improve.
- Continuously adjusting instruction based on the results of classroom assessments.
- Engaging learners in regular self- assessment, with standards held constant so that learners can watch themselves grow over time and thus feel in charge of their own success.
- Actively involving learners in communicating with their teachers and their families about their achievement and success.

Assessment for learning has come to refer to ‘any assessment for which the first priority is to serve the purpose of promoting learners’ learning’ (Black et al., 2003: 2).
If assessment information about learning is used, say, for recording purposes or for long-term curriculum improvement without helping the learning of the learners currently involved, it might be formative for the teacher, but not for the learners (Black et. al., 2003). Assessment for learning is primarily about addressing the needs of the present learners. Teachers who assess for learning use day-to-day classroom assessment activities to involve learners directly and deeply in their own learning, increasing their confidence and motivation to learn, by emphasising progress rather than failure and defeat (Stiggins, 1992; 2001).

2.5.4.3 Assessment as Learning?
Assessment as learning focuses on learners and emphasises assessment as a process of meta-cognition (knowledge of one’s own thought processes) for learners. Assessment as learning is based in research about how learning happens, and is characterised by learners reflecting on their own learning and making adjustments so that they achieve deeper understanding (Manitoba Education, 2006). The role of the teacher in assessment as learning includes designing instruction and assessment that allows all learners to think about, and monitor, their own learning. According to Manitoba Education (2006:43 ) the teacher’s role in promoting the development of independent learner’s through assessment as learning is to;

- model and teach the skills of self-assessment;
- guide learners in setting goals, and monitoring their progress toward them;
- provide exemplars and models of good practice and quality work that reflect curriculum outcomes;
- work with learners to develop clear criteria of good practice;
• guide learners in developing internal feedback or self-monitoring mechanisms to validate and question their own thinking, and to become comfortable with the ambiguity and uncertainty that is inevitable in learning anything new;
• provide regular and challenging opportunities to practise, so that learners can become confident, competent self-assessors;
• monitor learners’ meta-cognitive processes as well as their learning, and provide descriptive feedback; and
• create an environment where it is safe for learners to take chances and where support is readily available.

It is necessary for teachers to be conversant with assessment for/as and of learning. These can either be formal or informal.

2.5.5 Formal versus informal assessment.

Formal assessment is structured (Wragg, 2001: 7). It includes examinations, practical tests under controlled conditions, presentations and vivas (Freeman & Lewis, 1998:31). Formal assessment aims solely at obtaining knowledge about the learner; it is obtrusive but has no direct instructional function (Frith & Macintosh, 1991). Formal assessments are done by the teacher, or by people who may never have seen or worked with the children (Conner, 1991:4). Thomas (1990) argues that when the assessments are set, the teacher and children know that the occasion is special in that the process of teaching is abandoned for the time being. The children must rely on their own resources and expect no help. Both formal and informal assessments are carried out in Zimbabwean primary education. Teachers tend to set their own tests to assess pupils. However, the tests may not be a reliable form of
assessment. This could be attributed to poor assessment skills, on the part of the teacher. It is therefore the purpose of this study, to find out the extent to which poor assessment skills contribute to assessment problems in primary schools.

In most classes, assessment tends to be regular and informal, rather than irregular and formal, because teaching often consists of frequent switches in who speaks and who listens, and teachers make many of their decisions within a second (Wragg, 2001:3). Informal assessment is that which is used to continually collect data in the course of daily teaching (Conner, 1991:4). It may take place usually without pre-planning (Freeman & Lewis, 1998:31). While informal assessment utilises open-ended exercises reflecting learner learning, teachers (and learners) can infer "from the mere presence of concepts, as well as correct application, that the learner possesses the intended outcomes" (Muir & Wells 1983, 95). Informal assessment, which is often used diagnostically, must be obtrusive if the teacher is to obtain reliable insight about the pupil’s abilities and development. Frith & Macintosh (1991:17), contend that in carrying out informal assessment, once pupils are working on their assignment, it is common practice for teachers to walk around monitoring what learners are doing. The former can be said to be a ‘publicly’ satisfied purpose for public use, and the latter as a ‘privately’ specific purpose for private use. Agreeably, it is the practice, in the Zimbabwean primary schools, that teachers move around inside their classrooms as pupils work on their assignments; during which time, they casually assess their pupils. However, big classes may deter teachers from efficiently evaluating pupils as they work. The study aims to ascertain whether or not such a problem existed in the Zimbabwean primary schools.
2.5.6 Written versus oral

Wragg (2001:11) suggests that there are two considerations when written and oral assessments are being undertaken:

- The nature of knowledge or skills being appraised is to be considered. If one is assessing drama, then it might be valid to test it orally.
- The second issue is related to purpose, time and feasibility. If a record is required for future use, by the pupil or teacher, then written work may be useful. If assessment is informal and immediate then it is often tackled as a natural part of oral classroom discourse, like a question and answer, a comment from the teacher, and an explanation from a pupil with a teacher's response.

2.5.7 Criterion-referenced

Lin and Gronlund (2000) define Criterion-referenced assessments in the following:

Criterion-Referenced Assessment: A test or other type of assessment designed to provide a measure of performance that is interpretable in terms of a clearly defined and delimited domain of learning tasks." (p. 42)

These authors provide the following additional information about criterion-referenced assessments:

"...criterion-referenced tests include items that are directly relevant to the learning outcomes to be measured, without regard to whether the items can be used to discriminate among learners. No attempt is made to eliminate easy items or alter their difficulty. If the learning tasks are easy, then test items will be easy. The goal of the criterion-referenced test is to obtain a description of the specific knowledge and skills each learner can demonstrate. This information is useful for planning both group and individual instruction." (p. 43)

"Criterion-referenced interpretations can be made in various ways. For example, we can (1) describe the specific learning
tasks a learner is able to perform (e.g., counts from 1 to 100), (2) indicate the percentage of tasks a learner performs correctly (e.g., spells 65 percent of the words in the word list), or (3) compare the test performance to a set performance standard and decide whether the learner meets a given standard (e.g., performed at the proficient level). (p. 43)

Criterion referenced assessment is also called standards based assessments (Hamilton et al., 2002) are designed to measure what learners know and can do in comparison to academic standards for a subject area (Nitko, 2004). The criteria or standard serve the following:

- to describe; clarify and communicate; to contextualize and fine tune expectations; to facilitate the substantiation of judgment; to safeguard against subjectivity and bias; to ensure fairness and to provide a defensible framework for assessing LeBrun and Johnson (1994:185). The criteria serve the following purposes “to describe, clarify and communicate requirements , to contextualise and fine tune expectations, to facilitate the substantiation of judgment, to safeguard against subjectivity and bias, to ensure fairness, and to provide a defensible framework for assessing” (Scario, 2005:9).

There are multiple ways to score a criterion-referenced assessment. These include checklists, rating scales, grades rubrics and percent accurate. Criteria are usually listed in terms of what pupils should know or be able to do in order to obtain the award or to be given a particular grade level (Wragg, 2003:22). No attempt is made to compare learners with one another as with the case in norm referenced assessments.

2.5.8 Norm referenced assessments.

"Norm-Referenced Assessment: A test or other type of assessment designed to provide a measure of performance that is interpretable in terms of an individual’s relative standing to some known group Lin & Gronlund (2000: 42). On the contrary, norm referenced assessment is a way of establishing a rank order of learners in
terms of their achievement (Freeman & Lewis, 1998:16). The performance of learners is assessed relative to others in the group such as a class or a year. Using norm referenced approach to assessment grades each learner “according to a preconceived notion about how the distribution of grades will come out” (Dunn et al 2004:22). Fitting into such a predetermined distribution is commonly referred to as a bell curve (Burton, 2004:73). Norm referenced assessment has been criticised because it traditionally focused on content and yet recent trend is to assess skills as well as content (Bond, 1996; 2). Unlike norm referenced assessments which compare learners with others, ipsative assessment is a self comparison as presented the following discussion.

2.5.9 Ipsative Assessment

Ipsative assessment is a self-comparison either in the same domains overtime or comparative to other domains within the learners. Rowntree (1987:178) highlights, “...how well the learner has performed compared with their own previous efforts.” It is important when learners set their own learning objectives. According to McMillan and Hearn (2008:1) “Self-assessment occurs when learners judge their own work to improve performance as they identify discrepancies between current and desired performance”. Self-assessment is generally viewed as a formative strategy, rather than one used to determine a learner’s final grade. Its main purpose is for learners to identify their own strengths and weakness and to work to make improvements to meet specific criteria (Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009). Furthermore it is used to promote self-regulation, to help learners reflect on their progress and to inform revisions and improvements on a project or paper (Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009).
Research shows that when learners take an active role in “monitoring and regulating their learning, then the rate of their learning is dramatically increased” (Wiliam, 2007: 3). Self-regulated learners “adaptively regulate their use of cognitive tactics and strategies in tasks” (Winne, 1996: 327). Ross (2006:5) argues that in order for self-assessment to be truly effective four conditions must be in place: the self-assessment criteria is negotiated between teachers and learners, learners are taught how to apply the criteria, learners receive feedback on their self assessments and teachers help learners use assessment data to develop an action plan.

2.5.10 Continuous Assessment

Continuous assessment could be defined as a mechanism whereby the final grading of learners in the cognitive, psychomotor and an affective domain of learning systematically takes account of all their performances during a given period of schooling (Falayo, 1986). Another definition by Airasain (1991) describes continuous assessment as an assessment approach which should depict a full range of sources and methods used to gather, interpret and synthesise information about learners that is used to help teachers understand their learners, plan and monitor instruction and establish viable classroom culture. From the above definitions, it could be inferred that continuous assessment is an assessment approach, which involves the use of a variety of assessment instruments, and assessing various components of learning.

Such an approach will also take place over a long period of time and would be holistic, representing the learner in total. Continuous assessment can either be summative or formative (National Institute of Educational Development, 1999). They continue to argue that, formative continuous assessment is any assessment made
during the school year that is meant to improve learning and help shape and direct the teaching/learning process. Summative continuous assessment is meant to determine the effectiveness of the whole learning episode. The continuous assessment mark, along with the end-of-year examination, contributes to the final grade (McTighe & Ferrara, 1994). In other words, continuous assessment is a process by which work done during a course is assessed as part of the learners’ summative assessment (Petty, 2001:413). In the Zimbabwean context, continuous assessment especially formative, is likely to be difficult to implement due to lack of resources, such as time. Furthermore, contrary to McTighe & Ferrara (1994)’s suggestion, the continuous assessment mark does not contribute to the final grade in Zimbabwe. This could be the reason why carrying out continuous assessment is often not prioritised in Zimbabwean primary schools. Some teachers may also not have the expertise to carry out continuous assessment. Apart from this, as highlighted in paragraph 2 of 2.3.4, large class sizes as well as overloaded curricula, can make it difficult for teachers to carry out continuous assessment. According to UNESCO 2005, effective assessment techniques require adequate resources, teachers who are grounded in assessment techniques and relatively small classes. All these requirements do not fit the realities of many African countries, including Zimbabwe.

2.5.11 Alternative assessment
Alternative assessment refers to procedures and techniques that can be easily incorporated into daily activities of the classroom. Unlike standardised testing, it does not provide a comparison of an individual to a large group beyond the learners in a given classroom (Hamayan, 1995). Huerta-Macias (1995:8) refers to alternative
assessments as, “an alternative to standardized testing.” Alternative assessment takes into account the whole learner and his/her social, academic, and physical context (Harp, 1991). Alternative assessments utilise a variety of innovative testing procedures including portfolios, self and peer assessment, conferencing, diaries, learning logs and teacher checklist and observations (McNamara, 1996; Skehan, 1998). Hernman, Aschbacher & Inters (1992:6) put forward some characteristics of alternative assessment. They state that alternative assessment;

• Requires learners to perform, create, and produce or do something;
• Tap into higher level thinking and problem solving skills;
• Approximate real world application; and
• Uses tasks that represent meaningful instructional activities.

Ensure that people, not machines do the scoring, using human judgments and call upon teachers to perform new instructional and assessment roles. Alternative classroom are not ends in themselves but they are designed to foster powerful, productive learning for learners (Hargreaves et al, 2002).

2.5.11.1 Authentic Assessments

Authentic assessment is a form of assessment in which learners are asked to perform real-world tasks that demonstrate meaningful application of essential knowledge and skills (Mueller, 2003). Wiggins (1989) further explains that authentic assessment provides learners with the ability to engage worthy problems or questions of importance, in which learners must use knowledge to fashion performances effectively and creatively. Authentic assessment is any type of assessment that requires learners to demonstrate skills and competencies that realistically represent problems and situations likely to be encountered in daily life
(Mantero, 2002). In this view authentic assessment involves, “activities which can be direct models of the reality” (Black, 1998, p. 87).

Wiggins and McTighe (2005:337) assert that in fact, “authentic assessments are meant to do more than “test”: they should teach learners (and teachers) what the “doing” of a subject looks like and what kinds of performance challenges are actually considered most important in a field or profession”. Authentic assessment centres not only on the product of learning, but also on the process learners go through to create that product to provide ongoing feedback and feed forward for improving each learner’s performance relative, not to others, but to the learner herself/himself. A small study of teachers in the USA found that, “under some circumstances, performance-based assessment can change specific behaviours and procedures in the classroom” (Firestone, Mayrowetz, & Fairman, 1998: 11). Authentic assessment denotes that:

1. The assessment tries to reflect the complexity of the real world and provides more valid data about learner competence, by letting the learners solve realistic problems (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000).

2. Assessment criteria, as well as standards for excellent performance, reflect what is considered quality within a specified community of practice (Wiggins, 1998).

Rule (2006) says that every authentic assessment will be comprised of four main components:

- They involve real-world problems that mimic the work of professionals.
- They include open-ended inquiry, thinking skills, and meta-cognition.
• They engage learners in discourse and social learning.
• They empower learners by choice to direct their own learning.

Wiggins (1989a:41) is also of the view that authentic assessments present four basic characteristics as follows,

• The task should be representative of performance in the field.
• Attention should be paid to teaching and learning the criteria for assessment.
• Self-assessment should play a great role.
• When possible, learners should present their work publicly and defend it.

Tanner (1997:14) provides a good summary of the interrelationship between authenticity and learning experiences noting that,

> Authentic assessment presumes that learners will produce something that reflects not a narrow, compartmentalised repetition of what was presented to them, but an integrated scholarship which connects their learning housed in other disciplines and which is presented in a setting consistent with that in which the learning is likely to be most useful in the future.

This form of assessment includes a variety of formats such as dialogue journals, verbal reports, and conferences, learning logs, self-assessment checklists and portfolios. Studies conducted by Van Horn, (1997); Vining & Bell, (2005) indicate that the higher scores obtained by learners who are frequently tested by traditional tests, are attributed to learners’ test wisdom and the teaching of test-taking strategies. On the contrary, studies by (Nicol & Owen, 2008; Supovitz, 2001) suggest that performance assessment results in modest or equivocal effects on learning and instruction.
2.5.11.2 Portfolios

The portfolio movement is more closely associated with efforts to change the impact of high-stakes, often standardised testing of school learning. Gillespie et. al, (1996:487) offer the following definition: “Portfolio assessment is a purposeful, multidimensional process of collecting evidence that illustrates a learner’s accomplishments efforts and progress (utilising a variety of authentic evidence) over time.” Portfolios are generally defined in the literature in terms of their contents and purpose - an overview of effort, progress or performance in one or several subjects (e.g. Arter & Spandel, 1992; Gillespie et. al, 1996). Portfolios complement emerging reporting systems such as learner, parent, teacher conferences (Davies et. al, 1992; Davies, 2000; Gregory et al, 2001; McDonald, 1982; Wong-Kam et al, 2001).

2.5.11.3 Performance-based assessment

Linn and Miller (2005:7) explain performance based assessment as, “snap shots of learner learning in time, which provide a longer exposure of paranomic lens or real time video”. Performance-based assessment is also described as, “assessment which relies on the observation and judgment of activities as they occur” (Foster & Masters, 1996). Such assessments are characterised by two things. First, the learners are assessed while actually performing, which means that the assessment is “direct”, and that inferences to theoretical constructs (like “understanding” or “intelligence”) do not have to be made. Second, performance-assessment tasks can be positioned in the far end of the continuum representing allowed openness of learner responses as opposed to multiple-choice assessments (Messick, 1996). This approach facilitates both the way learners take information and the way they store and apply this information to deal with novel situations (Herrera et. al, 2007).
However, that being said, performance-based assessment has a number of advantages that should be considered in the context of classrooms. It is useful for gathering information on a wide range of achievements including concept acquisition, communication skills, problem solving, critical thinking, psychomotor skills, and social/affective characteristics such as cooperation in groups. As Shepard (1997) argues, it is an approach that can be used by teachers to assess the extent to which pupils can transfer knowledge and skills to new situations (what Shepard calls “robust understanding”). Performance assessment is also useful for charting progress over time, since performance assessment tasks can be used more than once with the same pupil without compromising their validity. Furthermore, it is useful for integrating assessment with teaching and learning (through the use of performance criteria), for identifying pupil learning needs, and for fostering pupil self-assessment (Airasian, 2000; Baxter et. al., 1996; Kuhs et. al, 2001; Linn 1994; Stiggins, 1997). Herrera et. al (2007:28) further interprets performance based assessment as an opportunity that “taps into the depth and breadth of learner learning.

2.5.11.4 Peer assessment

Peers are generally defined as learners of equal status in that they are in a similar grade and similar levels of proficiency with content, although there is often flexibility and slightly older learners may assess younger learners, or a learner moving more quickly through the material may be asked to assess less advanced learners.

Peer assessment, much like self-assessment, is a formative assessment strategy that gives learners a key role in evaluating learning (Topping, 2005). Peer
assessments is understood as more than only a grading procedure and is also envisioned as teaching strategy since engaging in the process develops both the assessor and assessee’s skills and knowledge (Li, Liu, & Steckelberg, 2010; Orsmond and Merry, 1996). The primary goal for using peer assessment is to provide feedback to learners. Peer assessment has even proven beneficial for learners as young as six years old (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007).

2.5.12 Questioning

Questioning underpins all classroom assessment methods. There are many different types of oral questions. These range from closed questions in which the teacher anticipates a single, factual answer to open-questions which encourage a more critical, analytical responses, and which facilitate multiple solution paths (NCCA, 2007:36). Open ended formative questions challenge common misconceptions to create some conflict that requires discussion which encourages learners to think of a response or an idea from different angles (Black et. al, 2003:39). Teachers’ questions can assess children’s depth of learning by encouraging them to elaborate on an answer, whether it is their own or another child’s. Research on teacher questioning behaviours and patterns indicate that teachers today ask between 300-400 questions each day (Leven & Long, 1981). Teachers ask questions for several reasons (Morgan & Saxton, 1991):

- the act of asking questions helps teachers keep learners actively involved in lessons;
- while answering questions, learners have the opportunity to openly express their ideas and thoughts;
• questioning learners enables other learners to hear different explanations of the material by their peers;
• asking questions helps teachers to pace their lessons and moderate learner behaviour; and
• questioning learners helps teachers to evaluate learner learning and revise their lessons as necessary.

Questioning plays an important role in assessment; however studies conducted in African schools revealed that questioning was poorly done in the classroom situation. Greaney & Kellaghan (2004:62) cited the following observations:

A study made in Kenya revealed that in many lessons pupils were asked no question at all. When questions were asked they were closed –a form of questioning that does not facilitate the development of higher order thinking skills. A study in Swaziland described the vast majority of questions in higher secondary classes as either rhetoric or at a low cognitive level. Low level taxonomy questions were also noted in primary classes in Tanzania, the questions asked were described as merely requiring of pupils to recall facts, which they did individually or in a chorus.

Ellis (1993) claims that many teachers do rely on low-level cognitive questions in order to avoid a slow-paced lesson, keep the attention of the learners, and maintain control of the classroom.

Teachers need to be aware the different questioning techniques in order to effectively assess pupils. However if the teachers questioning concentrates on lower order cognitive questions then the other domains will be neglected. It is therefore pertinent for teachers to be aware of the what should be assessed in order to come up with meaningful assessments.
2.6 WHAT SHOULD BE ASSESSED?

Assessment should mirror the full range of the child’s learning, encompassing the cognitive, creative, affective, physical and social dimensions of his or her development (NCCA document, 2004). Assessment, thus, should project the child’s attainment of objectives particularly in terms of knowledge, concepts and skills as well as taking account of the full range of his or her abilities. Assessment is integral to all areas of the curriculum and it encompasses the diverse aspects of learning, the cognitive, the creative, the affective, the physical and the social. (Primary School Curriculum, 1999:18)

In light of the above, the NCCA (2004: 40) exposes a brief summary of the domains as follows:

Assessment of the cognitive dimension considers the acquisition of knowledge, concepts and skills. It also takes account of the development of the child’s literacy skills and his or her mastery of higher order thinking and problem solving skills. The cognitive domain is based on the educational objectives classified in Blooms Taxonomy (Bloom et. al, 1956). This system involves a six level hierarchical progression for the categorisation of human cognitive behaviours from the most basic to higher order level of cognitive processing.

The first two levels of Blooms Taxonomy involve the accumulation and understanding of information while the other four levels, which are often classified as higher order thinking, involve application of such information for finding solutions to real life problems, for creativity and for critical thinking. Higher-level cognitive questions can be defined as questions that require pupils to use higher order
thinking and reasoning skills. By using these skills pupils do not only remember factual knowledge, instead they use such knowledge to solve problems, analyse, create and evaluate their learning. There should be therefore alignment between the teacher’s educational objectives, methods of instruction and forms of assessment (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). If teachers spend time asking low-level cognitive questions in assessing pupils, these questions are widely believed to limit pupils by not helping them to acquire a deep, elaborate understanding of the subject matter. This is because factual information can be memorised.

Ellis (1993) claims that many classroom teachers rely on low-level cognitive questions in order to avoid a slow-paced lesson, keep the attention of the learners and to maintain control of the classroom. Examinations, even at national level, are made of items that predominantly call for lower order skills (Nenty et. al, 2007), and a combination of low-level and high-level cognitive questions.

Assessment of the creative dimension takes account of the development of the child’s capacity for creative expression and response. Assessment of this dimension will also focus on the children’s ability to develop insights, interpretations, and visuals in response to their environment.

Assessment in the affective domain is concerned with the developing of a sense of discrimination in response to the expression of the artistic form. It should also encompass the emotional reaction of the child to artistic expression in creative, relative and aesthetic form. It will also focus on the moral and spiritual development of
the child, both of which are inseparable from his/her engagement with the content of every curriculum area.

Assessment of the physical dimension will consider the child’s development of the fine and gross skills and the gradual development of his or her body control and coordination.

Assessment of the social dimension will take account of the interpersonal and intrapersonal development, attitudes and social values he/she develops throughout his/her engagement with the primary school curriculum.

Teachers must first and foremost acquire the skills of integrating assessment with instruction, which no doubt will depend on clear understanding of the course curriculum being offered, its goals and the processes (Marira, 1993:137). One of the findings from Zindi’s research on pupil assessment techniques in Zimbabwe’s Secondary Schools in 1984-1987 was that, few teachers have the time and experience to construct questions, which the exam is designed to assess. Sometimes what is intended to assess learners’ depth and knowledge, instead displays a learner’s ability to cram or predict questions. For this reason it is important for teachers to be aware of the purposes of assessment and the use of different tests.

2.7 QUALITY CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT.

Quality in assessment means an assessment made and interpreted on the spot which provides the type of information required (high validity) and with the greatest degree of reliability possible in the circumstances (Harlen, 1994a:13). There is
evidence, that, the quality of classroom assessment practices may be deficient in many ways Kelleghan & Gleany (2004:49). Problems that have been identified include use of poorly focused questions predominance of questions that require short answers involving factual knowledge, the evocation of responses that involve repetition rather than reflection and the lack of procedures designed to develop higher order cognitive skills (Black & William, 1998). These are a result of teachers’ poor knowledge and skills in assessment and constitute evidence for poor assessment items.

Stiggins (1992:183) contends that teachers must apply the following four assessment quality criteria:

- Reflect a clear and specific achievement target, detailing specific subject matter, thinking skills to be demonstrated in the context of the content knowledge.
- Sample performance in an appropriate manner, by providing a representative sample of all key forms of that performance and providing a sufficiently large sample to permit confidence generalization of the performance domain assessed.
- Control for those extraneous factors that can interfere with the accurate assessment of achievement such as;
  1. quality of exercises.
  2. quality of administration.
  3. quality of scoring.
  4. quality of traits that can inhibit communication on achievement; and results that the decision maker understands and can use.
Stiggins & Chappuis (2005) also highlighted the following that need to be satisfied in order to ensure effective use of assessment and reduce achievement gaps:

- Assessment development must be guided by a clear purpose.
- Assessment must accurately reflect learning expectations.
- Assessment method must be capable of reflecting the intended target and also act as a tool for teaching to proficiency.
- Communication of assessment results must be timely, understandable and helpful.

The quality of an assessment is as good as the communication value of results. Quality assessments necessitate providing good feedback to learner, using assessment data to improve instruction and using a variety of assessment methods McMunn (2011:6). The purpose of feedback is to provide constructive guidance, to accelerate and improve learner achievement of learning outcomes (Hounsell, 2003). Assessment always has more to do with helping learners grow than with cataloging their mistakes (Tomilson, 1999:130). Gibbs & Simpson (2004) argue that, feedback is the single most powerful influence on learner achievement. Feedback is, “most effective when it is timely, perceived as relevant, meaningful and encouraging and offers suggestions for improvement which are within a learner’s grasp” (Brown, 2001:17). According to Shute (2008:154) formative, or descriptive, feedback is —information communicated to the learner that is intended to modify his or her thinking or behaviour for the purpose of improving learning. Commenting on a research project initiated to investigate assessment for learning Black et. al, (2003;44) note that teachers added comments on their learners written work that did
not really help them identify what they had achieved and what the next steps in their learning should be. The following views were expressed:

Most comments we saw .....either stated a general evaluation ,which indicated neither what had been achieved or what steps to take next ,or were geared to improving presentation or merely completing work. Examples included, Good, Well done, Title, Date, Space out question on the page, Use a pencil and ruler for diagrams, Please finish and Answer all questions (pp 44).

Weeden *et. al* (2002:101) provide the following checklist of principles for marking and feedback;

- Marking should be linked to clear learning objectives.
- Assessments should be linked to clear learning objectives.
- Assessments should be fit for purpose and have appropriate marking schemes.
- Marking should help identify learners’ misconceptions.
- Marking should be focused and prioritised.
- Marking needs to be planned for and integral to teaching and learning.
- Marking and feedback should take place quickly so that learners remember the context.
- Recording may need to take place in a variety of forms that are manageable and informative.

Nicol & Macfarlane (2006: 205) review of literature identified that good feedback practices help:

- deliver high quality information to learners about learning.
• encourage teacher and peer dialogue around learning positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem.
• provide opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance.
• provide information to teachers that can help them to teach.

Hatties & Timperly’s (2007) review of feedback literature identified that the type of feedback and the way it is given, mediates effectiveness. They identified four types of feedback. The first feedback is on the task itself, such as whether work is correct or incorrect. The second was feedback on processes undertaken to complete the task, trying to direct the learner to use a particular approach or strategy to improve their work. The third was focused on the learner’s self-regulation where learners are reminded of strategies they have been taught and how they can improve their own work. Finally, feedback about self, for example, “good job, you have tried”. They posit that feedback on self is the least effective, as it does not provide any information on how to academically improve work. Feedback on process and self-regulation are identified as the most powerful, but feedback on task is reported the most common.

According to Stiggins (1992:135), teachers should use four forms of feedback namely:

• Oral and non-verbal feedback;
• Feedback in form of written comments;
• Feedback in the form of performance assessment;
• Feedback in the form of test scores; and
• feedback in the form of grades.
Herbert & Hauser (1999) observed that feedback in the classroom may or may not be harmful. Such feedback as giving grades, on granting or withholding special rewards, on fostering self-esteem, irrespective of the quality of his or her work may be ineffective or even be harmful. To support the view Black & William (1998:25) posit,

……the way in which formative information is conveyed to a learner, and the context of classroom culture and beliefs about ability and effort within which feedback is interpreted by the individual recipient, can affect those personal features for good or ill. The hopeful message is that innovations which have paid careful attention to these features have produced significant gains when compared with the existing norms of classroom practice.

Torrance & Pryor (1998:40) argue, “Many teachers focus on praise as a form of ‘feedback’ because of the efficacy of behaviourist reinforcement systems”. However, when feedback is used effectively it is, "the most powerful single moderator that enhances achievement" (Hattie, 1999:9).

Competent assessors master all forms of feedback to enhance quality assessment. Black & William (1998) contend that daily classroom assessment must be of high quality or will not be effective and may even be detrimental to learner learning and motivation. Proficiency with appropriate assessment and evaluation would appear to be a requisite skill for improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Quality assessment should also observe the three characteristics of tests namely: validity, reliability and usability. According to Stiggins (1999a:20) “The quality of instruction in any ... classroom turns on the quality of the assessments used there.” For all of these reasons, the information resulting from classroom assessments must
be meaningful and accurate; that is, the information must be valid and reliable (Brookhart, 1999a).

2.7.1 Validity

Gibbs (1994 :vii) defines validity as, “The extent to which an assessment measures what it purports to measure. If an assessment does not measure what it is designed to measure then its use is misleading”.

Validity is an integrated evaluative judgment on the degree to which empirical evidence and theoretical rationales support the adequacy and appropriateness of inferences and actions based on test scores and other modes of assessment (Messick, 1993:13).

Validity of classroom assessment depends on;

• analysing the intended learning and all its embedded elements.
• having a good match among the assessment approaches, the intended learning, and the decisions that teachers and learners make about learning, ensuring that the assessment adequately covers the targeted learning outcomes including content, thinking processes, skills and attitudes.
• Providing learners with opportunities to show their knowledge of concepts in many different ways and with multiple measures, to establish a composite picture of learner learning (Northern Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Education, 2006).

It ensures the central question; does assessment measure what it purports to measure (Wragg 2001: 20)? There are three different types of validity evidence namely, criterion validity, construct validity and content validity. Wragg, 2001 also added face validity to the list.
2.7.1.1 Face validity

It is the most common criterion which addresses the question; does the test look as if it does the job it is intended to do? (Wragg, 2001). Lacity et.al, (1994) define face validity as making common sense and being persuasive and seeming right to the reader. That is validity is taken at face value. Face validity is essential in ensuring that test takers persevere and try their best on the test (Maizam, 2005:335). It also convinces the teachers to use the test regardless of the availability of scientific means. Face validity is the first step in the validation process.

2.7.1.2 Content validity

Content validity refers to the extent to which a learner’s response to a given assessment reflects the learners’ knowledge on the content of interest (Moskal & Leydens, 2000). The authors went further to say that, content validity is also concerned with the extent to which the assessment instrument samples the content domain. This requires affirmation from the expert. The expert should look into whether the content is representative of the skills that are supposed to be measured, that is, test objectives, syllabus content, and the test contents (Maizam, 2005). Content covered and the cognitive or skill level should confirm to a set syllabus (Black, 1997:42). Classroom teachers need the requisite skills in assessment for them to be experts. Lack of these might result in assessment problems.

2.7.1.3 Criterion related validity

Criterion validity is the extent to which the scores on a test are in agreement with (concurrent validity or predict (predictive validity) an external criteria (McAlpine, 2002). This type of evidence supports the extent to which the results of an
assessment correlate with a current or future event. Another way to think of criterion-related evidence is to consider the extent to which the learners' performance on the given task may be generalised to other, more relevant activities (Rafilson, 1991). The ability of a measure to predict performance on a second measure of the same construct, computed as a correlation is criterion validity. Predictive validity relates to whether the test predicts accurately or well some future performance. Predictive validity is important for tests which are meant to classify or to select pupils.

2.7.1.4 Construct validity

Construct validity is the degree to which a test measures an intended hypothetical construct (Gay 1980:168). Yu (2005) also defines construct validity as the extent to which an assessment corresponds with other variables as predicted by some rationale theory. When construct validity is emphasised, inferences are drawn from test scores to a psychological construct. Constructs are processes that are internal to an individual. Although reasoning occurs inside a person, it may be partially displayed through results and explanations. According to Gay (1980) a construct is a non-observable trait such as intelligence anxiety, creativity, and curiosity, which explains behaviour. Decisions based on the measurement of constructs are only valid to the extent that the measure of construct involved is valid (Gay, 1998:168). Construct-related evidence is the evidence that supports that an assessment instrument is completely and only measuring the intended construct. Problem solving, creativity, writing process, self-esteem, and attitudes are other constructs that a teacher may wish to examine (Rudner & Schaf er, 2002).
2.7.2 Reliability

It is about consistency. However, unless assessment has validity there is little point in even considering its reliability because it would have failed to measure what it was supposed to measure (Wragg, 2001). A reliable assessment is one that consistently achieves the same results with the same (or similar) cohort of learners. Gay et. al, (2006:601) defined reliability as “the degree to which a test (or qualitative research data) consistently measures whatever it measures”. If the assessment process is reliable, the inferences about a learner’s learning should be similar when they are made by different teachers, when learning is measured using various methods or when learners demonstrate their learning at different times (Northern Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Education, 2006:9). According to William (2008:128) a reliable test is one in which scores that a learner gets on different occasions or with a slightly different set of questions on the test, or when someone else does the marking, does not change very much. Various factors affect reliability including ambiguous questions, too many options within a question paper, vague marking instructions and poorly trained markers. Reliability operates at two levels as follows:

- that of the individual assessed,
- that of a number of assessors (Freeman & Lewis1998:23).

Reliable assessors make the same decision on a particular assessment whenever they mark it. When more than one assessor is concerned reliability is achieved if presented with work of the same standard, all assessors make the same judgment. Reliable assessment ensures accurate and consistent comparisons, whether between the performances of different pupils or between a learner’s performance and the criteria for success (Freeman & Lewis, 1998: 24). Maizan (2005:236)
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contends that there are three types of reliability that are most relevant to classroom tests which include internal consistency, inter-scorer and intra-scorer reliability. In the view of Maizan (2005) internal consistency refers to the consistency of objectives among the items of a test while, inter-score reliability refers to the consistency between marks given by different teachers. On the other hand, intra-scorer reliability refers to marks given by the same teacher on different occasions. According to Brown et al. (1997: 237) “The major threat to reliability is the lack of consistency of an individual marker”. However, intra-rater reliability might not in fact be a major concern when raters are supported by rubrics (Jonson & Svingby, 2007). Consistent grading is essential in order to ensure reliability of test scores.

According to the Northern Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Education (2006:9) there are many ways to promote reliability which are as follows:

- Teachers can use a variety of assessment tasks to provide a range of information.
- Learners can show their learning in many different ways.
- Teachers can work with other teachers to review learner work, bringing a collective insight about what is expected to the exercise in more reliable denomination of what learners understand.

If classroom teacher assessment is to have more robust reliability, then practising teachers require ongoing professional development opportunities to develop their expertise in a context that values judgment (Volante, 2006). Teachers need to have the correct conception of the terms validity and reliability so that the meaning they construct from assessment information is accurate and useful. Valid and reliable
assessment provides a sound instrument from which to gauge learners’ attainments. According to Stiggins (1999:20), "The quality of instruction in any ... classroom turns on the quality of the assessments used there". For these reasons, information garnered from classroom assessments must be meaningful and accurate; i.e., the information must be valid and reliable (Brookhart, 1999a).

2.7.3 Usability

It is another pragmatic matter for reflection as to how feasible the assessment is in terms of cost and time available for assessment. Other practical considerations include the ease of administration, ease of interpretation, ease of scoring and application (Gronlund, 1971). High quality assessments are considered as those with a high level of validity; reliability and usability come up with quality tests.

Black & William (1998), contend that daily classroom assessment must be of high quality or they would not be effective. Poor quality daily assessment can even be detrimental to learner learning and motivation. Proficiency with appropriate assessment and evaluation would therefore be a requisite skill for improving quality teaching.

2.7.4 Record keeping

Chifwepa (2001) defined a record as a documented proof of transaction. In schools teachers consistently document learner work progress to ensure teachers will have evidence of year long learner growth. Chifwepa went further to say the evidence becomes vitally important for communication with learners, parents and administrators as the year goes on. Record keeping is critical in ensuring quality in
classroom assessment (Northern Canadian Protocol in Basic Education, 2006). The authors went further to say that, the records that teachers and learners keep are evidence that support decisions that are made about learner learning. These records should include detailed and descriptive information about the nature of the expected learning as well as evidence of learners’ learning and should be collected from a range of assessments.

According to Heaney (1999) Information that is recorded may take a variety of formats. These may include, an observation schedule, a record of children's reading, comments on children's workbooks that identify areas for improvement and the recording of results from standardised tests. This information provides a valuable resource for the teacher when considering and reporting each child's progress. The records that are maintained, help schools furnish parents with a report about the progress and achievement of individual children, enable teachers to give examples of how a child has developed specific knowledge, skills and understanding in various areas of the curriculum, at parent interviews.

Records also provide useful and relevant information to clarify the progress a child has made and they identify areas that need to be addressed to other teachers. Alausa (2003) identified record keeping as a cardinal problem of continuous implementation, as records have to be accurately and meticulously kept over a long period of time, in a form that will enhance easy retrieval, if assessment techniques are to be effective. However, reviews of primary school practices in England and in Greece have reported that teachers' records tend to emphasise the quantity of learners' work rather than its quality, and that whilst tasks are often framed in
cognitive terms, the assessments are in affective terms, with emphasis on social and managerial functions (Bennett et al., 1992; Pollard et al., 1994; Mavromattis, 1996).

2.8 TEACHER COMPETENCIES IN ASSESSMENT

Burke (1990:20) defines competence as the ability to perform activities within an occupational area to the level of performance expected in employment. Charton (1996:360) also interpret competence as the exhibition of specific behaviour and attitudes being demonstrated and distinguishable from the potential to perform. Teachers need to be competent in order to perform their duties effectively. Incompetent teachers are likely to cause problems in assessment. Competent teachers are assessment literate.

Assessment literacy has been defined as the possession of knowledge about the basic principles of sound assessment practice, including terminology; the techniques, familiarity with standards of quality in assessment and familiarity with alternative to traditional measurements of learning (Paterno, 2001). Assessment literacy has also been defined as an understanding of the principles of sound assessment (Popham, 2004; Stiggins, 2002). Assessment literacy equips teachers with the competencies to carry out assessment. Teachers with a solid background in this area are well positioned to integrate assessment with instruction so that they utilise appropriate forms of teaching (McMillan, 2000). Assessment literate teachers recognise the need for sound assessment, evaluation, communication practices and they:

• understand which assessment methods to use to gather dependable information and learner achievement.
communicate assessment results effectively, whether using report card
grades, test scores, portfolios, or conferences.

- can use assessment to maximise learner motivation and learning by involving
learners as full partners in assessment, record keeping, and communication
(Metler, 2005).

Stiggins (1995:240) states that “Assessment literate teachers know the difference
between sound and unsound assessment. They are not intimidated by the
sometimes mysterious and always daunting technical world of assessment”.
Stiggins,(2001b:20) describes assessment as comprising two skills; the ability to
gather dependable and quality information about learner achievement; and the ability
to use that information effectively to maximise learner achievement (AFT, NCME, &
NEA, 1990). According to AFT, NCME and NEA (1990:30-32), standards for
teachers’ competence in educational assessment of learners, assessment
competence consists of the following principles:

- Teachers should be skilled in developing assessment methods appropriate for
  instructional decisions.

- The teacher should be skilled in administering, scoring and interpreting the
  result of both externally produced and teacher-produced assessment
  methods.

- Teachers should be skilled in using assessment results when making
  decisions about individual learners, planning teaching, developing curriculum,
  and school improvement.

- Teachers should be skilled in developing valid pupil grading procedures that
  use pupil assessments.
• Teachers should be skilled in communicating assessment results to learners, parents, other lay audiences, and other educators.

• Teachers should be skilled in recognising unethical, illegal, and otherwise inappropriate assessment methods and uses of assessment information (Pophum, 2004; Stiggins, 2002). Poor knowledge on the outlined principles of assessment constitutes a gap for teachers.

Stiggins (1991) reported that “teachers spend a third to half of their professional time on assessment-related activities”. According to Nenty (1985:34), “...next to teacher’s skill on how to teach (method), and what to teach (content) is his/her skill on how to assess in order to maximise learning”. Assessment is a part and parcel of every teaching method. It is essential that teachers coming out of teacher education institutions and those in the field are given adequate information on how to use proper methods of assessment and using results for whatever purposes. In his study, Gullickson (1984), reported that the average teacher did not perceive college measurement courses to be pertinent to his/her classroom testing needs and that most teachers learned how to test their learners through their own job experiences. Teachers with a solid background in this area are well positioned to integrate assessment with instruction so that they utilize appropriate forms of teaching (McMillan, 2000). Much research suggests that teachers in general are not proficient in learner assessment practices in the western world (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Black et al., 2003; Earl, 2003; Guskey, 2004; 1992; Popham, 2004; Smith, 1986; Stiggins, 2002; Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis, & Chappuis, 2004). Research continues to characterise teacher assessment and evaluation as largely incongruent with recommended best practice (Metler, 2003). Many teachers believe that they need
strong measurement skills (Boothroyd et al., 1992) and believe that their teacher education was inadequate (Wise et al., 1991). They also report a level of discomfort with the quality of their own tests (Stiggins & Bridgford, 1985).

In most American jurisdictions, there continues to be relatively little emphasis on assessment in the professional development of teachers. A study by Obioma (1984) on gaps and challenges on continuous assessment revealed that in general teachers demonstrated poor knowledge of the elementary concept of continuous assessment. Many teachers misapplied the continuous assessment instruments to more of continuous testing. According to Mayo (1967), general conclusions have been drawn by researchers who have collected evidence through observations, interviews and questionnaires from schools including the US. He contends that the tests used by teachers encourage rote and superficial teaching even when teachers say they want to develop understanding, many them seem to be unaware of the inconsistency. Further research suggests that some teachers tend to ask low-level cognitive test questions and learners consequently learn that they do not have to have deep understanding to pass a classroom test (Aitken, 1994; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Black et al., 2003; Stiggins, 2002; Wiggins, 1993; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). Consequently, teachers too often omit important curricular outcomes and, in their place, test trivia instead of using items that reveal depth of understanding (Perkins, 1992; Popham, 2002).

Knowledge of assessment is an issue with teachers. For example, quoting the Fair Test Examiner (1999), high quality assessment is relatively rare in classrooms because most teachers do not know how well to engage in such assessments.
Taylor & Nole (1996) in their research on practical assessment, posit that few teacher preparation programmes provide adequate teacher education for a wide array of assessment strategies by the teacher. In the same vein, few teacher education programmes require that undergraduates take an assessment course, resulting in practicing teachers feeling unprepared for classroom assessment demands (Lomax, 1996; Stiggins, 1991) and yet, teachers are likely to spend one-third to one-half of their professional time on activities linked to assessment, but they possess inadequate assessment skills (Mertler, 2005; Stiggins, 2002). This is supported by Nenty (1997:57) who said, “Many persons are certified to teach with little or no basic assessment skills. Some teachers’ teacher education institutions do not offer courses that impart such skills at all, while some make such courses optional as if assessment is an optional duty of the classroom teacher.

The formal assessment education teachers do receive often focuses on large scale test administration and standardised test score interpretation, rather than on the test construction strategies or item writing rules that teachers need to create their own tests (Stiggins & Bridgeford, 1995). Stiggins & Bridgeford (1995) further posit that teachers do not perceive the information learned in traditional test and measurement courses to be relevant to their tasks as classroom teachers. Gullikson (1993) and Wise, Lulkin & Ross (1991), found that teachers do not believe that they have adequate training. Colleges, schools and departments of education need to prepare their graduates in the areas of assessment literacy. Most state certification systems and half of all teacher education programmes have no assessment course requirement nor do they have an explicit requirement that teachers have received education in assessment (Trice, 2000). The formal assessment education teachers do
receive often focuses on large-scale test administration and standardised test score interpretation, rather than on the test construction strategies or item-writing rules that teachers need to create their own tests (Stiggins & Bridgeford, 1985). They have failed to meet this challenge in the past. Failure to address teachers’ classroom needs will result in the continued alienation of teachers from systematic assessment and evaluation (Stiggins & Conklin 1992: 198). They went further to argue that, introductory measurement textbooks and courses very often fail to reflect the reality, complexity and diversity of classroom assessment.

In 1993, Wise & Lulkin found that 60% of sampled teachers in Nebraska schools had less than one course in measurement and 47% of the sampled teachers felt that education on measurement and evaluation was inadequate. A Study conducted by Impara, Place & Fager in 1993 on teachers’ assessment background, revealed that 70% of the surveyed teachers had some in measurement while the rest had no training.

A research conducted by Ndalichako (2004) towards understanding of assessment practices of the primary school teacher in Tanzania, revealed that teachers heavily relied on traditional methods of assessment such as homework, tests, classroom exercises, quizzes, and that assessment practices that require extended time to accomplish, like projects and observations, are rarely used.

Marira & Mukandawire (1993) in their research on teacher competencies in former non-white schools in Namibia found that, teachers had to be skilled in appropriate methods, appropriate to instructional decisions. They argued that teachers should be
skilled in using assessment results, when making decisions about individual
learners, planning, teaching, developing curriculum and school improvement. These
findings suggest that a great deal of resources might need to be spent on both pre-
service and in-service training of teachers to equip them with those skills that are
associated with teacher competencies (Marira & Mukandawire 1993). According to
Linn (1989), the biggest and most challenging job today lies in making assessment
do a better job of facilitating learner learning and not predicting who will achieve, or
describing the achievement of the learner. In his study on pupil assessment
techniques in Zimbabwe’s secondary schools, Zindi (1989) found that teachers used
crude methods of assessment to make important judgments about their pupils.
These methods are mostly a poor replication of external examinations that are based
on psychometric practice.

In another article entitled, 'Reactions of Secondary School Teachers to Assessment:
The Zimbabwean Experience,' Zindi (1987) observed that:

- During teacher education assessment techniques are not included in the
course. Heavy emphasis is laid on specialist subjects and on psychology of
teaching and no attention at all is given to assessment as an integral part of
the teacher-education curriculum.

- Most of the courses available on assessment are often mathematical or
statistical in tone. Many teachers without a mathematical background regard
the courses as difficult to grasp. To them item analysis, facility value,
discrimination indices and standard score seem quite alien.
• Some teachers teach over two hundred pupils in any one week and getting to know all of them in one school year is almost impossible. In this case, they may try to make judgment based on quite inadequate information.

• Teachers also seem to be hesitant to embark on a program of assessment which includes other testing domains other than those directly linked to their own subject areas, yet, if teachers understand more of their pupils other traits such as personality, they would be in a better position to understand their individual needs.

Zindi (1987) went further to say that, out of 344 secondary school teachers surveyed 53% had no written policies in their schools, 67% preferred to use standardised published tests rather than construct their own tests, and 91% have never used the standard deviation in their test scores. Teacher education programmes should not assume that teacher candidates are graduating with an acceptable level of literacy. As with other facts of teaching and learning such as classroom management, teacher candidates are predisposed to rely on traditional approaches they had likely been exposed to as learners. Graham (2005: 619) describes ‘pre-service learners as being more likely to succumb to their apprenticeship observing and in doing so, seem doomed to replicate more traditional and unexamined assessment practices. The typical teacher can spend as much as a third or half his /her time in assessment related activities (Crooks, 1988) competence is required to do this job well (Stiggins, 1999). Finally, when teachers do not have time or effective assessment strategies, they generally resort to testing the way they themselves were assessed, too often ineffectively (Guskey, 2004; Stiggins, 1993). On occasion, teachers unintentionally engage in unfair assessment practice. For example, when teachers award a learner
a zero for work not handed in on time, they fail to acknowledge that, first, the zero is not an accurate description of achievement or of learners’ understanding of content material, but instead behaviour, and second, one zero averaged with other grades has a devastating effect on a learner’s overall grade, particularly if the work that was assigned a zero has been heavily weighted (Guskey, 2004; O’Connor, 2002; Reeves, 2004). Consequently, there is no efficient use of assessment to ensure effective teaching and learning. Teachers have reported that they are confident in their ability to produce good learner tests (Oescher & Kirby, 1990; Wise, Luklin & Roos, 1991). However, teachers are not particularly good judges of their own abilities or knowledge in test construction (Boothroyd et al., 1992; Oescher & Kirby, 1990). Teachers’ own estimates of ability and actual performance (in test construction) have been found to be negatively correlated Marso& Pigge (1988) hence the need to understand teacher perceptions of assessment.

2.9 TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF ASSESSMENT

Teacher perceptions act as a framework though which a teacher views, interprets and interacts with the teaching environment (Marton, 1981). Teachers’ conception of assessment is important because evidence exists that teacher’ conceptions of teaching, learning, and curricula influence strongly how they teach and what learners learn or achieve (Clark & Peterson, 1986; 1992; Calderhead, 1996). Teachers assessment practices are directly related to instruction and learner learning (Elkader, 2008:25). According to Good and Brophy ,(1995) teachers perceptions of assessment modify procedures teachers use for lesson planning, delivery, instruction and teacher interaction throughout the school term. Research suggests that teacher’ perceptions of teaching and learning strongly influence how they teach
and what learners learn or achieve (Brown, 2004; Marshall & Drummond, 2006). Research also suggests that changes in teachers’ attitudes are associated with changes in classroom assessment (Dekker & Feijs, 2005; Lee & Wiliam, 2005). Tittle (1994:51) proposed that teachers 'construct schemas or integrate representations from assessments into existing views of the self, of teaching and learning, and of the curriculum, broadly construed'. Indeed, teachers' beliefs about learner self-confidence, morale, creativity, and work are ‘closely linked to one's choice of evaluation techniques’ (Asch, 1976: 18).

There has been a robust measurement through questionnaires on teacher conceptions on assessment (Brown (2004, 2007); Hargreaves (2005)), but one weakness in this body of research is the lack of quality data. Brown et. al's (1997)questionnaire on teachers’ conceptions on assessment has been used with New Zealand, Australia and Hongkong primary teachers and secondary school teachers and the data obtained from these teachers revealed the following four purposes of assessment as perceived by teachers:

- It improves teaching.
- It makes learners accountable for learning.
- It makes schools and teachers accountable for learner learning.
- It should be rejected because it is invalid, irrelevant, and negatively affects teachers, learners, curriculum and teaching (Brown 2004; Shonany, 2001; Torrance & Pryor, 1998).

Studies have shown that, to a certain degree, teachers are satisfied with their classroom assessment practices (Yildrin,2004). Unfortunately, some teachers’
perceptions included poor teaching assessment training, not enough time to properly assess their learners (Bensur 2000; Mettler, 2005) and a large amount of teaching conceptual material in their courses (Beal & Bearka, 1998).

Brown (2003:1) provides a strong argument that, “All pedagogical acts are affected by conceptions teachers have about the act of teaching, the process and purpose of assessment practices and the nature of learning”. Teachers influence their classroom practices (Thompson, 1992). In turn teachers’ actions significantly impact on pupil learning (Muigs, 2006). Research has shown that learner assessment is one of the most important tasks of a classroom teacher Race (1995) and that it has the greatest influence on learners perception of assessment (Brookhart & Delan, 2003). Perceptions can lead a teacher to interact with learners in a unique manner (Gutierrez, 2000). Teachers, who view assessment as a useful means of gathering data upon which to base their decisions about learning and their teaching, attempt to make assessment an integral part of teaching. They emphasise formative rather than summative assessment, frequently use informal means of assessment; encourage learners to take risks and reward academic effort as well as good results. They tend to take responsibility for learning that takes place in the classroom.

The improvement conception, promoted by researchers Black & William (1998); Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall & William (2003), under the ‘rubric assessment for learning’ is underpinned by the premise that assessment’s primary role should be for learner improvement. This may occur directly by giving learners useful feedback and by using effective peer and self-assessment practices or indirectly through teacher modifications of instruction to better suit diagnosed learner needs.
Teachers who view assessment as a mechanism for making learners accountable for learning will favour formal summative high stakes assessment to formally determine learner abilities and achievements. This kind of information can be reported to the community and stakeholders like other schools and employers. Teachers tend to absolve themselves from the responsibilities of learners’ failure by blaming the learner’s socio-economic conditions or lack of ability (Delandshire & Jones, 1999).

Teachers who view assessment as a necessary part to education and school accountability will favour summative and quasi-formative assessment to generate marks that can be reported to external agencies (Vanderyor & Killen, 2003). This kind of assessment should be used to publicly demonstrate teacher and school effectiveness (Firestone, Shorr & Monfills, 1998).

Finally, the conceptions that reflect feelings that evaluation has no legitimate place within teaching and learning, will probably avoid formative assessment and take a haphazard approach to summative assessment, thus, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy that assessment is a waste of time (Vanderyor & Killen, 2003). When the system emphasises content, conformity and high stakes summative assessment as it did in South Africa during the apartheid era, teachers’ conceptions of assessment are unlikely to be immune to the system within which they work (Jansen, 1999).

In the same vein, post independence Zimbabwe’s assessment procedures may be influenced by the pre-colonial assessment methods, which also emphasised content and high stake summative assessments. It should therefore be noted that the way
teachers perceive assessment definitely impacts on the manner in which they carry out assessment in the classroom. Several researchers argue that educators’ conceptions of assessment are strongly interwoven with their views on broader issues of learning/teaching (Brown 2003). To evolve within new assessment practices, it of paramount importance for teachers to embed their perceptions into the following emerging models of assessment.

2.10 EMERGING MODELS OF EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

There are basically three conceptions of assessment, that is, assessment of, for, and as learning. These new models of assessment and evaluation are emerging in many western countries such as Canada, England, and United States (Volante & Fazio, 2007). These new conceptions offer a new lens to understand the multifaceted nature of assessment. In England, the work of Black & William (1998) entitled “Inside the Black Box” highlighted the central importance of formative assessment for improving learner achievement. Collectively their studies revealed how teachers can teach well and also get good test scores when they emphasise such things as questioning technique, feedback without grades, peer assessment, self assessment and the use of formative use of summative test as instructional strategies (Black, Harrison, Lee & William, 2004; Black & William, 1998).

In the United States, Stiggins (2002) argued for new ways of thinking about assessment because over-reliance on summative assessment makes it virtually impossible for teachers to adopt teaching and learning that meet individual learners’ assessment needs. Stiggins further advocated that assessment for learning (formative assessment) must be balanced with the traditional assessment of learning...
(summative assessment) so that teachers can feed information back to learners in ways that enable them to think well.

In Canada, Gorf (2003), advocated for assessment of learning (summative), assessment for learning (formative) and assessment as learning (the assessment is not graded but acts as a meta-cognitive learning tool). The latter is a subject of assessment for learning and occurs when learners personally monitor what they are learning and use the feedback from this monitoring to make adjustments, adaptations or even major changes in what they understand.

Against this backdrop it should be clear that teachers should be able to design more than summative end of unit tests and examinations, if they are to realize improvements in the schools (Green & Mantz, 2002; Shepard, 2000).

**2.11 CONDUCTING ASSESSMENT IN THE ZIMBABWEAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

The education system consists of primary education, secondary education and tertiary education. According to Kanyongo (2005) the primary level is a seven-year cycle and the official entry age is six years. It runs from Grade 1 through to Grade 7. Prior to Grade 1, children enroll in the early childhood education and care (pre-school). The teacher learner ratio is one to 30 or 40, though sometimes it can be higher than that. The subjects taught in primary schools are: Mathematics; English; Shona and Ndebele (Indigenous languages); and General Paper covering Social Studies, Environmental Science, and Religious Education (largely based on Christianity). At the end of Grade 7, learners are tested in the four subjects
mentioned in the report. Kanyongo (2005) did not mention the other subjects that are not examined at grade seven levels namely, Art, Music and Physical education.

According to the UNESCO Report, (1990-2005: 18) the following was reported with regards to assessment methods and instructions in Zimbabwe. Assessment in primary school is done after each topic during the term. The second type of assessment is mid-term assessment when all taught topics are assessed. The final form of assessment is the end of cycle assessment which takes place at Grade seven.

Tests and examinations are common instruments of assessment and evaluation. The assessment procedures and policies are fixed in most schools. The Zimbabwe Examinations Council is responsible for decisions on assessment, objectives, content on public examinations and the awarding of end of cycle examinations. Individual teachers in the primary school do post-assessment remediation. In some schools, the last two weeks of the term are used for revising those areas where pupils would not have done well. The assessment procedures and policies are fixed in most institutions. The Zimbabwe School Examinations Council is responsible for decisions on assessment objectives and content of public examinations, assessment and the awarding of end-of-cycle grades. The same report registered the following concerns that, some teachers teach for examinations and as a result fail to develop their pupils’ skills and attitudes that are necessary for livelihood. In this area it is necessary to come up with assessment techniques that strike a balance between the affective and cognitive domains. Examinations have tended to require acquired
knowledge other than a demonstration of an ability to apply knowledge. New examination techniques should match new curricula thrusts.

2.12 ASSESSMENT CHALLENGES IN SCHOOLS

Assessment is integral to effective instruction. When assessment and instruction work in tandem, improvement of learner achievement is likely to occur. The procedures of assessment embrace such functions as monitoring learners’ progress, the diagnosis of learners’ strengths and weaknesses, and the decisions relating to teaching strategies which are closely tied up with quality learning and provide valuable feedback to both the learner and the teacher (Maria & Mukandawire 1993). “Teachers are expected to be assessment literate and capable of using such assessment knowledge to inform the instructional process” (Stiggins, 2001b:20). Yet, despite these expectations, limits in teachers’ assessment knowledge and education are well documented (Bookhart, 2001; Campbell & Evans, 2000; Mertler & Campbell, 2006). The limitations that have been identified include the use of poorly focused questions, a predominant of questions that require short answers involving factual knowledge, and a lack of procedures designed to develop higher order cognitive skills (Black & William, 1998). Stiggins (2001) concurred and states that we are seeing unacceptably low levels of assessment literacy among practising teachers and administrators in our schools. He continues by stating that this assessment illiteracy has resulted in inaccurate assessment of learners, causing them to fail to reach their full potential.

Stiggins (1991) has argued that test and measurement courses have not met the day-to-day assessment needs of teachers. Teachers must recognise different
purposes of assessment and use them accordingly. Teachers should be able to
design and administer more than end-of-unit tests and examinations if they are to
realise improvement in schools (Green & Mantz, 2002; Shepard, 2001). A survey by
Volante (2009) on Assessment for Learning in Schools: Implication for Transforming
Classroom Practice indicated that there is an over-emphasis on assessment of
learning (i.e. tests quizzes, projects). A range of assessments particularly those that
emphasise traditional paper and pencil summative measures, are over-emphasised
within the contemporary schools (Popham, 2005; Stiggins, 2008). In this aspect,
teachers’ lack the knowledge and skills required to use effectively, a variety of
assessment techniques in the classroom (Black & William, 1998). Many have
suggested the reforming of schools and classroom assessment strategies that are
intimately connected and that an ability to promote diverse assessment strategies is
paramount to schools’ success (Harlen, 2005; Heritage, 2007).

The national examination tended to shift focus of classroom assessment and away
from authentic formative practice techniques closely aligned to the national
examination (Stiggins, 1999). Teachers feel compelled to spend time preparing their
learners to master the content covered in the national examination and to coach
them on test taking strategies. Black & William (1998) concluded that formative
assessment produces significant learning gains, with it apparently helping low
achieving learners including learners with learning disabilities. Formative
assessment helps learners to become aware of any gaps that exist between the
desired goal and their current knowledge; understanding or skills and guides them
through actions necessary to obtain the goal (Sadle, 1989).
Assessment in Nigerian secondary schools is tailored towards examinations, especially public examinations (World Bank Group, 2001). This is because the Nigerian society, like any other developing country, places a premium on certificates (Faleye & Ojerinde 2005). They continue to argue that, the quality of effectiveness of schools and teachers are judged by the performance of their learners and no serious effort is being made by the stakeholders to ensure that Nigerian teachers develop the capacity to effectively employ assessment for the improvement of their teaching and the learning of their learners. Teachers sacrifice learning for drilling learners in things that they will be held accountable (Dhindsa et.al, 2007:1262).

According to Popham (2001:21)

Teachers drill their learners relentlessly of types of test items contained in the particular high stakes test their learners must pass. Such repetitions of instructional activities tend to deaden learner genuine interest in learning. All the excitement and intellectual vibrancy that learners might encounter during a really interesting lesson are driven out by tedious, test-fostering series of drills….Drilling can help learners develop low-cognitive skills and teach them to recite memorized information.

The negative influence of high stakes tests has also been noted by Eisemon, Patel & Abage (1987) in Greaney (2004:4) who observed that, “Pupils were taught through drill recitation, and exercises of fill-in-the missing type, all of which procedures were designed to impart factual information and techniques that learners would need in public examinations” If this situation is also obtaining in the Zimbabwean education system, the teachers are likely to be compelled to diminish any curricular attention towards any subject that is not included on high-stakes tests. Furthermore this competitive culture of schools may be an obstacle to learning especially when linked to beliefs in the fixed nature of ability.
In the United States people believe that schools with high scoring learners were successful and schools with low scoring learners were the opposite (Pophum:2001). Equally bad in Popham’s view is the idea that low performing schools receive a label such as “failing schools”. Staff members at a negatively labeled school are certain to feel awful about the way they have been identified (Popham, 2001:16).

Teacher education courses appear to offer little exposure to assessment for professional preparation of teachers. The courses offered offer a very narrow view of assessment in a traditional sense (Stiggins & Conkling 1998). Wise, Luklin & Ross (1991) found that teachers do not believe that they have the education needed to meet the demanding classroom assessment. At the same time, teachers’ ability to develop classroom-based assessment is seen as one of the six core functions of the teachers. Teacher programmes fail to provide the literacy required for fulfilling the tenets of assessment (Chappuis, 2003). ---Assessment is peripheral in many teacher education programmes (Taylor & Nole, 1996). Furthermore, in programmes that do include assessment courses, assessment is usually treated as a foundational course focused on a set of generalisable concepts and skills. As Anderson et.al (1995) noted, survey approaches to preparation of the teacher do not allow for a rich and grounded ‘understanding’. Classroom teachers therefore need a education programme in order to be effective assessors of their learners and offer focused teaching rather than where summative reporting dominated. The findings by the New Zealand Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture research on teachers’ knowledge of assessment revealed that:
School leaders need a level of theoretical assessment knowledge that enables them to make school based policy decisions that lead to the balanced use of assessment purposes.

Teachers lack technical assessment knowledge.

The Kenya National examinations Council (2000) also reported that teachers face assessment challenges that include:

- High enrolment and scarcity of facilities in many public schools make it difficult for teachers to effectively carry out continuous assessment. This makes it difficult for teachers to observe learners on a one to one basis. As a consequence of these developments, teacher report on learner progress is less than wholesome, as it is predominantly based on classroom tests. Many of the tests they develop are found wanting in quality, as they lack originality of style, clarity of language and abilities to be tested.

- Some teachers do not bother to develop their own tests; instead they simply lift questions from past national examinations or commercial publications, which both the teacher and the pupils believe would improve performance in public examinations. The Kenya National Examinations Council (2000) finally concluded that a combination of class size, teachers inability to develop suitable assessment instruments and an endemic shortage of suitable and sufficient educational resources explain why teachers are unable to effectively assess their pupils and collect information that would help them improve teaching.
2.13 SUMMARY

Definitions of assessment were given, followed by the framework of assessment. The rationale and the different forms of assessment were also discussed. Assessment should mirror a wide range of the child’s learning including the cognitive, creative, physical and social dimensions in order to come up with quality assessments. Quality assessments have validity, reliability and usability. Teachers need to be assessment competent / literate in order to gather valid and reliable data on learner attainment. Although it is argued that teacher’ assessment practices are affected by their conceptions of assessment teachers generally encounter assessment problems such as scarcity of materials and facilities, work overload, lack of competencies, lack of variety in assessment and the tendency to follow demands by public examinations in carrying out assessment.

Currently, the world over, there are emerging models of assessment which offer a new lens on how assessment can be perceived; namely, assessment for, of, and as learning. However, the Zimbabwean assessment procedures indicate that they are highly summative (assessment of learning). Finally it has been revealed that teachers encounter different problems in the assessment of pupils. The next chapter will discuss the research methodology.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Two dealt with the issues related to works of authorities regarding challenges of assessment in the primary schools. An attempt to define assessment was made; the rationale for assessment and the different forms of assessment were highlighted. Literature on teacher competencies, perceptions, emerging models to assessment, evolution of assessment and assessment paradigms was exposed. This chapter is concerned with the research methodology and the research design used for the study. It begins with a discussion of the research paradigm, which is the lens to this study, followed by a description of the research design and data collection procedures. The issues regarding trustworthiness and ethical considerations will also be discussed. Finally, the chapter spells out how data gathered were processed, analysed and interpreted.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

A paradigm is a set of interrelated concepts which provide the framework within which we see and understand a particular problem. The paradigm within which we work determines what we look for, the way which we construe what we observe and how we solve emerging problems (Gipps, 1994:1). A qualitative research paradigm was preferred in this study. Qualitative research uses naturalistic paradigms that help to understand phenomena in context-specific settings, such as "real world setting, where the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest" (Patton, 2001: 39). Qualitative research, can be viewed as, " any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990: 17) and instead, the kind of
research that produces findings arrived at from real-world settings where the "phenomenon of interest unfold naturally" (Patton, 2001: 39). The qualitative research has its roots in cultural American Sociology (Kirk & Miller, 1986). Researchers in Education began adopting an ethnographic research design to the educational setting in the United States in the 1970’s (Thomas & Nelson, 2000). The aim of this paradigm is to understand how people in everyday settings create meaning and interpret events in their world (Wimmer & Dominic, 2000). Marshall & Rossman (1989) (cited in Creswell, 2003) suggest that this entails immersion in the everyday life of the setting chosen for the study; the researcher enters the participants’ world and through ongoing interaction seeks the participants’ perspectives and meanings.

This research specifically adopted an interpretive and constructivist qualitative research paradigm. Schwandt, (1994:118) argues that,

> These persuasions share the goal of understanding the complex world of lived experiences from the point of view of those who live in it. The goal is variously spoken of as an abiding concern for the life world, for the emic point of view for understanding meaning, for grasping the actors’ definition of the situation, for verstehem. The world of lived reality and situations specific meanings that constitute the general object of investigation is thought to be constructed by social actors.

Interpretive research is fundamentally concerned with meaning and it seeks to understand social members’ definitions and understanding of situations (Hemming, Rensburg & Smit, 2004: 20). Denzin & Lincoln (2000) argue that qualitative research involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach: “This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3).
The constructivist recognises the importance of subjective human creation and is built upon the premise of social construction (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The approach enables the collaboration between the researcher and the participants ‘while enabling the participants to tell their stories’ (Crabtree & Miller 1999:10 in Baxter & Jack, 2008). Furthermore, knowledge is established through the meanings attached to a phenomenon studied; researchers interact with the participants of study to obtain data; inquiry changes both the researcher and the participants and knowledge is context and time dependent (Coll & Chapman 2000; Cousins 2002). The researcher has direct contact with and gets close to the people, situation and phenomenon under study; the researcher’s personal experience and insights are an important part of the inquiry and critical to understanding the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). The researcher does his/her work to capture the thinking of the participants from the participants’ perspective as accurately as possible as opposed to the researcher reporting what he/she thinks (Fraenkel & Wallen 2000). Through these stories the participants were able to describe their views of reality and this enabled the researcher to understand participants’ actions. This tied with the focus of the research as its purpose was to gain a deep level of understanding of the perceptions of specific teachers on problems of assessments in the primary schools. Interpretive research attempts to understand phenomena through meanings that people assign to them (Trauth, 2001:219).

The interpretive paradigms pointed to the use of qualitative research methods to collecting and analysing data. According to Creswell (2003:6-9) qualitative research includes the following characteristics; Firstly, individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and work and to develop subjective meaning of their
experiences or meanings directed towards certain things. In this research it was the
goal of the researcher to rely on the participants’ views as much as possible on the
situation being studied. The researcher used open-ended questions and listened
carefully to what the teachers said about the problems they faced in assessment. In
this research the interpretive research was well suited for giving a voice to teachers
as they gave their views to the situation on the ground.

Secondly, interpretive research focuses on the contexts in which people live and
work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants.
Observation takes place in real world settings, in places and under conditions that
are comfortable and familiar to the participants (Patton, 2000). Marshall and
Rossman (1989) (cited in Creswell 2003) suggest that this entails immersion in the
everyday life of the setting chosen for the study. The researcher entered the
participants’ world and through on-going interaction sought the participants’
perspectives and meanings. The advantages of doing qualitative research on
assessment include (Conger, 1998; Bryman et. al, 1988; Alvesson, 1996):

- flexibility to follow unexpected ideas during research and explore processes
effectively;
- sensitivity to contextual factors;
- ability to study symbolic dimensions and social meaning;
- increased opportunities;
- to develop empirically supported new ideas and theories;
- for in-depth and longitudinal explorations of assessment phenomena; and
- for more relevance and interest for practitioners.
The researcher visited schools to talk to the teachers on the problems they faced in assessment. Talking to the teachers in-depth and allowing them to tell their own stories provided the researcher with their worldview rather than that of the researcher. The researcher developed a level of detail about individual’s place and was highly involved in the actual experiences of the participants. Thus, according to Denzin (1971) naturalism enables the researcher to understand people’s perspectives and then produce the experiences in a rich and detailed fashion, thoughts and languages of those studied. Observations were also carried out during the course of normal life.

Thirdly, qualitative research uses one or more strategies of inquiry as a guide for procedures. In this study, the researcher used observations, focus groups, individual interviews and document analysis as sources of data. This enabled the researcher to gain an understanding of the perceptions, values, actions and concerns of the teachers under study. The interpretive researcher encourages varieties of data and different sources and analysis methods in order to strive for validity (Henning, Rensburg & Smit, 2004:19). Multiple sources allowed for triangulation. Yin (1994) also suggested using multiple sources of evidence as a way to ensure construct validity. Triangulation is the use of various methods in collecting data. In this study, triangulation was implemented during data collection and analysis.

Fourthly, the researcher is a co-creator of meaning (Henning, Rensburg & Smit, 2004:19). The researcher’s personal experiences and insights are an important part of the inquiry and critical to understanding the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). In this respect the researcher exposed her experiences in the field of assessment in the
primary school. The researcher systematically reflected on who she was in the inquiry and was sensitive to personal biography and how it shaped the study. This guarded against bias by the researcher because the researcher’s interpretation was shaped by the researcher’s own experiences and backgrounds.

Finally, other characteristics of qualitative research were advanced by distinguished scholars as follows:

The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection (Thomas & Nelson, 2003:9; Patton, 2001: 14). Qualitative researchers seek to understand the context or setting through visiting this context and gathering information personally. In this particular research, the researcher visited the schools to collect data by way of individual interviews, focus group observations and document analysis. Through interviews, rich descriptions of problems faced by teachers, influenced by their unique circumstances were generated.

The final characteristic of qualitative research is that researchers tend to analyse data inductively, (Frankel & Walter, 2000). Data is descriptive and interpretive (Thomas & Nelson 2001). Theory are data driven and emerges as part of the research process evolving from the data as they are collected (Keyton, 2000). The researcher developed a setting, analysed the data in themes and finally interpreted their meaning, stating lessons learned.

Scholars contend that qualitative research can be distinguished from quantitative methodology by numerous unique characteristics that are inherent in the
methodology (Creswell, 2003). The following is a summary of the characteristics of qualitative research as presented by various researchers.

- The researcher is an integral part of data (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000).
- The design evolves during the research; it can be adjusted as the research progresses (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000).
- The researcher conducts studies in the field, that is natural surroundings, trying to capture the normal flow of events without controlling extraneous variables (Keyton, 2000; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2001; Patton 2001; and Wimmer & Dominick, 2000).
- The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Thomas & Nelson, 2000; Keyton, 2000).
- Theory is ‘data driven’ and emerges as part of the research process, evolving from the data as they are collected (Keyton, 2000).
- Data are collected in the form of words and pictures rather than numbers (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000).
- Qualitative researchers tend to analyse data inductively (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). Data is descriptive and interpretive (Thomas & Nelson 2001).
- The focus of qualitative research is on participants’ perceptions and experiences and the way they make sense of their lives (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000).
- Researcher places more emphasis on tacit and intuitive knowledge (Borg & Gall, 1989).

In summary Cassell & Symon (1994:7) give the following list defining characteristics of qualitative research in contrast with quantitative research.
A focus on interpretation rather than quantification; an emphasis on subjectivity rather than objectivity; flexibility in the process of conducting research; an orientation towards process rather than outcome; a concern with context—regarding behaviour and situation as inextricably linked in forming experience; and finally, an explicit recognition of the impact of the research process on the research situation

The justification of interpretive research in this study was that it would be employed to probe everyday working experiences of teachers and through interviews rich descriptions of their problems in assessment, influenced by their unique circumstances were generated. These descriptions provided data from which perceptions regarding the teachers’ assessment problems could be used to inform professional policy as well as on-going skills development of the professionals.

Although qualitative research is largely criticised for producing knowledge that may not be generalised to other people or settings, it fulfilled the purpose of the proposed study, which was to gain and to provide a rich complex, textual description of how teachers were experiencing assessment in the schools (Green & Thorogood, 2004). This took precedence over eliciting data that could be generalised to other geographical locations, therefore suited for an interpretive research paradigm with its emphasis on experience and interpretation.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN: THE CASE STUDY

Assessment is multidimensional and is the social phenomenon that can only be understood by taking an intensive study of the various problems in assessment that occur in schools. To develop information that is accurate and interpretable on assessment problems in the primary schools, the researcher used the qualitative
research methodology drawing largely on the case study. The specific type of case study used here was a single case design with embedded units of analysis (Yin 2002:40). A single case study allowed the researcher to obtain a wealth of information about the assessment problems in Gweru District Schools. Furthermore Gweru District is representative to other areas in Zimbabwe because it constitutes all school types such as, urban, rural, government and private. The study of more than one case dilutes the overall analysis; the more the cases any individual studies, the greater the lack of depth in any single case (Coolican, 2004:135).

Yin (1984:23) defines a case study as, “An empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context; when the boundaries and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used”. Yin (2002:14) also defines a case study as, “an all-encompassing method covering the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis”. Hartley (2004:332) also defines a case study as

... a heterogeneous activity covering a range of research methods and techniques, a range of coverage (from single case study through carefully matched pairs up to multiple cases), varied levels of analysis (individuals, groups, organizations, organizational fields or social policies), and differing lengths and levels of involvement in organizational functioning.

This fits well with the author’s intention to investigate a real life issue through a variety of data collecting instruments. The case study involved intensive interviewing of key participants coupled with the use of documentary evidence such as record of test books, teacher made tests, ZMSEC tests, pupils’ exercise books and assessment policies.
Depth of understanding was important to the author. Morris & Wood (1991) and Fisher (2004) suggested that case studies are more appropriate for an in-depth understanding of a particular situation. The intent for the case study is to focus on one phenomenon, which the researcher selects to understand in-depth regardless of the number of sites, participants and documents for the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). The case study is the ideal method or design when a holistic in-depth investigation is needed (Tellis, 1997). As an interpretive, inductive form of research, the case explores the details and meanings of experience; the richness of case studies is related to the amount of detail and conceptualization that is possible when only one or a small number of focal cases are analyzed (TESOL Quarterly, 1996-2007). It was for this reason that the case study was considered the most appropriate because the researcher was able to go deeper into the assessment problems teachers encountered in schools.

A case study was also considered for its emphasis on fieldwork with the aim of getting to know the "insider" perspective, by observing participants going about their ordinary business in their natural setting (Stark & Torrance, 2005). Accessing participants in their natural setting allowed the researcher to study how teachers manage assessment in the busy contexts of their everyday teaching. Talking to teachers, listening to their informal conversations and allowing them to tell their own stories provided the researcher with the teachers’ worldview rather than that of the researcher. This further helped the researcher to interpret the observations.

The case study uses a variety of data gathering methods that lead to the understanding of the case and answers to the research questions (Krauss, 2005).
These methods helped to shed light on the problems perceived by teachers on assessment. In this research multiple sites were also used to collect data. These included different urban and rural schools which were involved in document observation, interviews and focus groups. Multiple sources of data allowed for triangulation. Triangulation also arises from the ethical need to confirm validity of the research process (Tellis, 2005). In the case study this can be done by using multiple sources of data (Yin, 1984). Interviews enabled the researcher to probe and verify information from other data sources. Furthermore, interviews yielded data of participants’ lived experiences and worldviews, which gave rich phenomenological data (Henning, Rensburg & Smit, 2004). Patton (2002:29) posits that,” To support a holistic analysis, qualitative inquirers gather data on multiple aspects of a setting under study to assemble a comprehensive and complete picture of the situation.”

While the justification of using the case study method is in its strength to use multiple methods and data sources to explore and interrogate a phenomenon, the method has a weakness that it was difficult to statistically generalise the findings from one or a small number of cases to the population as a whole. Some scholars, however, have argued that good case studies appeal to the capacity of the reader for naturalistic generalisation (Stake, 1994, 1995). Thus readers recognise aspects of their own experience and intuitively generalise from the case. (Stark & Torrance in Someck & Lewin, 2005). The hallmark of the case study design lies in its strength as a tool for in-depth investigation of phenomena under study. Indeed, the case study’s unique strength is “its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence—documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations” (Yin, 2003a:8).
3.4 RESEARCH PROCESS.

3.4.1 Selecting cases and determining data gathering and analysis techniques.

All schools in Zimbabwe do classroom assessment. The researcher determined that only Gweru District Primary schools were studied because they represent all schools in Zimbabwe which include urban, rural, and private and government. Further boundaries of the study included Grades three to seven because these junior grades have the same assessment procedures.

The researcher considered multiple sources of data for this study and selected document examination; the gathering and study of tests set in the schools and test record books for grade threes to grade sevens. The researcher conducted open-ended interviews with teachers, head teachers of each school, college lecturers, ZIMSEC officers and Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture officers using an interview protocol to guide the researcher during the interview process so that uniformity and consistency of data could be enhanced (see appendix 1-6).

The researcher also employed direct observations as a tool. The researcher visited the grades three to seven to observe the assessment methods used and the availability of resources. Furthermore, all the other issues observed that were in line with the research question were probed during the interviews.

Finally, the researcher carried out some focus group discussions on assessment problems that were faced by teachers (see paragraph, 3.4, and 5.3). Focus groups enabled the researcher to collect information quickly. Grounded theory within case
analysis was selected. Grounded theory is a qualitative research design in which the inquiry generates a general explanation of a process of action or interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants (Strauss Corbin, 1998:62-63). In this research analysis took place during data collection period and was thoroughly integrated into all aspects of it including an analysis of every interview and observation as they were given. In this way each step of the data collection fed into the analysis. Theoretical perspectives were derived from the data, reflecting participants’ views.

3.4.2 Preparing to collect data
The researcher prepared to collect data by first contacting the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture, ZIMSEC Offices, Colleges and each school to be studied to gain their cooperation, to explain the purpose of the study, and assemble key contact information. Since data to be collected were to be found in documents, the researcher stated her intention to request for the documents.

3.4.3 Collecting data
The researcher scheduled time for interviews, observations and focus groups. She took field notes for both interviews and observation. The interviews were also recorded using a tape recorder. At the end of each day the interview and field notes were transcribed. Focus group discussions were also transcribed after every discussion. Data were coded and entered into the data base so that it could be used independently as well as integrated when the case study progressed to a point of case examination of the data.
3.4.4 Sampling Techniques.

Sampling is important in research because it is often neither possible nor desirable to collect data from the entire population (Best & Kahn, 1993:73). The researcher decided who or what to study (Johnson & Christensen, 2004:220). A comprehensive purposive sampling was adopted in this study. “In purposive sampling the goal is to select cases that are likely to be ‘information-rich’ with respect to the purposes of the study” (Gall, et al., 2007, p. 218). In purposive sampling, the researcher seeks individuals and sites that can best supply relevant information needed to answer the research questions raised (Creswell 2008:214). Patton (2002:46) contends that, the logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis of in-depth understanding.

The researcher included only Grades 3 to 7 of Gweru District schools in the study. It was difficult to visit all the ninety-two (92) schools in Gweru District; as such quota sampling was used to select 3 former Group A schools and 3 former Group B schools in Gweru urban. Six rural schools were purposefully selected. The researcher selected grade three to seven teachers because they have similar assessment procedures. Furthermore, Grade 7’s were able to show if the public examination had anything to do with assessment procedures in the primary schools. All the head teachers of the sampled schools were part of the sample. This sample of head teachers allowed for in-depth interviews. Grades 3 to 7 teachers were purposefully selected from each school to constitute eight (8) focus groups. Four focus groups were from urban schools while four others were from rural schools. Focus groups helped the researcher to understand the perceptions and behaviour of respondents. Furthermore, responses from head teachers, Teachers’ College
lecturers, ZIMSEC officers and Ministry of Education, Arts, Sport, and Culture officers were verified. Observations were also verified through focus groups.

3.4.5 Data Collection Techniques.

The study used the multiple measure instruments, that is, triangulation and mixed methods to establish validity and reduce uncertainty of interpretation. Manion & Cohen (1980:208) define triangulation as “the use of two or more methods in data collection.” The methods used in this study are, focus groups, interviews, document analysis and participant observation. Maykut & Morehouse (1994:46) state that:

The data for qualitative inquiry is most often people’s words and actions and thus requires methods that allow the researcher to capture language and behaviour. The most useful ways of gathering these forms of data are participant observation, in-depth interviews, group interviews, and the collection of relevant documents.

Because of the nature of this type of research, investigations were connected to methods such as in-depth interviewing, participant observation and the collecting of relevant documents which the researcher adopted and adapted in this research. Punch (1994) (cited in Harris, 2002:47) commented that, “Qualitative research covers a spectrum of techniques, but central are observations, interviewing and document analysis……and these may be used in a broad range of disciplines “The combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives and observers in a single study is best understood as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth in any inquiry (Flick, 2002:229). Triangulation is defined as, “a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study” (Creswell & Miller, 2000: 126). Matheson (1988:13) elaborates
this by saying, “Triangulation has raised an important methodological issue in naturalistic and qualitative approaches to evaluation in order to control bias and establishing valid propositions because traditional scientific techniques are incompatible with this alternate epistemology”. Denzin & Lincoln (2000:5) stated, “The use of multiple methods, or triangulation reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question…it adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to an inquiry”. “The “trustworthiness” of the conclusions established by “triangulation” was superior because they had been verified through “the use of multiple data sources” (Gay, *et al.*, 2008: 88).

**3.4.5.1 In-depth Interviews**

Fontana & Frey (2006:645), maintain that interviewing is one of the commonest and most powerful ways a researcher can use to understand behaviour. An interview is a conversation with a purpose of gathering information (Berg, 2004: 75). Face-to-face interviews are, “a conversation, the art of asking questions and listening” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 633). Further, as Patton (2002: 417) noted, face-to-face interviews are,

“.........the opportunity for a short period of time to enter another person’s world. This means being interested in what people have to say. You must yourself believe that the thoughts and experiences of the people being interviewed are worth knowing. In short, you must have the utmost respect for these persons who are willing to share with you some of their time to help you understand their world.”

Glanz (2006:343) is of the view that, “Interviews will allow the researcher to learn the complexities of participants’ experiences from their point of view.” This study used in-depth semi-structured interviews as the main method for collecting data for this study since an interpretive approach was adopted .The central concern for the interpretive
research is to understand human experiences at a holistic level (Berry, 1992). Individual interviews enabled the participants to express unique or controversial perspectives without fear of censure or, indeed, with complete confidentiality, unlike the focus group interview (Cresswell, 2008). This confidentiality allows the participants complete freedom to describe their world and reality which also provides opportunities to understand their context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In-depth interviews encouraged the capturing of respondents’ perceptions in their own words. This allowed the researcher to present the meaningfulness of experience from the respondent’s perspective. In light of the above, the perceptions of teachers, head teachers, Teachers college lecturers, Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture officers and ZIMSEC officer’s concerning assessment problems were captured.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to make sure that those relevant areas were covered concerning assessment problems in the schools. Wanden (1982) considers that the guided interview is useful as it allows for in-depth probing while permitting the interviewer to keep the interview within the parameters traced out by the aim of the study. The interviewer should always be in control of a conversation and be able to guide and bend to the service of their research interest (Palmer, 1928:171). According to Patton (2002:343) the interview guide presents the following advantages:

- Helps in interviewing a number of different people in a more systematic and comprehensive manner by delimiting in advance the issues to be explored.
- It keeps interactions focused while at the same time permitting individual perspectives and experiences to emerge.
• Serve as a basic checklist during the interview to ensure that all relevant topics are covered.

• Logical gaps in data can be anticipated and closed.

In-depth interviews also allow for probing and follow up questions (Patton 1987:125-126). The purpose for probing is to deepen the response to the question, to increase the richness being obtained, and to give cue to the interviewer about the level of response that is desired (Berry, 1992).

In-depth interviews were also characterised by open-ended questions. The open-ended questions enabled the researcher to probe further and allowed the informants to qualify their responses. Furthermore, in-depth interviews allowed participants to express their views freely without being restricted by predetermined responses. Creswell (2003:9) contends that," Meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interacting." In depth interviews with the participants were used to gain insights into their perceptions about the problems they faced in assessment. Findings made during document analysis, focus groups and observation were also probed in order to get an in-depth meaning of issues discussed. Open-ended questions have the disadvantage of collecting worthless and irrelevant information as well as data that are not standardised, thus making it difficult when it comes to analysis. Bless & Achola (1988) observed that only the participant knows the true answer and many factors might introduce distortions to the answer. The interview however, enabled the researcher to probe further into the perceptions of teachers, head teachers, Teachers college lecturers, ZIMSEC officers and Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture officers into the assessment problems as faced by primary school teachers. Thus, the interviewer clarified and
extended the meanings of the interviewee’s statements and avoided her own interpretation. The use of face-to-face interviews provided for a different conversation to that of focus group in providing the richness of individuality and freedom to describe a unique life-view without influence from others and negotiation with a group.

3.4.5.2 Document Analysis

Document analysis was the second technique of data collection that was used in this study. It provided insights in the different modes of assessment used by teachers as well as some comments made by teachers in the pupils’ exercise books. Teachers’ record of test books, teacher made tests and learners’ exercise books provided insights in the frequency and quality of classroom assessment. Furthermore, the grade seven summative ZIMSEC tests were also studied. School policies pertaining to assessment were studied.

Schram (2003) identifies advantages of using document analysis. Firstly documents can be accessed at a time convenient to the researcher at a minimum cost. Secondly documents tend to contain data that are thoughtful because adequate time and care is given to compile them. In spite of this the researcher was contented with the limitations associated with document analysis. Triangulation of data collection techniques enabled the researcher to verify the data collected from documents.

3.4.5.3 Focus groups

The study included focus groups as a way of collecting data. Focus groups are a gathering of 6 to 12 people who share some characteristic relevant to the research
(Hugh, 2004). Powell et. al (1996; 499) define a focus group as, “a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research”. Focus group interviews are, “essentially a qualitative data gathering technique …that rely upon the systematic questioning of several individuals simultaneously in a formal or informal setting” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 650). Focus groups can be thought of as collective interviews in which it is hoped that participants, through their interaction may provide data and some insights, which may not be revealed through interviews with individuals. The focus group session is indeed an interview (Patton, 1990). As a method, focus groups are a “collectivistic rather than an individualistic research method that focuses on the multivocality of participants’ attitudes, experiences, and beliefs” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:836). They are essentially interviews conducted with groups of “individuals … who are well informed about the research topic” (Gall, et al., 2007: 244).

Focus groups result in a collective synergy that helps to explore and clarify participants’ perceptions that may not be as readily accessible in a one-on-one interview (Krueger & Casey, 2000, cited in Gall, et. al., 2007: 244). Focus groups were chosen to provide the means by which to give the teachers and Teachers college lecturers a stronger voice in the study. In the spirit of ideal speech, every participant with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in the discourse (Habermas, 1981). Teacher and college lecturers’ encounters may be sporadic or limited precluding a rich breadth of experience and the chance to share experiences with others to understand norms and nuances was provided in focus groups. The research looked to focus groups to provide a means to obtain teachers
and Teachers college lecturers’ “expertise” through collaborative construction and learning from the related experiences of others (Morgan, 1997). In addition, it was thought that the process of interactive discourse in the focus group may provide a collective strength to help empower the teachers and Teachers college lecturers to overcome reluctance to say the wrong thing or provide an acquiescent response set. Focus groups also helped in soliciting information from teachers and teachers’ college lecturers on what they perceive as assessment problems, the sources of these problems and how they thought these could be solved. Teachers were able to consider their own views on assessment in the context of others. Focus groups enabled interactions among study participants that enhanced data quality (Patton, 2002). The teachers heard each other’s comments beyond their own original comments as they listened to what other people had to say (Patton, 2002: 386). Krathwohl (2004:295) contends that details and experiences of one individual may stimulate others.

Focus group discussions are “comfortable and often enjoyable for participants as they shared their ideas and perceptions” (Krueger, 1994: 6). They reveal “the extent to which there is a relatively consistent, shared view or great diversity of views” (Patton, 2002: 386).

Eight groups of six teachers each from the twelve sampled schools constituted the focus groups. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants in the focus groups. “In purposeful sampling the goal is to select cases that are likely to be ‘information-rich’ with respect to the purposes of the study” (Gall, et. al., 2007: 218). Research and experience has demonstrated that conducting more groups does not
usually result in additional meaningful insights, but conducting fewer than 3 groups increases the likelihood that the researcher would miss an important aspect of the discussion (Keyton, 2001:302). The focus groups enabled the researcher to collect data quickly and information gained in focus groups was then used in subsequent interviews. Denzin & Lincoln (2000:652) stated, “The emerging group culture may interfere with individual expression, and the group maybe dominated by one person; and ‘groupthink’ is a possible outcome”. The researcher made an effort to tactfully give the group members chance to talk as well as to allow for free ideas and opinions, discussions and proceedings were recorded using a tape recorder.

3.4.5.4 Participant Observation

In this research, observation was also used to collect first hand information on the assessment process. Conrad & Serlin (2006: 381) view observation as, “a systematic, purposeful and selective way of watching and listening to an interaction as it is”. Observation gave the researcher an opportunity to collect data on a wide range of behaviours, to capture a great variety of interaction and openly explore the assessment topic. By directly observing operations the researcher developed a holistic perspective, that is, understood the context within which assessment took place. This was because the researcher was in direct contact with the naturally occurring events, when the teachers were presenting how they made meaning. In participant observation the aim was to capture the “insider’s view” and not to impose exterior knowledge categories on what was observed (Henning, Rensburd & Smit, 2004). The researcher entered the field in order to find a full descriptive picture (or a thick description) of phenomena (Geertz, 1973:6), in order to present it from a participant’s perspective (Stark & Torrance in Someck & Lewin 2005:34). This was
particularly necessary since the researcher constructed experience in a similar way as that in which the teachers were experiencing it.

The observational approach enabled the researcher to see the things that participants were unable to discuss in an interview or focus group. Observational methods allowed the researcher to record the mundane and unremarkable features of everyday life that interviewees might not feel worth commenting about (Green & Thorogood, 2004:182). By being an observer the setting would provide both length and depth of information (Gay & Airasain, 2003). In this research, the researcher visited schools and see if there were any assessment policies displayed either in the staffroom or head teachers’ office. Furthermore, it was important to observe when and how teachers carried out assessments in their classrooms. This would augment data obtained from focus groups, individual interviews and documentary analysis.

During observation field notes were used to describe what was observed, when, where, and under what conditions. The researcher also used portraits of participants, a reconstruction of dialogue, description of physical setting, accounts of particular events or activities (descriptive notes) and the researcher personal thoughts (reflective notes).

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

Data analysis consists of examining, categorising, tabulating or otherwise recombining evidence to address the initial proposition of a study (Yin, 1994). To analyse data literally means to break it into bits and pieces which Miles and Huberman (1994) label ‘coding’ and Dey (1993) refers to as ‘categorising’. Dey
(1993: 30) describes data analysis as, "... a process of resolving data into its constituent components to reveal its characteristic elements and structure." The simultaneous collection and analysis of data is an important feature of qualitative research (Thomas & Nelson, 2001:340). The overlapping analysis with data collection does not only give the researcher a head start to analysis, but more importantly, allows the researcher to take advantage of flexible data collection (Eisenhardt, 2008). The researcher can make adjustments by adding more cases or adjust the interview guide. Data analyses also continued in an interactive manner during the interview stage. As Patton (2002:68) stated “today’s evaluator must be sophisticated about matching research methods to the nuances of particular evaluation questions and the idiosyncrasies of specific stakeholder needs”

Epistemologically, this research followed an interpretive/constructivist view, which emphasises a subjective interrelationship between the researcher and the participants and the co-construction of meaning. Hayes & Oppeheim (1997), argue that researchers and their ‘humanness” are part of the research endeavour rather than objective observers, and their values must be acknowledged by themselves and their readers as an inevitable part of the outcome (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Charmaz (2000) identified grounded theory when it is underpinned by a constructivist paradigm. Grounded theory is a methodology that seeks to construct theory about important issues in people’s lives (Glaser, 1978). Furthermore, Charmaz (2002:667), see a data and analysis as created from shared experiences of the researcher and the participants and the researcher’s relationship with participants. The researcher, to analyse data using grounded theory, followed the following steps:
• Organised and prepared data for analysis that is, transcribing interviews, typing field notes and arranging data into different types depending on the sources.

• Read and re-read the data to get a sense of the overall data and start to list broad themes that exist. Detailed analysis began with coding, which was a process of organising materials into “chunks” before bringing meaning to those “chunks” (Rallies, 1998:171). Data were coded according to details of setting, types of situation observed, processes, events, strategies and methods observed and social relationships (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

• Once the themes were identified the researcher read through the notes again, now looking for relationships among themes and other salient features within the themes that exist.

• Finally, the researcher chose one category and related all the other categories to that category.

In this research grounded theory was used to analyse data because its strength lies in the cyclical process of collecting data, analysing them, developing a provisional coding scheme, using this to suggest further sampling, checking out emerging theory, and until a point of saturation (Glaser & Strass, 1987 in Green & Thorogood 2004:118). Data from interviews, focus groups, observations and document analysis were transcribed. The researcher read and re-read the textual database in order to discover categories, concepts and their relationships. Bogdan & Biklen (1992) recommend reading data several times in order to begin a coding scheme. Detailed analysis began with open coding, which was a process of organising materials into ‘chunks’ (Rossman & Rallies, 1998:171). This enabled the researcher to capture a
range of concepts used by participants to be identified and to extend the analysis so that research questions could be better understood in terms of grounded theory. The researcher made use of in vivo codes during these first stages to explore how respondents saw their social world.

The second stage in the analysis was axial coding, where the fractured data are put back together, looking for relationships between the data (Henning, Rensburd & Smit, 2004). Close attention was given to deviant cases, which helped to develop the analysis. Finally, the researcher chose one category and related all the other categories to that category.

Creswell (1998) suggests developing written summaries as the next step. The researcher developed a single storyline around which everything else was draped. In developing the storyline the researcher retained the language and syntax of the participants. Visuals were used as adjuncts to the discussion.

3.6 TRIANGULATION, VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY CONSIDERATIONS.

Denzin & Lincoln (2000:393) suggested that the terms “validity” and “reliability” in qualitative research mean different things and are obtained in different ways. Validity in qualitative research has to do with description and explanation and whether or not the explanation fits the description. In other words, is the explanation credible?. Gay et. al. (2006:603) defined validity as being the degree to which a test measures what it is intended to measure; a test is valid for a particular purpose for a particular group. In Qualitative research, it is the degree to which qualitative data accurately gauge what the researcher is trying to measure. Gay et. al. (2006: 601) define
reliability as, “the degree to which a test (or qualitative research data) consistently measures whatever it measures.” On the other hand, Patton (2001) states that validity and reliability are two factors which any qualitative researcher should be concerned about while designing a study, analysing results and judging the quality of the study. This corresponds to the question that, “How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 290).

Some researchers consider the words validity and reliability to be semantically incompatible with qualitative research. The words truthfulness and consistency respectively, are often used to replace them (Andrew et.al, 1996). It has been suggested that quantitative language should not be used in qualitative research due to the different philosophical underpinnings of each paradigm (Curtliffe & McKenna, 1999).

The issues of validity are vital in establishing the truthfulness and credibility of findings (Neuman, 2000; 164). Likewise, Briggs & Coleman (2007:97) contend that the concept of validity is used to judge whether the research accurately describes the phenomenon that it is intended to describe. Research bias is regarded by Johnson & Christensen (2004:249) as one of the potential threats to the validity of qualitative research to be watched out for. Validation of the research findings occurs throughout the various stages involved in the study (Creswell, 2003:95). The aim of trustworthiness in qualitative enquiry is to support the argument that the inquiry findings are worth paying attention to (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:290). In qualitative
research, issues of trustworthiness demand attention to credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

### 3.6.1 Credibility

Credibility is an evaluation of whether or not the research findings present a ‘credible’ conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participants’ original data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:296). Credibility was enhanced through triangulation. According to Denzin & Lincoln (2000:15),

> Triangulation has raised an important methodological issue in naturalistic and qualitative approaches to evaluation in order to control bias and establishing valid propositions because traditional scientific techniques are incompatible with this alternate epistemology.

Denzin & Lincoln (2000:5) stated, “...the use of multiple methods or triangulation reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question; it adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry.” The “trustworthiness” of the conclusions established by “triangulation” was superior because they had been verified through “the use of multiple data sources” (Gay, et al, 2008: 88). Triangulation is viewed by Suter (2006:319) as essentially a means of cross checking multiple data collection sources to establish validity.

In this study, triangulation was undertaken; and data were collected through multiple sources to include focus groups, observations, interviews and document analysis. Triangulation provided both reliability and validity checks by permitting the comparison of themes in the different data groups. Furthermore, focus groups, interviews, observations, and document analysis were particularly useful in
identifying issues and included the participants’ perspectives on assessment problems in the classroom with some depth.

Triangulation also involved the use of a variety of informants. These informants included teachers, head teachers, college lecturers, ZIMSEC officers and Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture officers. Their individual views and experiences were verified against each other’s and ultimately a rich picture of assessment problems in the primary schools was drawn based on the contributions of a wide range of people.

Triangulation was as well achieved by the participation of informants from different organisations so as to reduce the effect of the study to a single institution. Different organisations included ZIMSEC, different urban primary schools, rural primary schools, Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture officers and college lecturers. Similar results emerged from different cites, thereby enhancing the credibility of the findings.

To further enhance credibility in this study, it was made clear that the participants had the right to participate or withdraw from the research. Participants who participated in individual interviews and focus group sessions involved those who were genuinely willing to take part. These participants were prepared to offer data freely. During focus groups and interviews, the researcher probed some responses in order to elicit detailed data. All this was done in order to produce credible data.
Detailed thick description was another strategy that was employed to promote credibility of this study. This helped the researcher to convey the actual situations that were investigated. Furthermore, the researcher also examined previous research studies to assess the degree to which the research findings were congruent to previous studies. This was aimed at transporting the reader to the setting and to give the discussion an element of shared experiences.

The researcher also prolonged her engagement in the field. The researcher observed the setting over a long period of time in order to develop an in depth understanding of the phenomenon. Observations were made during a period of slightly more than six months.

Member checking was another strategy which was employed by the researcher in order to come up with credible information. The researcher took the final report of specific descriptions or themes back to participants and determined whether these participants felt that they were accurate. McMillan & Schumer (2001:404) suggested that the researcher would check informally with participants for accuracy of information during data collection. Denzin & Lincoln (2000:393) stated that “validity” and “reliability” in qualitative data gathering result when we “cross–check our work through member checks. The researcher needs to find a way to allow for the participants to review the material one way or another.” In this study when conducting interviews and focus groups, notes were typed verbatim and respondents were invited to check the accuracy of the transcription and to make any changes. This assured the respondent that the researcher was accurately noting their thoughts and opinions.
3.6.2 Dependability

Lincolin & Guba (1995:63) stress the close ties between dependability and credibility, arguing that, in practice a demonstration of the former goes some distance in the former. In this research, the use of focus groups and individual interviews enhanced dependability. The way the study was carried out was also described in detail to enhance dependability. Such a detailed description allows the reader to assess the extent to which proper research practices have been followed. According to Guba & Lincolin (1985:317), the use of an ‘inquiry audit’ allows reviews to examine both the process and the research for consistency. A permanent record of the original data for analysis and researchers’ comment was kept. This was to allow others to examine the thought process involved in the research and also enabled them to assess the accuracy of the conclusions. In addition, a lecturer who was also a doctorate learner with UNISA served as a peer examiner and provided some meaningful insights into this study.

3.6.3 Transferability

According to Merriam (1998:39), external validity is the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied to other situations. In order to allow transferability, the researcher provided information that could be used by the reader to determine whether the findings were applicable to any new situation (Lincolin & Guba, 1985). Eisner (1991:25) says this is a form of ‘retrospective generalisation’ that can allow us to understand our past/future experiences in a new way. This study described the characteristics of both the participants and primary schools; the data collection methods used as well as the time frame within which data were collected. The researcher also used thick description. This was done to enable the readers to assess the extent to which the findings may be true of people in other settings.
3.6.4 Confirmability

In this study the findings were the result of the experiences and ideas of informants rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher. In order to enhance confirmability, the researcher offered a self-critical reflective analysis of the methodology used in research. The self-reflection created an open and honest narrative that was aimed to resonate well with the readers.

3.7 ETHICAL ISSUES

Research ethics is an essential component of this study. The researcher had the responsibility to conduct the investigations and report their findings without harming research participants (Keyton, 2004:251). In this research informed consent was sought from teachers, head teachers, Teachers college lecturers, Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture officers and ZIMSEC officers who participated in the research. Furthermore, consent was sought from the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture officers, ZMSEC and the Ministry of Higher Education. Johnson & Christensen (2004:102) contend that informed consent refers to procedures in which individuals choose whether or not to participate in an investigation after being informed of the purpose of the study, procedures of the study, risks and the right to ask questions, the benefits of the study that would accrue to the participants, alternative procedures and limits of confidentiality prior to participation and non participation. This was done verbally and in writing, by providing information about the study, the research aims and questions, instruments, research procedures, and plans for informed consent by all study participants. Participation at every stage was voluntary, and confidentiality and anonymity were
assured wherever possible. The overall purpose of the study, duration, benefits and risks of the study were also stated.

Only voluntary participation by participants was acceptable prior to participation in research. All participants could discontinue their participation at any time as they wished. Participants made the choice to be part of the research or to withdraw from the research after some explanations pertaining to the study. Borg & Gall (2002:85) contend that, “researchers should respect the individual freedom to decline to participate or to withdraw from the research study at any time”. By the nature of qualitative research, protecting anonymity would be difficult because of its use of observation, interviews and focus groups. Clearly, focus group participants could not be assured of anonymity from the other group members, however, and their data were protected from external scrutiny. Furthermore, when making write-ups about focus group participants’ names were changed. Names were not attached to any other data. Information provided by the research participants was not given to parents, other teachers, Teachers college lecturers, Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture officers, ZIMSEC officers and their supervisors. The research results from all participants were summarised and given as a research report with no names. Bogdan & Biklen (2007:215) asset that, informant identities should be protected to avoid embarrassment and any form of harm on participants”. Any material that was collected through document analysis, interviews, observations, audiotapes was kept away from the data collection site to further enhance confidentiality. Participants were not deceived in order to take part in the research. The true nature of the research including procedures was spelt out.
3.8 SUMMARY
This chapter focused on methodology used in this study. Research design, participants, samples and sampling procedures, research instruments, and data collection procedures were detailed and justified. The next chapter sets out to analyse, present, and interpret data.
CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter three gave a description of the methodology, the research design and the instruments used in the research. A description of all the activities and procedures that were undertaken during the empirical study were outlined. This chapter presents an analysis and discussion of the data generated during the field study. Bogdan & Biklen (1998) define qualitative data analysis as, “working with data, organising it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesising it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learnt and deciding what you will tell others”. The researcher collected data from observations, individual interviews with teachers, head teachers, Teachers college lecturers, ZIMSEC officers, and Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture officers. Focus groups were held with teachers and college lecturers. The researcher also analysed documents.

Findings of the research study were given as follows. Firstly, each of the twelve schools involved in the research, was described and explained in terms of location, learners’ information and infrastructure. Secondly, the characteristics of the participants were described. Thirdly, this chapter tries to respond to the central research question and sub-problems raised in paragraph 1.5. The ensuing paragraphs presented significant themes which emerged from the study and from the questions structured in the form of individual and focus group interviews with participants (teachers, school head teachers, Teachers college lecturers, ZIMSEC officers and Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture officers). All the interviews
conducted were tape recorded, transcribed verbatim and the researcher read and re-read the transcribed work until some themes came out.

4.2 PRIMARY SCHOOLS INCLUDED IN THE RESEARCH STUDY

This chapter provides data that were captured during the site visits to each of the twelve schools. The primary schools were purposively sampled on the basis of their type and geographical location, that is, proximity to the researcher. Before the schools are described, a checklist showing the characteristics of these schools is shown in Table 4.2 below. The data were obtained via document analysis, observation and interviews as research instruments.
### Table 4.1 Checklist for the urban schools' characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School 1</th>
<th>School 2</th>
<th>School 3</th>
<th>School 4</th>
<th>School 5</th>
<th>School 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medium of instruction</strong></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of teachers:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of pupils</strong></td>
<td>1056</td>
<td>1438</td>
<td>1511</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>1205</td>
<td>1100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average number of pupils per class</strong></td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of classrooms</strong></td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of staffrooms</strong></td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of special rooms</strong></td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Telephone line</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Library</strong></td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Photocopier</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fax</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Generator</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Computers</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Printers</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4.2 Checklist for the rural schools’ characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School 7</th>
<th>School 8</th>
<th>School 9</th>
<th>School 10</th>
<th>School 11</th>
<th>School 12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medium of instruction</strong></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of teachers:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of pupils</strong></td>
<td>735</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>617</td>
<td>749</td>
<td>614</td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average number of pupils per class</strong></td>
<td>45</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of classrooms</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of staffrooms</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of special rooms</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Telephone line</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Library</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Photocopier</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fax</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Generator</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Computers</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Printers</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Electricity</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.1 Characteristics of the urban primary schools

• School 1

The school was built after independence and is located in the high density suburb of Mkoba 15, Gweru. It is a council school meant to cater for pupils residing in the surrounding Mkoba 15, 18 and 19. The school offers places for day scholars and does not have hot sitting. It had an enrolment of 1056 pupils and 33 teachers. 26 of the teachers were female while 7 were male. The average number of pupils per class was 48. There were 21 classrooms of which 3 of these were special rooms. The school had neither a library nor a staffroom. There were a total of 12 computers, 1 printer and 1 photocopier.

Most of the time the researcher visited the school, there was no electricity. Electricity enables teachers process assessment papers using electrical gadgets such as computers and photocopiers. The head teacher also reported that power cuts were the order of the day and they hardly had electricity hence plans had been put in place to buy a generator. The characteristics of the school show that in some facilities, such as computers, printers, photocopiers that are crucial for assessment procedures were available.

• School 2

This is a government school that was built before independence. It is situated in the high density suburb of Mambo, Gweru, and is meant to accommodate pupils from Mambo, Ascot and Mtapa high density suburbs. The school had an enrolment of 1438. There were 42 teachers of which 36 were female and 6 were male. The average number of pupils per class was 48. The school caters for day scholars,
some being for the morning session and others for the afternoon session (hot sitting).

There were 36 classrooms and 3 special rooms. The school also had a photocopier, a printer and a generator to be used during power cuts. The characteristics of the school showed that there were some facilities such as computers, printers, photocopier and generator to carry out assessment. During the visits to the school there was no electricity. A generator was available, but according to the head teachers getting the fuel for the generator was sometimes difficult due to financial constraints.

- **School 3**

This is a government school situated in Mkoba 6. It was built before independence and had an enrolment of 1511 pupils. It caters mainly for pupils from Mkoba 1, 3, 5 and 13. There was a staff complement comprising 44 female and 2 male teachers, making a total of 46 teachers. The average number of learners per class was 45. There was hot sitting in the school, that is, there were separate morning and afternoon learning sessions for different batches of pupils.

School 3 had 36 classrooms and 3 special rooms. There was no library or staff room. The school had a generator, 2 computers and a printer. However, there was neither a fax machine nor a photocopier. While there were some basic facilities to carry out assessment, there was need for a photocopier and another printer to help in the assessment of pupils.

- **School 4**
Situated in the high density suburb of Ascot Gweru, School 4 was built before independence and had an enrolment of 850 pupils. The school is under the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. There was no hot sitting and the average class size was 50 pupils. At this school there was a teacher complement of 25. Of the total number of teachers, 20 were females while 5 were male. There were 21 classrooms but there were no special rooms. The school had a library, small photocopier, 1 printer, 2 computers and a fax machine. The head teacher highlighted that more often than not, the school experienced power cuts during the day. However, there was no generator.

- **School 5**

This is a former Group A government school situated near the Gweru City Centre at corner of School Avenue and Kopje Road. The school was built before independence and is meant to cater for pupils from Kopje, Windsor Park and other suburbs around the southern area of Gweru City Centre. The school had an enrolment of 1205 pupils and there was a staff complement of 30 female and 7 male teachers respectively. The average pupil number per class was 48.

School 5 had 20 classrooms and 3 special rooms as well as a library. The school was also equipped with 15 computers and 2 printers but had no generator. The basic facilities to carry out assessment were available. During the period of the field study, the researcher observed that electricity was available during each site visit. The head teacher confirmed that electricity was available most of the time.
- **School 6**

School 6 is a former Group A school situated along Harare Road in Gweru. It was built before independence and had an enrolment of 1200. There was no hot sitting in the school. The average class size was 50. There were 33 teachers in the school of which 29 were female and 4 were male. The total number of classrooms was 22. There were neither special rooms nor a staff room but the school had a library. There were 10 computers, 1 printer and a fax machine. There was no photocopier in the school. School 6 has a boarding facility and caters for both boarders and day scholars. It would appear there were sufficient facilities to carry out assessment. However, the head teacher complained about power cuts which disturbed their assessment procedures.

- **School 7**

School 7 is a rural school situated in Chiwundura area which is 45 km out of Gweru. It is administered by the 7th Day Adventist Church. The school caters for 735 day scholars from the surrounding community. The staff complement comprised of 10 male teachers and 6 female teachers making a total of 16 teachers. The average class size was 45 and there was no hot sitting.

School 7 had 16 classrooms and no special class. It had a library, 3 computers, and a printer. However, there was neither a generator nor a photocopier in the school. There was adequate furniture in the school and reading materials were available. Though the school had basic facilities to carry out assessment, there was need for a photocopier to help in the production of assessment materials. Special rooms would make it practical for the teachers to give meaningful assessment to practical
subjects. These were however not available in the school. School 7 compared very well with most of the urban schools in terms of infrastructure. An added advantage was that electricity was always available. The school was rarely affected by power load shedding.

- **School 8**

School 8 is a rural council school situated in Chiwundura 40 kilometers outside Gweru. The school had an enrolment of 495 pupils and a staff complement of 12 which comprised of 8 male and 4 females. The average class size was 40.

The school had 12 classrooms, a staff room, and electricity. However, there was no library, specialist rooms, telephone line, photocopier, generator and printers to facilitate in assessment. The classrooms had insufficient furniture, as such, some pupils sat on the floor and wrote on their laps. The cement floors of most of the classrooms had pot holes. Reading materials were also difficult to come by.

From the characteristics of the school it is likely to be very difficult to carry out assessment because of the poor infrastructure and the poor resource base.

- **School 9**

School 9 is a rural school situated in Chiwundura area 36 kilometers outside Gweru. It had an enrolment of 617 pupils with an average class size of 45. There was a staff complement of 10 male and 9 female teachers totaling 19.
School 9 had 16 classrooms but had no staffroom, special rooms, electricity, generator or computers. There was insufficient furniture in the classrooms as a result pupils were packed on the few available benches. Though some reading materials had been donated to the school, the book to pupil ratio was about 1:5 in some subjects. In other subjects there were no books at all. The resource base in this school was poor. As a result teachers were likely to face problems in assessment.

• **School 10**

This is a rural council school situated in Lower Gweru area, 35 kilometers out of Gweru. It had an enrolment of 749 pupils and a staff complement of 12 females and 10 males. The average class size was 30. As reflected in Table 4.2 there was no staffroom, special rooms, telephone line, library, photocopier, computers and printers in the school. The school lacked basic facilities to carry out assessment and this might greatly hinder the assessment procedures in the school.

• **School 11**

School 11 was a rural mission school situated in Lower Gweru area, 30 kilometers outside Gweru. It had an enrolment of 614 pupils and staff complement of 20. Of the teachers in the school 13 were females and 7 were males as reflected in Table 4.2. The school had 18 classrooms, 2 special rooms, a staffroom and a library. There was also a telephone, a photocopier, 1 computer and printer as well as a generator in the school. There was adequate supply of reading materials as well as a fair supply of reading materials. The researcher also observed the head teacher and the deputy head teacher had laptops. The school compared very well with former group
A schools in the urban schools in terms of infrastructure. The basic facilities to carry out assessment were available in the school.

- **School 12**

School 12 is a council school situated at Lower Gweru growth point, 25 kilometers outside Gweru. The school was built after independence. The school had an enrolment of 322 pupils and an average class size of 40. The staff complement was 13, consisting of 7 females and 6 males. There were 8 classrooms in the school which had no electricity, library or special rooms. There was also no telephone line, photocopier, generator, computers and printers in the school. The buildings were neat because the school was fairly new. There was also adequate furniture in the classrooms. The researcher also observed that teachers had composite classes where teachers taught two levels, that is; grades 3 and 4 or grades 5 and 6. This unique load may affect proper assessment procedures. Although the buildings were neat, the school lagged behind in terms of other resources that are basic to facilitate proper assessment in the school.

Considering the characteristics of both urban and rural schools it would appear that most of the schools lacked the basic facilities to carry out assessment. Schools were found wanting in terms of reading materials, computers, electricity, infrastructure, printers and photocopiers. However, the list was longer in rural areas where in some schools pupils had no chairs or desks and had to write on their laps. Some pupils in the rural areas could not afford to buy pens and books.
Composite classes were another feature which was peculiar to the rural set up, while hot sitting was solely evident in the urban areas. The above factors for both urban and rural schools were likely to militate against proper assessment procedures in the school.

Appendix 8 was used to collect data considered to be important in this research.

4.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

This paragraph presents characteristics of the participants in the study from which the information was obtained through observations, individual interviews, focus groups and document analysis.

4.3.1 Urban primary school head teachers

As reflected in Table 4.3, of the six participating urban primary school head teachers, three were female while three were male. The increase in the number of females could be attributed to the government’s policy on Women Advancement. Furthermore, most women would want to join their husbands in town as evidenced by the population of women teachers in town (see Table 4.2). All the six head teachers in the study were of mature age ranging from 45 to 57 years of age. All the participating school head teachers attained further studies in their field of profession. Five of them had a Masters Degree in Education while one of them had a first degree. The school head teachers were well experienced in their leadership positions as their experience ranged from 12 to 25 years. Their service as staff members in those particular schools in which they head spanned from 2 to 23 years which was quite long. This indicated that the heads had long experience in education.
Table 4.3 Profiles of urban school head teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School 1</th>
<th>School 2</th>
<th>School 3</th>
<th>School 4</th>
<th>School 5</th>
<th>School 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<td>50</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest Academic Qualifications</strong></td>
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<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest Professional Qualifications</strong></td>
<td>BEd (EAPPS)</td>
<td>MEd (EAPPS)</td>
<td>MEd (EAPPS)</td>
<td>MEd (EAPPS)</td>
<td>MEd (EAPPS)</td>
<td>MEd (EAPPS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of years of experience as head</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of years in the school</strong></td>
<td>7½</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**KEY**
- ‘O’ level - Ordinary level
- ‘A’ level - Advanced level
- BTech - Bachelor of Technology
- BEd (EAPPS) - Bachelor of Educational Administration, Planning and Policy Studies
- MEd (EAPPS) - Masters in Educational Administration, Planning and Policy Studies

4.3.2 Rural primary school head teachers

An analysis of Table 4.4 reveals that of the participating rural school head teachers, 3 were female while 3 were male. All rural school head teachers were mature with age ranging from 44 to 50. Furthermore, all the rural school head teachers who participated in this research attained further studies in their profession. 3 of them had masters’ degrees while 3 had first degrees. The school head teachers had a long experience as heads which ranged from 7 to 19 years. The serving period in those particular schools in which they work ranged from 1 to 10 years. The levels of
experience as well as the academic and professional qualifications of both the urban and rural head teachers are similar. Furthermore, both rural and urban teachers were of mature age. (Tables 4.3 and 4.4). These head teachers were therefore likely to be conversant with assessment in the primary schools hence; their responses were likely to be relevant to this research.

Table 4.4 Profiles of rural school head teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Highest Academic Qualifications</th>
<th>Highest Professional Qualifications</th>
<th>Number of years of experience as head</th>
<th>Number of years in the school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>‘A’ level</td>
<td>MEd (EAPPS)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>BEd (EAPPS)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>BEd (EAPPS)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>MEd (EAPPS)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>‘A’ level</td>
<td>MEd (EAPPS)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>BEd (EAPPS)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The primary school head teachers were asked to complete the form (Appendix 9) to facilitate collection of important and relevant demographic data about them.

4.3.3 Interviews with individual teachers (urban)

Altogether 12 teachers participated in interviews as individuals. Each school was represented by two teachers. The teachers were deliberately selected to
accommodate the teachers who did not participate in the focus groups. The researcher tried to consider gender balance but in some schools it became difficult because there was a high population of female teachers. The analysis of Table 4.5 below revealed that 8 teachers were female while 4 were male. The teachers’ ages ranged from 35 to 55 years while the teaching experience ranged from 11 to 25 years. Of all the participating teachers, 3 taught one subject at Grades 3-7, 4-7 and 5-7 respectively, while the rest taught between 10 and 11 subjects at Grades 3-7.

The analysis also revealed that all the participating teachers had ‘O’ level. Of the 12 participating teachers, 8 had either a C.E. or DipEd while 4 had degrees. A range of 53 to 600 pupils were taught by specialist teachers; while the number of pupils per class ranged from 42 to 50. Basing on their maturity, work experience and academic qualifications, the teachers appeared to be well versed with assessment problems in the primary schools.
### Table 4.5 Profiles of urban primary school teachers in the individual interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Highest Academic Qualifications</th>
<th>Highest Professional Qualification</th>
<th>Grades taught</th>
<th>No of subjects taught</th>
<th>Number of pupils taught</th>
<th>Number of years teaching experience</th>
<th>Number of years at present school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School 1</td>
<td>Tr 1</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>C.E.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 2</td>
<td>Tr 2</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>C.E.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 3</td>
<td>Tr 1</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 4</td>
<td>Tr 1</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 5</td>
<td>Tr 2</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 6</td>
<td>Tr 1</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>BEd</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.3.4 Profiles of the rural primary school teachers in individual interviews

Six teachers participated in individual rural interviews. Each school was represented by one teacher. The selection of teachers targeted those who did not participate in focus groups. The analysis of Table 4.6 below indicated that 2 teachers were male and 4 teachers were female. The teachers’ ages ranged from 34 to 40 years. All the participating teachers taught 8 to 11 subjects. Moreover, all the participating teachers had ‘O’ levels, 5 had Diplomas while 1 had a BEd. The experience of the teachers ranged from 7 to 19 years.
Considering their working experience as well as both academic and professional qualifications, it would appear highly likely that the teachers were conversant with the assessment problems in the primary schools.

Table 4.6 Profiles of rural teachers in the individual interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School 1</th>
<th>School 2</th>
<th>School 3</th>
<th>School 4</th>
<th>School 5</th>
<th>School 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest Academic Qualifications</strong></td>
<td>'O' level</td>
<td>'O' level</td>
<td>'O' level</td>
<td>'O' level</td>
<td>'O' level</td>
<td>'O' level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest Professional Qualifications</strong></td>
<td>C.E</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Further Study</strong></td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>BEd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of subjects taught</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grades taught</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of learners taught</strong></td>
<td>49</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of years of teaching</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of years at present school</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.5 The urban primary school teachers’ focus groups

Altogether, 24 teachers participated in the focus group interviews conducted during the empirical study. Each focus group had one representative from each of the
participating schools. The teachers were deliberately selected to cater for the various levels (grades) and specialist teachers. There was also a deliberate attempt to maintain gender balance.

Table 4.7 Profiles of urban teachers in the first focus group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School 1</th>
<th>School 2</th>
<th>School 3</th>
<th>School 4</th>
<th>School 5</th>
<th>School 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Academic Qualifications</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Professional Qualifications</td>
<td>C.E</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Study</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>BTech</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>BSc Counseling</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>NIL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of subjects taught</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades taught</td>
<td>4,5,6,7</td>
<td>3-7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of learners taught</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of years of teaching</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of years at present school</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4.8 Profiles of urban teachers in the second focus group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School 1</th>
<th>School 2</th>
<th>School 3</th>
<th>School 4</th>
<th>School 5</th>
<th>School 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest Academic Qualifications</strong></td>
<td>‘A’ level</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest Professional Qualifications</strong></td>
<td>BEd (EAPPS)</td>
<td>BTech Degree</td>
<td>C.E.</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Further Study</strong></td>
<td>MEd (EAPPS)</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>BSc Psychology</td>
<td>BSc Counselling</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>NIL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of subjects taught</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grades taught</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of learners taught</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of years of teaching</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of years at present school</strong></td>
<td>1½</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.9 Profiles of urban teachers in the third focus group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School 1</th>
<th>School 2</th>
<th>School 3</th>
<th>School 4</th>
<th>School 5</th>
<th>School 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest Academic Qualifications</strong></td>
<td>'O' level</td>
<td>'O' level</td>
<td>'O' level</td>
<td>'O' level</td>
<td>'O' level</td>
<td>'O' level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest Professional Qualifications</strong></td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>BSc SPED</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Further Study</strong></td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>NIL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of subjects taught</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grades taught</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of learners taught</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of years of teaching</strong></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of years at present school</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>46</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.10 Profiles of urban teachers in the fourth focus group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School 1</th>
<th>School 2</th>
<th>School 3</th>
<th>School 4</th>
<th>School 5</th>
<th>School 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest Academic Qualifications</strong></td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest Professional Qualifications</strong></td>
<td>CE</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
<td>BEd (EAPPS)</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Further Study</strong></td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>NIL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of subjects taught</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grades taught</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of learners taught</strong></td>
<td>52</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of years of teaching</strong></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of years at present school</strong></td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>52</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.11 Profiles of rural teachers in the first focus group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School 7</th>
<th>School 8</th>
<th>School 9</th>
<th>School 10</th>
<th>School 11</th>
<th>School 12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest Academic Qualifications</strong></td>
<td>‘A’ level</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>JC</td>
<td>‘O’ level</td>
<td>‘A’ level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest Professional Qualifications</strong></td>
<td>DipEd</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
<td>C.E.</td>
<td>PTL</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
<td>DipEd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Further Study</strong></td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>NIL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of subjects taught</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grades taught</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of learners taught</strong></td>
<td>49</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of years of teaching</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of years at present school</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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Table 4.13 Profiles of rural teachers in the third focus group

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Table 4.14 Profiles of rural teachers in the fourth focus group

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<td>Female</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
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<td>40</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>16</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**KEY:**
- DipEd          - Diploma in Education
- C.E          - Certificate in Education
- ‘O’ level      - Ordinary level
- ‘A’ level      - Advanced level
- BTech           - Bachelor of Technology
- BEd (EAPPS)        - Bachelor of Educational Administration, Planning and Policy Studies
- MEd (EAPPS)       - Masters in Educational Administration, Planning and Policy Studies
- BSc Psychology   - Bachelor of Science in Psychology
- BSc Counseling - Bachelor of Science in Counseling
- BSc SPED   - Bachelor of Science in Special Education
- PTL            - Primary Teachers Lower
- J C            - Junior Certificate
4.3.5.1 Urban primary school teachers focus group.

An analysis of Tables 4.7, 4.8, 4.9 and 4.10 revealed that the teachers included in the four focus groups were mostly female. Only 8 teachers were male while 16 were female. This was because there were more female teachers in the schools than male teachers (see Table 4.1). The teachers' age ranges were between 31 to 56 years. Their teaching experience ranged from 1 to 30 years.

Of all the participating teachers, 4 had degrees and the rest either had a Certificate in Education or a Diploma in Education. 5 of the teachers were also pursuing further studies. 3 teachers taught one subject from Grade 3-7 while the rest of the teachers taught 10-11 subjects. One specialist teacher taught 600 pupils while the class sizes of other teachers ranged from 40-53.

4.3.5.2 Rural primary school teachers' focus group.

An analysis of tables 4.11, 4.12, 4.13, 4.14 revealed that of the rural teachers included in the focus groups, 16 were female and 8 were male. The teachers' ages ranged from 27 to 54 years. Of all the participating teachers, 2 had degrees and 21 had Diplomas in education and 1 had a Primary Teachers Lower Certificate. All participants taught 10 to 11 subjects. The head teachers of the rural schools the researcher visited during this research indicated that they did not have any specialist teachers as yet. Appendix 9 was used to collect data considered important to the research.
### Table 4.15 Profiles for ZIMSEC staff.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Number of years with the Organisation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of years in present post</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
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</table>

#### 4.3.6 The ZIMSEC staff.

Two ZIMSEC staff members participated in this empirical study (see Table 4.15). An analysis of Table 4.15 revealed that the two officers interviewed were both males aged 48 and 50 respectively. One has a first degree and the other one had a master’s degree in education. Both the participating officers have been with the organisation for 6 and 8 years respectively. From the information regarding their experience, age and qualifications, the ZIMSEC staff members, likely gave valid responses concerning assessment problems in the primary schools. This is because their experience coupled by their qualifications could enable them to give relevant responses.

Appendix 10 was used to collect data considered to be important in this rese
4.16 Profiles for Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture officers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>Age</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of years at present post</td>
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<td>5</td>
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</table>

4.3.7 Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture Officers

An analysis of Table 4.16 reveals that all education officers interviewed in this research were male. Their ages ranged from 57 to 61 years. 3 had first degrees in education and 1 had a first degree in mathematics and physics. Their experience in education ranged from 27 to 35 years and the number of years at present post ranged from 2 to 19 years. Considering the qualifications and experience of the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture officers, it was likely that their responses pertaining assessment problems in the schools were valid. Appendix 11 was used to collect data considered to be important in this research.

4.3.8 College lecturers

An analysis of Table 4.17 shows that most of the Teachers college lecturers interviewed in this research were female. Their ages ranged from 36 to 50 years. Two of them had first degrees while the rest had masters degrees in different areas. Their experience range was 2-22 years. Based on their ages and level of
experience, the Teachers college lecturers were likely to be aware of assessment knowledge that was imparted on their learners.

### Table 4.17 Profiles for College Lecturers

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### 4.4 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY

As stated in paragraph 3.2, a qualitative approach drawing from the case studies was used to address the research questions raised in paragraph 1.5 and those in interview protocols for primary school teachers, head teachers, Teachers college lecturers, Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture officers and ZIMSEC officers. (See appendices 1, 2, 3, 4, 5). In analyzing the data the researcher read and re-read the transcripts, identified the preliminary themes, classified the quotations according to themes, discussed the quotations made and an analytic comparison to arrive at an interpretation and conclusion.
A discussion of the findings from qualitative observation, qualitative individual interviews and focus group interviews, as well as document analysis, is covered under the following subtopics:

- Teacher competencies on assessment
- Teacher perceptions on classroom assessment
- Resources put in place to support assessment.
- Lack of variety in assessment
- Teacher conceptions on assessment
- Assessment policies
- Too many records
- Work load
- Demands of public examinations
- Lack of motivation
- Economic factors

4.4.1 Teacher competencies on assessment

The literature study in paragraph 2.9 indicates that teachers coming out of training institutions and those in the field possessed inadequate information on how to use proper methods of assessment and using results for whatever purposes. In the separate interviews with the 12 primary head teachers and the teachers, virtually all the school head teachers indicated that teachers were not competent enough to carry out assessment. Asked for his view on teacher competencies in assessment, one head teacher said, “Teachers lacked expertise. Most teachers were at 40% while a few were at 70% competence.” The teachers also confirmed this, and attributed it to inadequate assessment training in the Teachers’ colleges. In response
to the question on whether they received adequate training, the school teachers in
the focus groups confirmed that the training was little to none. The following
responses were given.

“We were mainly trained in theory and no
implementation.”

“Teachers Colleges concentrated on philosophy,
sociology and psychology.”

“We are using trial and error; no skills really were
imparted during college days.”
“I don’t know whether we were trained or not because we
were taught that we should record pupils’ marks in
Individual Progress Record Books.”

“Assessment was part of our training, but I don’t think it
was thorough as what the actual situation on the ground
demands. I think it was done more on a theoretical level,
but would believe there is a need for far more detail than
that.”

“Ya-ah, it was theoretical, but practically we had to go out
and learn on our own.”

“I taught myself through experience and sometimes I
asked for help from teachers around. We are able to
address some aspects of assessment but item writing
needs revisiting.”

“I met item writing when I was already in the field after
completing my college. Even the specification grid I met it
when I was already in the field. The college curriculum
was shaky with regards to assessment.”

“Yes we were taught during teaching practice. We were
not taught in class but during teaching practice. We had
to go for teaching practice where we learnt through
practice and experience.”

“I can say we were taught to do assessment in the sense
that, we were taught to evaluate our schemes of work at
the same time trying to evaluate the response of our
pupils”.

One head teacher also said during his days at college, they were partially trained. He
gave the following response:
“We were not exposed to specification grids, we were not exposed to skills to be addressed when setting tests....ummm..yah! We were not taught the variety of items used in setting tests”.

A Teachers college lecturer at one of the colleges confirmed the teachers’ and head teachers’ views and said,

“Very little is done with regards to how to set tests. I believe learners learn through trial and error while there are on teaching practice or in the field”

Responding to the same question one ZIMSEC officer echoed these views;

“At the moment I will say the bulk of our teachers were not trained in assessment theory especially at pre - training and during training because when you look at the course outline of most of our primary school teachers colleges the assessment component is not emphasised. It may be true to say most of the teachers that are coming out of teachers training colleges are not strong in assessment theory”.

One education officer also expressed his views when he said,

“If you look at it rationally, I would say teachers are just on the average. But if you look at it from the way our learners perform in the national examinations then I will have to qualify that .Because national examinations seem to give teachers an impression that they are doing well, because of the assessment they do in preparation for the examinations. But when you look at the quality of the product, that is when you begin to see the uh –ah this is not a complete child, because the assessments have been focusing on one domain.”

These responses showed that teachers came out of Teachers’ colleges with inadequate assessment skills since very little thrust was given on assessment when training teachers. Apparently, teachers’ colleges concentrated on theory and neglected the practical aspect. This being the case, the competencies necessary to enable the teachers to carry out assessment were low. This confirms the findings of

Teachers also do not believe they had adequate training (see literature review 2.8). Interviews with the head teachers and teachers further revealed that schools were doing very little to develop skills of assessment in their staff. Literature in paragraph 2.8 pointed out that in most American jurisdictions, there is relatively little emphasis placed on assessment in the professional development of teachers.

When asked whether or not they received professional development on assessment, some teachers interviewed gave the following responses,

“There have been none, for as far back as I can remember.”

“No, not really.”

These comments showed that teachers had a problem in assessing pupils in that; they came out of Teachers colleges with partial training and when they got into the schools, teachers received very little support in terms of staff development. One teacher supported the preceding comment and said, “We sit down and evaluate the tests written at the end of each term. Therefore we can say that we have some kind of staff development at the end of each term.” This confirmed Marira & Mkandawire’s proposition on the need for pre-service and in-service training of teachers to equip them with those skills that are associated with teacher competencies (see literature review 2.8). According to the responses from teachers and head teachers, both Teachers colleges and primary schools were found wanting with regards to training of teachers.
The study established from teacher focus groups which further confirmed that teachers gained assessment skills while they were already in the field. When asked where they got the skills from, since they already carried out classroom assessment, the teachers had this to say:

“I think from teaching practice and now.”

“We are still learning in class now.”

“Ee-eh experience is the best teacher. We learnt through trial and error.”

Apparently, from the teachers’ responses, the experiences gained by teachers might be a vicious cycle of malpractice. If one considers that teachers were not adequately trained in the field and that very little is done to staff develop them, one can conclude that the experience teachers perceive might be packed with poor assessment strategies. One head teacher also responded to the question of experience as follows,

“I obtained my assessment skills from Better Environmental Science Teaching workshops, but I was already teaching by then.”

One education officer concurred with the head teachers’ view above when he said,

“The Ministry e-e-m has a Better Schools programme which is deliberately designed to ensure that we create a better school environment; better teaching and better learning. It has a number of resource centres. In each district there is a resource centre where we expect the better schools programme to organise workshops for teachers that they develop themselves through peer coaching and sometimes we get facilitators from outside the provincial offices. There is a coordinator at provincial offices who after identifying schools that are faltering in a certain area then they organise people from schools that are doing well to go and share their practices with schools that are not doing well”
The comments made by the education officer and one head teacher seem to indicate that the ideal was to have teachers trained in their area of weakness through the Better Schools Programme. Only one head teacher from all the interview respondents had benefited from this programme. From these observations it would appear that very little is happening on the ground in terms of the staff development of teachers through the Better Schools Programme. The programme caters for many aspects of teacher competencies and it seems the area of assessment has not been given its much needed attention.

In response to whether or not they attended any staff development programmes on assessment, or if at all their schools organised these, the teachers went on to say:

“"We have them (staff developments on assessment) all the time when we are about to have exams and they are facilitated by the head teacher, deputy head teacher or T.I.C (teacher-in-charge)"

"Nooo….ah! We had just one, but now the problem is motivation ma’am. Honestly, I cannot sit and listen to someone teaching me about my job while my mouth is as white as…Vim. I can’t concentrate."

The above sentiments were also echoed by one Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture officer, who said,

"I am afraid to say even if you carry out staff development programmes, teachers are not enthusiastic. For example we carried out a staff development on HIV. What they will ask is how much they will get from it more than the content. So you will realise that it is the monetary factor that is affecting our teachers."

It is disturbing to note, however, that while there might be efforts by some schools and the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture to mount staff development programmes, some teachers are developing a negative attitude towards these. The
last comment made with regards to staff availability to professional development programmes in the schools, revealed that teacher morale had been affected by the harsh economic environment, to the extent that they no longer even wanted to participate in any developmental programmes. This was confirmed by the following sentiments from one of the teachers:

“We haven’t had any, but even if the school organises one, without any incentives, we will just sit in there and when it is all over, we just go back to our usual way of doing things.”

One respondent in the teacher focus groups also made the following comments with regards to staff development programmes:

“We as teachers also have an attitude. We believe we have all the requisite knowledge from colleges and don’t want to be bothered. We just say, we know this after all so that too can cause people not to listen in workshops.”

From the above comment made by one of the teachers it is worth noting that, in as much as teachers are poorly trained and very little is done to staff develop the teachers, some teachers felt that they had the requisite skills to carry out assessment. The comment indicated that they did not need any staff development on assessment. This tallies with the observations made by Yildrin (2004, literature review 2.9), Wise, Lukin & Ross (1991) and Oescher & Kirby (1990, literature review 2.8) that teachers are satisfied with their classroom assessment. However, they are not good judges of their own abilities (Boothroyd et. al, 1992; Oescher & Kirby, 1990, see literature review 2.8)

Another interesting observation from teachers and head teachers was that teachers used mainly percentages and sometimes averages to analyse assessment data.
Having been asked why they did not use the other statistical applications, one teacher said:

“It will bring us more work. Even when I was doing my first degree, that module on statistics was a mammoth task. We actually have that statistical phobia or whatever you might call it.”

Apparently both the head teachers and the teachers were quick to confirm that the teachers were not comfortable with any other complicated statistics. The following sentiments were expressed by the teachers in interviews:

“We don’t use these statistics partly due to attitudes. I think there is need for attitude change to appreciate that besides percentages and averages, these other statistics are also necessary.”

“Right from our secondary school days, Maths was not a favourite for most teachers. We just don’t like dealing with numbers.”

“We were not exposed to statistics in the Teachers college. I don’t even know what it’s all about.”

“Because we did not do well in ‘O’level Maths, we still have a phobia for anything that is Mathematical”.

“I did statistics at degree level and I am comfortable with it, but our purpose for testing does not necessarily require us to go further than percentages and averages.”

One head teacher also revealed that teachers were not well versed in statistics. To quote his words:

“When teachers use the statistics, it is usually the average and sometimes percentages because those are the ones they know. They can’t use any other because they are not competent”.

Another head teacher also had this to say on statistics:

“Teachers use mainly percentages... yah...; percentages because of basically two reasons. Firstly, many of them do not know all those other statistical methods you referred to and
secondly, their purpose for testing doesn’t necessarily require them to go that far.”

One Teachers’ college lecturer was also quoted as saying,

“Very little is taught on statistics. Learners who do Maths as a main subject are the ones who do Maths. In fact they just do very little statistics as part of their research and not in line analysing learner data.”

The above view was also confirmed by one teacher, who said,

“I have never met the statistics component in professional studies, but some of us who majored in mathematics did statistics and will know how to calculate for example the mean and the standard deviation. However, in this school there is no were to apply those advanced statistics.”

In the same concept (statistics) the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture officers were quoted as saying;

“In terms of assessment data analysis we fall short as ministry because the data are simply presented as raw scores but without say as of what to do with these figures to bring meaning in reality”.

“The ministry has not demanded for the use of advanced statistical analysis from teachers so that they go that extra mile. Things are just silent”

It seemed that the idea that mathematics was a difficult subject eroded the confidence of teachers in carrying out advanced statistics in analysing statistical data as revealed in the preceding statements. Lack of confidence could have resulted in giving up the possibility of analysing assessment data using advanced statistics.

In summary, teachers, head teachers and college lecturers revealed that teachers lacked the requisite competence to analyse assessment data using other statistics besides percentages and averages. A rationale for these views included the belief
that, “math phobia” was prevalent among many teachers and hinders correct interpretation and appropriate use of the range of assessment data available in educational communities. However, some degreeed teachers who had done a course in statistics still dreaded to use sophisticated statistical components because of the mathematics phobia. This confirms Zindi’s (1987) findings; that teachers without a mathematical background regarded statistics courses as difficult to grasp (see literature review, 2.8).

While some teachers revealed that they could use a variety of statistics, the extent to which data analysis is done in the schools, seemed not to require these other statistical components. It would appear the Teachers colleges did not give teachers a foundation in assessment data analysis; as such, some teachers who were not degreeed confessed ignorance on the use of statistics such as the standard deviations, z and t-scores, percentile ranks, just to mention a few. Teachers who did mathematics as a main subject revealed that they were exposed to statistics but the education system did not demand for their expertise.

The study also established that some teachers had poor attitudes towards using other statistics. They regarded the use of other statistics as a burden that would add more work to their already overloaded schedules. One teacher remarked;

“I don’t need any staff development in statistics. I am not interested and have a mathematics phobia. Furthermore, it’s just an unnecessary work load”.

From the findings, it would appear that teachers lacked the statistical competence in analysing assessment data because of the following reasons;

- Phobia for anything mathematical.
• Resistance to heavier workload.
• Lack of exposure during teachers college training.
• Negative attitude towards statistics.

It was therefore, difficult to convince those who had developed negative attitudes that they could analyse statistical data using advanced statistics. Teachers’ negative attitudes as well as lack of knowledge of statistics became an impediment to effective analysis of assessment data. This supports Zindi’s (1987) findings that, the lack of interest in statistics has been installed by poor mathematical background and that most courses available on assessment are often statistical or mathematical in tone.

4.4.2 Lack of variety of assessment methods

Assessment is central to effective teaching and learning. The use of a variety of assessment methods provides information for instructional improvement and for monitoring learner learning (literature review, 2.11). The primary school head teachers and teachers interviewed indicated that schools used mainly tests, homework and classroom exercises. Unfortunately schools were failing to use a variety of assessment techniques in order to capture as much information as possible on the pupil’s attainment. One headmaster gave the following response:

“We give objective and essay tests because this is the thrust of ZIMSEC.”

One teacher also said:

“Homework and exercises are what are prescribed by the school policies which are imposed on us (see Appendix 13). Furthermore, when the head teachers supervise us using key result areas, they count the number of exercises in pupils’ exercise books. I am not really
worried about the quality of the exercises, but the quantity."

These sentiments were evidenced by the records of work which revealed fortnightly recordings of tests. However, it is rather worrying that in the record books, teachers admitted that they do not always give actual test scores, but rather teachers can create marks without giving the test. Teachers gave the following comments:

“Sometimes I cook marks because I need to impress the administration...the head...you know... the school administration just look at how many exercises were recorded to satisfy the requirements of key result areas.”

“My record book does not reflect the child’s performance because we work under pressure. The teacher-pupil ratio is too high and the curriculum is overloaded. Honestly, we are carrying an abnormal load.”

The study further revealed that teachers used both summative and formative assessment though more emphasis was placed on summative. Literature review 2.5.1 indicates that formative assessment improves teaching and that the gains in learner achievement were amongst the largest ever reported. Teachers interviewed acknowledged that formative assessment was more important for learner learning but it was difficult to implement because of the big classes they have and consequently, the large workload (see Tables 4.6 to 4.16). However, the use of a variety of techniques should not be underestimated (see literature review, 2.1). They gave the following responses:

“We have no time for a one to one interaction with the pupils."

“I have to satisfy the demands of the key result areas so I have to give as many tests as possible.”

“I have to drill pupils on examination techniques because my effectiveness is judged on how high the pupils performed in the final examinations.”
As pointed out by the teachers, while it was important to do formative assessment, factors like high enrolments, the requirements of the school and ministry on school effectiveness as well as the key result areas, which facilitated their supervision, hindered them from effectively implementing formative assessment.

These findings are similar to Volante’s (2009) findings (literature review 2.12) which indicated that, there is an emphasis on assessment of learning, that is, tests, quizzes and projects; and Popham’s (2005) and Stiggins’s (2002) findings which revealed that, a range of assessment particularly those that emphasised traditional paper and pencil summative measures, are over emphasized within contemporary schools.

Considering the domains the teachers, head teachers and the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture Officers reported that they concentrated on the cognitive domain and ignored the affective and psychomotor domains. One teacher passionately declared, “We concentrate 100% on the cognitive.”

Some Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture officers subscribed to the above views and made the following comments,

“E-eeh I think the cognitive is the one teachers mostly concentrate on, because it is tested by ZIMSEC and continues to be tested even when pupils get to secondary.”

“M-m-m, the teachers naturally concentrate on the cognitive domain because perhaps we have an assertion that the acquiring of knowledge is all that is required in learning and teaching. The other impression I have is that the teachers we get from Teachers colleges have not quite been told the requirements of assessing pupils. It is a side thing to their training. Even in the cognitive domain you find that teachers have a tendency of setting
questions which require recall and are easier for them and the pupils.”

Literature on paragraph 2.6 indicated that assessment should mirror a full range of the child’s learning encompassing all the dimensions of the child. As reflected in the pupils’ exercise books and in test papers of all the schools which participated in the study, assessment concentrated only in the cognitive domain. Teachers actually did not make an effort to assess the other domains. Asked on why they concentrated only on the cognitive, some of the statements expressing such views were:

“ZIMSEC (Zimbabwe School Examinations Council) concentrates on the cognitive domain.”

“The type of education that we have now is results oriented, because once a school does not produce results, there is noise, even at district level.”

“The other domains are difficult to measure, especially with an average teacher pupil ratio of 1:48, it’s just not practical.”

“The other domains are tested in music, art and physical education. I am only interested in the subjects that are tested by ZIMSEC. In fact I do not even teach Music, Art and Physical Education.”

“We were taught these domains theoretically but not on how to practice; we tend to do what was done to us.”

“We concentrate on the cognitive because we want them to be able to give the correct answers in the exam, they should remember the answers to questions.”

“The cognitive domain is what we concentrate on even when teaching. Most of the time we do academic work. Even on the time table subjects that require the testing of the psychomotor and affective domain are allocated very little time on the time table.

The teachers’ concentration on the cognitive domain was evidenced also by the fact that most of the school based test papers perused by the researcher, revealed that most tests concentrated on cognitive domain. The test papers in most schools also
indicated that even within the cognitive domain, teachers mostly concentrated on the first level of the taxonomy. These findings were similar to those made by Zindi in 1984-1987. He also found that, few teachers have the time and experience to construct questions. Sometimes what is intended to assess learner’s depth and knowledge, instead displays learners ability to cram and predict questions.

The ZIMSEC Officers on the contrary indicated that their tests covered all the domains of learning. One ZIMSEC officer made the following comments,

“We test all the domains of learning. If we are to structure these subjects and say art, music and physical education test the psychomotor domain and say maths, shona, English and general paper will test the cognitive domain, e-e.h from a psychological point of view I don’t think that is correct. Because we are saying even if we are dealing with mathematics as a discipline we can test all those domains.”

A general consensus of the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture officers, head teachers, and teachers was that assessment concentrates on the cognitive domain of learning. While ZIMSEC might be referring to the ideal that all the domains of learning should be tested, the ZIMSEC public summative Grade Seven examinations rather concentrated on the cognitive domain. Very little on affective domain is tested. One education officer went further to say that it had become a culture of the nation to concentrate on the cognitive domain. He expressed his views as follows;

“Yes, if you look at our pro-formas we use to carry out assessment, I think they basically concentrate on the cognitive domain. When we get to a lesson we want to see the teacher teach and advise if he is teaching properly. After that we look at their records, exercises they give and individual progress records on the cognitive part then we produce a report. And even our culture as a nation, we are examination oriented. Everybody has been
4.4.3 Conceptions on assessment.

Brown (2003) stated that all pedagogical acts are affected by the conception teachers have about the act of teaching, the process and the purpose of assessment practices and the nature of learning (see literature review, 2.9). The findings from the interviews of teachers and head teachers indicated that teachers favoured summative and quasi-formative assessment to generate marks. Asked on what they preferred between summative and formative, one of the head teachers gave this response:

“One would prefer formative assessment but the thrust in this school is on summative. We give fortnightly tests and monthly tests which could be considered as formative... eh. It’s easier to have summative because formative demands a lot of time and input from the teacher.”

The teachers interviewed gave the following responses,

“I am aware of the importance of formative assessment, but school effectiveness is seen by the ministry in the light of Grade 7 results. Parents also consider end-of-term tests as important to the learning of their children”

“As long as the education system is based on examination performance of Grade 7 pupils, school assessment will always be directly related to school effectiveness.”

“The way we assess determines the kind of results that we produce. Good results automatically mean the school is effective, that’s why our teaching is exam oriented, we teach for exams”

One Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture officer also advanced the following view when he said,
“Formative is more important but yes...er...we have discussed these things before because you see, we need to come up with the change in the mindset. The whole nation should change and say now we want to focus on formative evaluation. ZIMSEC should be in a position to say we want to consider formative assessment in the primary school.”

When asked to comment on what kind of assessment ZIMSEC implements in the primary schools, ZIMSEC officials gave the following responses:

“ZIMSEC does not have any input in as far as formative assessment in the primary school is concerned because we believe that teachers set their own tests on weekly, fortnightly, monthly or termly basis. But when it comes to summative assessment where candidates are expected to be assessed through public examinations, ZIMSEC sets the tests at Grade 7. It has nothing to do with other levels. At Grade 7 it is only interested in summative assessment.

“Formative assessment tends to benefit candidates although we concentrate on summative. I am basing this on current researches.”

The above comment seems to indicate that there is a poor conception of the term formative assessment. The ZMSEC officer described formative assessments as, end of week, fortnightly, monthly, or termly tests. This again shows dominance of summative assessments at the expense of formative assessments in the primary schools. This confirms Firestone, Shorr & Monfill’s (1998) findings, that summative and quasi-formative assessments are used to publicly demonstrate teacher and school effectiveness (see literature review, 2.9). Despite the knowledge by most stakeholders in education, that formative assessment benefits pupils more than summative assessment, the latter continues to dominate the assessment of pupils in the primary schools.
4.4.4 Barriers to effective classroom assessment in Zimbabwean schools

4.4.4.1 Assessment Policies

From the above discussion, it seemed teachers were aware of the importance of formative assessment; however the demands of the stakeholders such as parents and the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture seemed to compel teachers to resort to summative assessment. Also, the need to save time made teachers resort to summative assessment. When asked what problems they encountered when they carry out classroom assessment, many teachers in the focus groups highlighted high enrolment as a major drawback that made it difficult to conduct formative assessment (see Table 4.1 on school characteristics).

As stated in literature review 2.12, assessment policies are common in every school. All the twelve schools studied in the empirical study gave fortnightly tests, end-of-month tests and yearly tests as forms of assessment. Some schools drew their own assessment policies as indicated on (Appendix 13) while teachers interviewed revealed that they were not involved in formulating school based assessment policies. All teachers interviewed revealed that they had problems in implementing assessment policies. The following reasons were advanced:

“Policies are forced down our throats, as such they are difficult to implement especially with our large classes.”

“It’s not realistic to test fortnightly, because I just don’t have time. We have hot-sitting and I only have 4 hours in the classroom.”

“Too much writing is involved and pupils end up tired”

“I do not have time to teach and ensure that pupils have understood. I continuously engage pupils in writing and there is a lot of marking to be done. For example in a class of 50, pupils write exercises out of 10 in five subjects. If you multiply 10 times 50 you have 500 questions to be marked per subject and if you multiply...
that by 5 subjects that’s 2500 problems per day excluding homework”

The statements revealed that teachers end up having negative attitudes towards assessment. The first statement showed that teachers were not involved in the formulation of school based assessment policies. The second and third statements revealed that teachers were overloaded with work as such they found it difficult to cope with the big numbers. This is also supported the Kenya National Examinations Council’s findings that high enrolment and scarcity of facilities in many public schools made it difficult to carry out continuous assessment (see literature review, 2.12).

4.4.4.2 Too many records in the school

The study also established that teachers found it difficult to carry out assessment because of too many records in the school. One teacher who participated in the focus group lamented:

“The records are too many. These include the scheme book, individual record, extension work, morning challenge, test record, as such we are reduced to mere clerks and the work is just too much.”

While perusing documents, the researcher confirmed the teachers’ concerns and saw the following records in the majority of the participating schools; scheme books, test records, individual progress records, remedial records, extension work books and test record books. Teachers also highlighted that they resorted to unethical uses of the record book, by creating marks which do not reflect on the child’s performance (see 4.4.2). Teachers fail to respect the important use of record books (see 2.7.4.)
4.4.4.3 Demands of public examinations

It was also revealed during interview with teachers that teachers aligned their assessment practices to the national examination. When asked if they taught for examinations, the teachers replied:

“Yes, we teach for examinations because this is what the system demands.”

“Yes we teach for examinations because I have to produce good results. If I don’t produce good results the head teacher wants to know why. The results are also displayed and I get embarrassed.”

“Actually we drill the pupils so that we don’t tarnish the image of the school if pupils fail. Or else, everybody will say, these teachers are not working.”

“We want to equip our pupils with exam skills so that they perform well and are welcomed into the secondary schools.”

One head teacher also shared the teacher’s views when he said:

“Schools compete for the best Grade 7 results at district level up to regional and so on. If your school produces poor results you are invited to the regional office for staff development which is embarrassing.”

The Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture Officers concurred with the above sentiments and made the following comments:

“To a very large extent, teachers teach for examinations because you find that the subjects that are non-examined, give a cursory attention. They attend to the subjects they know will be examined at the end of the year. So they are teaching for examinations rather than for learning sake.”

“Teachers teach for examinations because of competitions at price giving. It will be announced that this school got 0%, 20% or 90% pass rate at Grade 7 for example. The head teachers and teachers of schools with a low pass rate are invited to the district for reprimand. Even if they say they have no resources we tell them, ‘the teacher is number 1 resource, see what you can do’”
According to the responses, it seemed teachers were left with no choice but to teach for examinations. One head teacher also confirmed that their tests followed the ZIMSEC format so as to be thorough in the preparation of pupils. These findings indicated that while the teachers might be aware of the proper methods of assessment, competition of teachers and schools negatively impacted on the assessment practices. Teachers were compelled to spend time preparing their pupils to master the content covered in the national examination and coach them on test taking strategies (Black & William, 1998; World Bank Group, 2001; Dhindsa, 2007; and Phophum, 2001; see literature review 2.9). This further confirms Falege & Ojerinde's (2005) views that the effectiveness of schools and teachers are judged by the performance of pupils (see literature review, 2.9).

4.4.4.4 Economic Factors

All the teachers and head teachers of schools interviewed emphasised the impact of harsh economic environment on the process of assessment. It emerged from focus groups that teachers felt that their salaries were too low and this was impacting negatively on the level of their commitment. In this study, it emerged that low salaries for teachers have apparently had a particularly significant impact on the teachers’ feelings. During one of the focus groups a teacher had this to say;

“We are paid peanuts and schools expect too much from us”

Further findings of this study revealed that most schools lacked resources to carry out assessment. Teachers were expected to write on the chalk-board when giving end-of-week and end-of-month tests which they said was tiresome and time consuming. In one school, it was observed that three different teachers rotated their Grade 6 pupils during these tests. This was done because in one class the teacher
wrote numbers 1-20, in the next class the other teacher wrote numbers 21-40 and lastly the third class had numbers 41-50. Asked why they decided to conduct the tests in this way, one teacher replied:

“It is difficult to write the whole test on the chalkboard. The school cannot give us typed test papers during the term but at the end of the term. This is because the school does not have stationery.”

One school head teacher also confirmed that resources such as printers and photocopiers were difficult to come by in the school. He said:

“We can’t afford the luxury of typing Mid-term tests. We just don’t have the resources.”

This was further evidenced in Tables 4.4 and 4.2 on school characteristics where general scarcity of printers and photocopiers was exhibited. While some former Group A schools could afford the privilege of having their papers typed, with almost all the resources in place; observations revealed that power cuts were a major problem. One head teacher said:

“We hardly have electricity anytime during the day. It has therefore, become very difficult for the school to use electrical gadgets. If we need to type anything, we have to make arrangements to come during the night.”

When the researcher visited the schools during the day for observations, only two schools had electricity. The heads of these schools however, highlighted that the researcher was fortunate to find the power on. On further visits, the schools had no electricity (see Table 4.2).

It appeared from the interviews that some assessment problems are peculiar to certain schools while others are common in every school. While resources were
affecting mostly the former group B schools in the high density suburbs and schools in the rural areas, the power cuts were affecting most of the schools.

**4.4.4.5 Lack of motivation**

From the individual interviews with head teachers and teachers, it has emerged that lack of motivation was affecting assessment procedures in the schools. Motivation is an emotional attribute that provides energy and cooperation among members of an organisation. One emotional teacher, asked about their motivation towards assessment had this to say:

“I can’t think about assessment when I am hungry, let alone pay attention in a staff development workshop which will only add more work and no extra money!”

When the researcher asked for possible reasons why the teachers lacked interest, the following reasons emerged,

- Poor remuneration and lack of motivation.
- The degradation of the status of the teacher as a result of negative perception by society.
- Inadequate facilities including power cuts.
- Large class sizes.
- Unachievable policies that are forced down the throats of teachers.
- Curriculum that is loaded (10-12 subjects), plus co-curricula activities.
- Hot sitting.
- Too many records to take care of hence teaching has become more of a clerical job.
- The performance appraisal referred to as the KRA (Key Result Areas) that forces teachers to comply to a minimum number of tests and exercises.
Under such conditions of poor morale, teachers found it difficult to focus their energy on assessment. One respondent, a head teacher of a school confirmed this saying:

“My teachers do not like assessment because I make follow ups to those who make mistakes and ask them to set the tests again. You hear them saying ‘Saka ndingafire ka100 dhora ikaka?!’ (All this suffering for only $100?!)”

4.4.4.6 Other Problems

It also surfaced in this research that absenteeism was a problem which affected most rural schools. Rural teachers made the following comments:

“Absenteeism is a problem. You find that a child comes to school for 2 or 3 days a week. Assessment of those who have a habit of absenteeism is very difficult”

The teachers also highlighted that they were disturbed by sporting activities and other activities that occur in the school. These sentiments were echoed by teachers who participated in the rural focus groups who had this to say:

“Some sporting activities disturb us when we are holding end-of-month tests that is to say 2 or 3 days we might be having competitions and yet we will be expected to assess pupils. The school is affected by a hive of activities, churches, MASO e.t.c. such disturbances actually affect us”

Furniture and infrastructure are other assessment problems which this research has revealed especially in the rural areas. Teachers in the rural focus groups had these comments to make:

“Furniture is a problem; some pupils sit on the floor and write tests. There are no desks.”

“One pupil do not bring the needed materials such as pens, books; as such, they will just sit while others are writing. What can I do?”

This was confirmed by the researcher’s observations that there were no benches in some rural schools. Some pupils wrote on their laps, while others lay on dust floors
as they wrote. From the above discussion it is clear that teachers have problems in assessment and these problems emanate from various sources as highlighted in the context of this discussion.

4.5 SYNTHESIS OF EMERGING PATTERNS

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the main purpose was to analyse, interpret and discuss data collected through observations, document analysis and interviews outlined in paragraphs 4.1. Each of the research questions contained in paragraph 1.5 was intended to address the research topic: Assessment problems in the Zimbabwe’s Primary Schools with special reference to Gweru District. The themes discussed in the various paragraphs of this chapter were influenced by the literature study and the sub-problems outlined in paragraph 1.5 as well as the interview questions contained in appendices 5, 6 and 7.

The findings of this study have revealed that assessment in Gweru District Schools was faced by a number of problems. They include:

- poor motivation;
- harsh economic environment;
- power cuts;
- shortages of financial and material resources;
- lack of staff development;
- lack of competence in assessment;
- poor attitudes towards assessment;
- high teacher pupil ratio;
- poor remuneration
• lack of interest;
• work overload; and
• assessment illiteracy;

In spite of the problems, it emerged that primary school teachers were aware of the important role of assessment and school head teachers were making an effort to make assessment effective. It also emerged from schools in Gweru District that the education system was heavily dependent on the empirical model whose thrust is on traditional standardised approach to assessment. Thus there was lack of a variety of assessment techniques where summative assessment dominated.

While teachers were aware of the importance of formative assessment, it would appear teachers mostly used summative assessment because of the pressure to produce excellent Grade 7 results. Summative assessment was also easy to apply on large classes and the education system concentrated on it, since it is used to make crucial decisions by many stakeholders in relation to a child, teacher or school’s performance. For the same reasons discussed above, teachers mainly concentrated on testing the cognitive domain and there was a tendency to sideline the other domains. In the cognitive domain, the documents revealed that most of the tests concentrated on the first and second level of the taxonomy which emphasized recall questions.

It appeared, from the discussion, that teachers did not get a thorough training on assessment and very little was also done by the schools and the districts to staff develop teachers on assessment.
4.6 SUMMARY

This section presented and discussed results from the qualitative analysis and interpretation of data collected on assessment problems in the primary schools. The theme that came out was that assessment was generally poorly done in Gweru District schools. As indicated in the sub themes there were various reasons that caused assessment problems. The next chapter focuses on summary, conclusions and recommendations.
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1  INTRODUCTION

The aim of the study was to investigate on assessment problems in Zimbabwe’s Primary Schools with special reference to Gweru District. This was done with reference to the objectives and research questions as outlined in paragraphs 1.4 and 1.5 as follows:

Objectives

- determine classroom teachers perceptions on assessment;
- establish what schools and colleges are doing to equip teachers with classroom assessment skills.
- determine whether any resources are put in place by schools to support classroom assessment efforts; and
- explore the influence of public examinations on classroom assessment.

Research questions

- What sort of assessment skills do classroom teachers have to enable them carry out classroom assessment?
- Do teachers' perceptions influence their assessment procedures?
- How do classroom procedures influence classroom assessment?
- How do public examinations affect and influence poor assessment procedures?
- How does lack of resources affect poor assessment procedures?

In the previous chapter, an attempt was made to analyse and discuss data obtained from observations, interviews and document analysis. Relevant information from Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture officers, ZIMSEC officers, Teachers’
college lecturers, head teachers and teachers were cited to provide defensible and scientifically valid and reliable arguments. Following the review of the related literature in Chapter 2 and the empirical findings reported in Chapter 4, assessments can be perceived as the use of a variety of techniques to collect information about the teaching and learning environment, so that decisions are made within the school situation. However, assessment in the primary school is bedeviled by an array of problems as reflected in Chapter 4. These as expected, affect decision-making on the teaching and learning.

5.2 SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

The paragraphs below provide what is contained in each of the chapters of the research study.

Chapter 1 presented the research problem and its context. The chapter described the following aspects of the study; the background, the statement of the problem, specific research questions and objectives, the conceptual framework and the research methodology used. Finally the chapter gave the ethical considerations as well as an elucidation of the key concepts. A summary of the entire research study was also presented in this chapter.

Chapter 2 dealt with the literature related to the study to enhance understanding of the assessment concept as well as the theoretical framework of the study. The chapter went further to show that there were problems encountered by teachers in other countries the world over as evidenced by the different researches cited in the context. Some models of assessment were exposed in this chapter.
Chapter 3 described the research methodology and design used in the study to collect empirical data. This was a case study of Gweru District. The population consisted of teachers, ZIMSEC officers; Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture officers head teachers and Teachers’ college lecturers. A purposive sampling technique was used. Observations, interviews and documentary analysis were used to collect data (see paragraphs 3.4.5 and 3.4.6).

Chapter 4 presented, analysed and discussed the data that were collected during the empirical study. The data collected were then analysed and categorized according to themes (see paragraph 1.11.2)

5.3 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The paragraphs that follow give a summary of the findings of the empirical study discussed in Chapter 4 and constrained with literature findings in Chapter 2

5.3.1 Teacher Competencies

It was found that most of the teachers lacked the requisite competencies to carry out assessment in the primary schools. The lack of competencies was attributed to poor training of teachers by teachers’ colleges, which concentrate mostly on other aspects of the curriculum and giving peripheral treatment to assessment. Teachers come out of teachers colleges without the knowledge of item writing or statistics to analyse data and apparently they had to learn assessment whilst on teaching practice. As was observed, trained teachers who were mentors to the teachers on practice, passed on their poor assessment practices to the learner teachers thus creating a vicious cycle of poor assessment.
In addition, when teachers completed their college studies, they went into the field where staff development programmes on assessment were apparently a rare phenomenon. The Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture encouraged the staff development programmes to be mounted through the Better Schools Programme, but from this study it emerged that very little was happening on the ground. ZIMSEC which was responsible for setting Grade 7 tests sometimes invited teachers from different schools to set Grade 7 items. However, not all teachers were well trained and ZIMSEC made it clear that it was not its mandate to train teachers on assessment. As such, the development of teachers on assessment remains a neglected area.

It also emerged from the study that some schools tried to mount some staff development programmes in areas outside assessment, but teachers were not interested in attending these. The apathy was attributed to poor remuneration and work overload. Teachers seemed to suggest that the curriculum was congested and addition of anything else, no matter how pertinent, would enlarge the existing burden. A staff development workshop for example, was viewed as an extra weight (see 4.4.1).

It would appear that teacher competencies are compromised by inadequate teacher education, lack of staff development programmes on assessment in the schools, negative attitudes towards staff development programmes as well as incompetent mentors in the schools.
5.3.2 Lack of Variety of Assessment Methods

It also emerged in the research that teachers mainly used tests in the assessment of pupils. They also used homework and daily exercises but the main thrust was on tests. The tests were given weekly, fortnightly or monthly. These tests were essentially administered because the teachers wanted to satisfy the demands of performance appraisal where they were expected to have a prescribed number of tests recorded in their record books. Because of the performance appraisal Key Result Areas (KRAs), some teachers confessed cheating by recording false marks. The teachers did this because they felt overloaded with work. It also emerged that these tests were summative and quasi–formative.

The teachers gave these series of tests following the ZIMSEC format of conducting examinations. This they did, to ensure that their pupils excelled in the summative ZIMSEC Grade 7 public examinations, which were written at the end of the seven year primary education period. If pupils performed badly, the teachers and head teachers of the poor performing pupils would be called in by District Education Officers for reprimand. This, teachers found to be embarrassing. Moreover, after the public examinations, schools were ranked according to performance. These ranks were announced at a public meeting where all the schools would be represented, thus causing further embarrassment.

As a result, assessment for teachers meant drilling pupils so that they perform well in public examinations. For the stated reason, primary school teachers mainly confined their assessments to the cognitive domains of learning giving a cursory treatment to the affective and psychomotor domain and yet assessment should mirror a full range
of the child’s learning (see literature review, 2.6). The other reason which emerged was that the cognitive domain was easier to assess and that ZIMSEC public examinations also concentrated on the same domain.

In addition, the lack of variety in assessment methods was the result of the culture of the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture, ZIMSEC as well as the teachers themselves who revealed that there was need for the whole education system to change their mindset and see other forms of assessment as important. To date, mostly summative assessment is used in the primary schools, ZIMSEC does summative assessment, the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture assesses teachers to see if they were fulfilling the summative aspect, thus, teachers follow suit and concentrate on summative assessment. The most interesting aspect was that the participants in this research were aware of the importance of formative assessments as evidenced by their views and comments.

5.3.3 Teachers’ Conceptions on Assessment

All pedagogical acts are affected by conceptions teachers have about the acts of teaching, the process and purpose of assessment practice and the nature of learning (see literature review, 2.9). It emerged from this study that teachers emphasised summative rather than formative assessment for reasons cited in paragraphs 4 of 5.2. As highlighted in literature review, 2.9, teachers are not immune to the system in which they work. The research further revealed that the way the teachers assess the pupils was attributed to the culture of the nation which lays emphasis on summative assessment (see literature review 2.12). Literature review has also indicated that the post independent Zimbabwe may have been influenced by pre-
independence assessment methods which emphasised high stakes summative assessments (see literature review, 2.9). This research revealed that indeed summative assessment dominated in the Gweru district primary schools.

5.3.4 Barriers to Effective Assessment in the Primary Schools

5.3.4.1 Policies

Teachers revealed that they had problems in implementing assessment policies. This was because teachers had no input in the formulation of the policies and were difficult to implement due to large classes which ranged from 30-50. Teachers found it unrealistic to give fortnightly tests in all the 10-11 subjects of the curriculum. Some schools had hot sitting while others had composite classes making it difficult for the teachers to implement assessment policies. Because of this, teachers tended to develop a negative attitude towards assessment (see paragraph 4.4.4.1).

5.3.4.2 Too many records

Teachers lamented that they had been reduced to clerks in the school system. They were to maintain the scheme book, individual record, extension work, test record, remedial book just to mention a few. These records consumed a lot of the teachers’ time to ensure that they were up to date, as such; assessment becomes difficult because records were an additional load. (See paragraph 4.4.4.2)

5.3.4.3 Demands of Public Examinations

It surfaced from the study that teachers taught for examinations as such their assessment practices were tailored towards examinations. Teaching for examinations was done because of competition at regional schools’ prize giving days
and the teachers wanting their pupils to excel at Grade 7 level (see paragraphs 4.4.4.3 and 2 of 5.3.2). Grade 7s were examined on only four subjects of the curriculum which were English, Content, Shona and Mathematics (see 2.12). It was in these subjects where teachers centred their teaching and likewise gave tests in order to fully prepare their pupils for Grade 7 examinations.

Such assessment failed to build a complete child as they only succeeded in equipping pupils with test taking strategies. It was an unfortunate situation that school effectiveness was judged by the manner in which schools performed in their summative Grade 7 examinations, as such, all assessments became skewed towards the Grade 7 public examinations.

5.3.4.4 Economic Factors

These have posed yet another barrier to effective assessment in the primary schools. The teachers said that the salaries were too low to boost their morale. Instead of concentrating on their core business, which includes assessment, teachers would rather commit themselves to income generating activities.

5.3.4.4.1 Resources

These also impacted negatively on assessment in the primary schools. Teachers lamented on the unavailability of resources such as exercise books, textbooks, photocopiers, printers and furniture in some schools which are all crucial in facilitating assessment. It also emerged from the teachers that in most of the schools teachers were still writing tests on the board which was time consuming and physically taxing. All these factors hindered effective assessment practices.
It also emerged from the research that electricity was another stumbling block in assessment. While some schools had electricity, load shedding was making it difficult for schools to use electricity. Some schools had managed to buy generators for use but they still lagged behind in terms of other resources and facilities.

A peculiar problem to some rural primary schools was the lack of furniture to the extent that some of the pupils wrote on their laps and some pupils crowded themselves on existing few benches. Some pupils also could not afford to buy writing exercise books and pens. These among other resources made assessment in the primary schools difficult.

**5.3.4.5 Lack of Motivation**

The research study has also revealed that teachers lack motivation which emanated from lack of resources (see paragraphs 5.3.4.4.1 and 4.4.4.4), inadequate facilities (see 5.3.4.4.1) large class sizes, unachievable policies, too many records in the school and demands of the performance appraisal (see 4.4.4.4).

**5.3.4.6 Other Problems**

The findings of this research also revealed that there were other problems that hindered effective assessment practices in the primary schools. It surfaced that absenteeism was a problem which affected most of the rural schools especially in the rainy season when pupils either go to the fields or heard cattle. This made it difficult for the teachers to teach and assess the progress of such pupils.
The teachers also highlighted that they were disturbed by other activities that were run in the schools during learning periods. These included community meetings and sporting competitions. Because of these teachers may fail to carry out the required assessment procedures and yet they are supposed to be up to date with their assessment records. All the highlighted problems were reported to be thwarting assessment efforts in the primary schools.

5.4 CONCLUSIONS
The study set out to determine assessment challenges in Zimbabwe’s primary schools with special reference to Gweru District primary schools. This was done in the understanding that assessment played a pivotal role in the teaching and learning situation. The research concludes that assessment in the primary school is bedevilled by a number of problems that include:

- Teachers lack competencies and skills in assessment. This is because the Teachers’ college curriculum has allocated little attention to assessment. Interviews indicated learner teachers were not taught assessment methods. Even when learner teachers go out in the field, there is very little done to mount staff development programmes. The Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture has neglected this area. Some schools try to mount staff development programmes in this area, but lack of resources has militated against their efforts. The problem has been broadened by the teachers’ negative attitudes towards any staff development efforts because of poor remuneration. Teachers would rather do other income generating activities than concentrating on the core business. ZIMSEC is responsible for setting
summative Grade 7 tests and has the expertise to mount staff development programmes on assessment. It was revealed in this research that it was not the mandate of ZIMSEC to mount staff development programmes, but the mandate of the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture. ZIMSEC, teachers colleges and the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture are not working closely to address the problem as revealed in this research.

- Further, it has been established that the teachers used summative assessments more than formative. Formative assessment would help to improve the teaching and learning process. This perception was a result of the public examinations. Teachers tailored their assessments towards the expectations of the ZIMSEC public examinations. As such teachers failed to improve the teaching and learning situation. Teachers found themselves concentrating only on summative tests which do not improve teaching and learning. A balance of the two would be paramount.

- It also emerged from the study that teachers failed address all the domains of learning in assessment but concentrated on the cognitive domain. Within the cognitive domain teachers also found themselves addressing only the first level of the taxonomy. The attitudes of the teachers and the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture officers lead teachers to concentrate on the cognitive domain. The study revealed that public examinations had a great impact on assessment. Teachers would want to thoroughly prepare their pupils for the Grade 7 public examinations. Sometimes they got to the extent of drilling the pupils on test taking skills so that pupils would excel in public Grade seven examinations. Assessment in this respect failed to
address all the domains of learning since teachers declared that they concentrated on the cognitive domain.

- The study concludes that resources were negatively impacting on assessment procedures. Lack of resources such as books, furniture, photocopiers, printers and bond paper made it difficult for teachers to carry out assessment. Teachers spend time writing the test on the board and some pupils crowd themselves on available furniture while others write on their laps. It also emerged from the study that high teacher-pupil ratio, absenteeism by pupils, low morale by teachers all contributed to assessment problems in the primary schools.

5.5 THE EMERGENT MODEL

![Fig 5.1 Reflective Model of Assessment](image-url)
Upon a critical analysis of the findings, a model to provide insights into the identification and overcoming of assessment problems has been proposed (Figure 5.1). This model emphasises four key dimensions in which the problems of assessment are situated and can be identified. The model depicts that assessment is central to the teaching and learning situation, as alluded to in the review of some related literature. According to this model, assessment can be described in four different ways which are quality, process, form and focus. It is in these dimensions that assessment problems emergent as findings of this study, are located in an evasive and reflective manner. This is where the name of the model is coming from. The arrows within the model indicate the reflective nature of the model. The explanation of each of these dimensions is provided below.

The forms of assessment are the various methods teachers employ in the monitoring of progress through performance and grading. This can take place in all the domains of learning, that is; cognitive, psychomotor and affective (see paragraph 2.5.1). Within the forms of assessment, problems such as teachers’ failure to use a diverse form of assessment, teachers concentrating on one form of assessment or teachers’ failure to choose an appropriate method of assessment can be identified.

Assessment focus needs not only be the cognitive domain of learning, but also needs to include behaviours, personality traits and manual dexterity. Teachers in this research revealed that there is more focus on the cognitive domain at the detriment of all the other domains.
The process refers to a series of ordered steps which are followed in carrying out assessment. There are various models of assessment with some being linear, while others are cyclic (see figure 1.1 and 2.1). The model in Fig 2.1 portrays the four steps of a cyclic process. However, in the Reflective Model these steps are reflective rather than directional. In this model, the teacher analyses the forms of assessment and then follows the assessment cycle propounded by McMunn (2011) figure 2.1. Within the process, teachers in this study showed that they have problems in focusing their assessment and in following the assessment cycle. Teachers concentrated on summative assessment and neglected formative assessment which is reflected in the cyclic model.

Quality assessment provides the required information with the greatest degree of validity and reliability. In the quality of assessment, this research revealed that assessments were poorly focused and constructed with a predominance of questions that require pupils to recall factual knowledge. These problems were a result of researchers' poor knowledge and skills in assessment.

The finding that teachers hold limited in assessments skills, broadly referred to as 'lack of competence' in assessment is used here to illustrate the reflective of nature of this model. The assessment problem that teachers focus on the cognitive domain and neglect the affective as well the psychomotor domains cascades into the other domains of this model. For example, within this cognitive domain focus, teachers concentrate on the lower level of the taxonomy. This encourages rote and factual learning. In reflective assessment this assessment problem has ripple effects on the other dimensions and the converse is true. In the process of assessment, the
teachers’ lack of skill in developing assessment tools may be emanating from lack of focus as well as poor choice of assessment form; thus, the quality of assessment is comprised.

The same model can be useful in teacher education as well as to school staff development planners, in the identification of assessment problems. After identifying the problem areas, corrective measures can be implemented. The following examples in Table 5.1 below, illustrated how the Reflective Model can be applied in solving and correcting assessment problems.

**Table 5.1 Application of the Reflective Model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Problems</th>
<th>Dimension of Location</th>
<th>Application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of teacher competences</td>
<td>All four dimensions</td>
<td>• Identify a particular assessment problem. Describe it in terms of all four dimensions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Workshop, or educate teachers by tracing and linking the problem within these dimensions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of resources such as material, personnel, money, infrastructure, manpower and time</td>
<td>All four dimensions</td>
<td>For example personnel:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Equip personnel with knowledge and skill of becoming resourceful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Reduce teacher pupil ratio to create time for teachers to focus on assessment through improvisation action research and assessment problem solving.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most of the recommendations of this research have been drawn from the findings and this model.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations were made in response to the findings highlighted in the study. For the objective number one (1) which reads to determine classroom teachers perceptions on assessment, the following recommendation was made:

- Teachers colleges need to educate learner teachers so that they are well versed in assessment practices. This will inculcate perceptions which do not militate against effective assessment practices. Furthermore the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture needs to staff develop teachers on assessment for the same reasons.

For objective number two (2) which reads to establish what schools and colleges are doing to equip teachers with classroom assessment skills, the following recommendations were made:

- The teachers’ college curriculum needs to expose learner teachers to a variety of assessment techniques. Furthermore, the curriculum should include statistics since they are necessary in the analysis of assessment data.

- Teachers’ colleges need to provide short courses on assessment for teachers who are already in the field in order to close the existing gap.

- Teachers’ colleges need to give learner teachers more time at college so that the learners can grasp as much theory as possible. Learners spend more
time with mentors who have indicated to have problems with assessment and this creates a vicious cycle of malpractice.

- Teachers can apply what they have learnt in theory. Colleges need to marry theory with practice, without assuming that learners will figure it out on their own

- ZIMSEC, the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture and teachers’ colleges need to work together in the production of a Teachers’ college curriculum on assessment.

For the objective number three (3) which reads to determine whether any resources are put in place by schools to support classroom assessment efforts, the following recommendations were made:

- Resources need to be provided to schools to mount staff development programmes on assessment. Assessment is a dynamic area and staff development for teachers should be done on a yearly basis, at least.
- The Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture needs to reduce the teachers’ load by reducing the teacher pupil ratio and also deploy specialist teachers as these were not deployed in most schools. These will decrease the teaching load.
- There is need to recruit teachers who can train pupils in different sporting activities so that classroom teachers can focus their attention on classroom activities.
- Schools need to be provided with adequate resources to facilitate assessment.
For objective number four (4) which reads, explore the influence of public examinations on classroom assessment, the following recommendation was made:

- Formative assessment needs to be introduced in the primary schools as part of final assessment. It is high time ZIMSEC and schools used both summative and formative assessments.

Other recommendations are as follows;

- School head teachers need to educate parents on the importance of assessment, by sitting down with them, encouraging them to send all their pupils to school on a daily basis.
- Government needs to come up with a law which makes it compulsory for every parent to send his/her child to school daily.
- There is need for the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture to ensure that the quality of working life is good if the teachers are to give their best.
- Head teachers need to slot any activities which disturb the teaching and learning situation during the weekends so that assessment processes are not disturbed.

5.7 RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study is a qualitative single study and its focus is on, “Assessment Problems in the Primary schools with special reference to Gweru District Primary Schools,” which limits the ability to generalise the conclusions to the entire population. A case study design is a strategy for holding together multi-case and multi-paradigm research effort. Such an effort would most likely collect qualitative and quantitative data that would most likely involve a research team instead of a single researcher as the case was in this study. Qualitative and quantitative data were equally important in this
research, serving as a system for checks and balances (Jik, 1979). Furthermore mixed parallel methods produce the most convincing body of evidence by corroborating and extending the primary qualitative data on assessment problems in the primary schools. The combination of data sources can be highly synergistic (Eisenhardt, 1989:538).

Further research could also adopt a multi-case design where numerous sources of information can be replicated. Replicating the cases through pattern matching allows the researcher to cross check themes and constructs across cases.
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1:
INTERVIEW AND OBSERVATION PROTOCOL FOR TEACHERS

Opening Statement
I am a Doctorate learner with the Zimbabwe Open University. I am carrying out “A Study of Assessment Problems in Zimbabwe’s Primary Schools with special reference to Gweru District Primary Schools. The findings will be relevant to college curriculum developers, school staff development programmes, and policy makers and may lead to changes in primary school assessment methods.
The findings will be relevant to college curriculum developers, school staff development programmes, and policy makers and may lead to changes in primary school assessment methods.

I would like to hear your views concerning the topic under study. You are assured that data collected from this research will be treated confidentially and will be solely used for the purposes of the research. Your names will be concealed in the research report. The information you give will not be availed to parents, other teachers, supervisors or any other people. Participation in this research should be purely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time from the research if you feel like doing so.

This interview is going to take 30 minutes and will be recorded using a tape recorder. Once the interviews are completed the findings will be availed to you.

1 Research Question
What sort assessment skills do classroom teachers have to enable them carry out classroom assessment?

Interview questions.
1.1 How do you define assessment?
1.2 What role does assessment play in the education of pupils?
1.3 What do you consider to be the core purpose of assessment?
1.4 What do you consider when setting classroom tests?
1.5 Are objectives necessary in setting classroom tests?
1.6 What exposure on assessment were you offered by teachers’ colleges?
1.7 Do you think assessment should be core to teacher training?
1.8 What assessment techniques do you use?
1.9 Do you think you have the competence to carry out assessment?
1.10 What statistics have you used to analyse assessment data?
1.11 How do you select your test items?
1.12 How do you mark essays?
1.13 Which domain of objectives do you concentrate on when assessing?

**2 Research Question**

*How do teachers’ perceptions influence poor assessment procedures?*

**Interview Questions**

2.1 According to you, what is the importance of assessment?
2.2 What sort of assessment do you think is important for the benefit of classroom learning?
2.3 Has the Zimbabwean education system changed its assessment procedures since the colonial era? If yes/no, say why this was/was not necessary?
2.4 When is it necessary to carry out assessment?
2.5 How is school effectiveness judged and how does this impact on assessment?
2.6 Which groups of people are favoured by assessment practices in Zimbabwe? Justify your answer.

**3 Research Question**

*How do classroom procedures influence classroom assessment?*

**Interview Questions**

3.1 What policies are in place, in your school, for performing classroom assessment?
3.2 Are there any problems with regard to implementation of assessment the policies? Justify your answer.
3.3 Suggest ways in which you think assessment should be improved?
3.4 How often do you carry out assessment? Is that the requirement of policy?
3.5 What problems do you meet in carrying out assessment?
4 Research Question

How do public examinations cause poor assessment procedures?

**Interview Questions.**

4.1 How do examinations impact on the setting of tests at class level?
4.2 Do you think teachers teach for examinations? Justify your answer.
4.3 How would you define quality assessment?
4.4 How can quality learning be achieved through assessment?
4.5 How does assessment contribute to school effectiveness?
4.6 What is school effectiveness?
4.7 Why does some teachers copy test items from past examination papers?

5 Research Question

What resources are put in place to support classroom assessment efforts?

**Interview Questions**

5.1 How does the size of your class affect your classroom assessment procedures?
5.2 What resources do you need for assessment?
5.3 How are resources impacting on your classroom assessment procedures?
5.4 Do you think adequate time and finances are allocated for assessment? Can you make any other comments with regard to assessment in your classroom?

Thank you very much for participating in this interview. The conversation has been recorded and will be transcribed. Soon after that I will bring back to you the transcribed schedules for you to confirm whether what was recorded is exactly what you said.
APPENDIX 1.1 Individual teachers’ transcripts

Teacher 1.1.1

Q: What is assessment?
A: I think you should define first what assessment is.

Q: Don’t you carry out assessment in this school?
A: We do but we just want to find out your own definition.

Q: Okay, it’s the use of various methods like tests, home-works etcetera to collect information about pupils so that we can map the way forward and make decisions.
A: Okay I think we usually use tests to carry out assessment.
We also give home-works.

Q: Do you have continuous assessment for the practical subjects?
A: No.

Q: What is the role of assessment?
A: To check progress.
To see what the child is able to do and what they are not able to do.
To check if the concept has been fully grasped by the child.
For effective learning and teaching because if you have assessed, you can evaluate whether or not you have met your objectives so it promotes effectiveness.

Q: Were you trained on assessment in college?
A: I don’t know whether we were trained or not because we were taught that we should record, we must have these IPR, Individual Progress Record, whereby you record the child’s marks so that you can check progress.
Q: So as teachers can you actually say you have the skills to do assessment?
A: Yes.

Q: What do you consider when setting classroom tests?
A: The concepts that the children have covered.
The level of my pupils; are they above average, below or average.
The test must be fairly balanced to suit the weak, the average and the fast learners.

Q: Which groups are favoured by these classroom tests?
A: It doesn’t favour anyone because when I set a test, I am just questioning the concepts that I have taught. And the test is balanced. The ones below average should be at least able to get half because the first 25 questions will be easy.

Q: What techniques of assessment do we use?
A: Mostly tests.

Q: Do we have a policy with regards to assessment?
A: Yes, it’s there; and how much you stick to the policy will determine your rating on your performance appraisal.

Q: Is every teacher aware of it?
A: Yes.

Q: Are there any problems in implementing the policies?
A: Here and there, for example we can have disturbances here and there, such that by the end of the week you might not have covered everything you were supposed to, so you find that it can be difficult to test. Sometimes we can test but we will not have covered all the concepts.
Another problem can arise if the teachers are over-controlled. Someone might pretend to have an up to date record which is not really supported by the work on the ground.

Q: Is it true that teachers create marks sometimes because of these policies?
A: (laughter) it’s true.

Q: So is the record book a true reflection of the pupil’s performance?
A: Not really.

Q: Why?
A: Because of that creation.

Q: Why do you create marks, where is the problem?
A: The policy must be followed whether we are disturbed or not so sometimes you end up creating marks so that you do not get into trouble.

Q: Is the KRA, one of the reasons why there is false assessment going on?
A: Yes because the standard is the number of exercises, the quality does not really matter.

Q: Which domain do you focus on in this school when setting tests?
A: Obviously cognitive (chorus), because even those who set public examinations have a tendency of ignoring them too.

Q: Why do you ignore these other ones? The music teacher, do you assess your pupils?
A: I assess them holistically; because in music it’s not possible for you to separate one domain from another. Once you affect the other domain, you cannot achieve anything. They need to be sharp, because they might need to compose and recall a few lines and also the affective domain; a musician has
to be able to communicate to an audience even without saying anything, just
the attitude. They also dance and the like.

Q: **Why do the other teachers ignore the other domains?**

A: I think it is because of the nature of our education which does not demand
much of the other domains. They just want these objective answers like you
see, the multiple choice, they sort of want just the answer. Whether or not the
person is able to apply the knowledge; it doesn’t seem to be necessary at this
level.

The other problem is the teacher pupil ratio which is about 1:45 in this school.
For you to fit everything, it’s just not practical

In terms of the affective domain, the teachers’ morale is just down there. The
salaries are just frustrating. So the teachers come to school loaded with other
stresses and they pass it on to the children. It’s only natural because children
are children, they are not young adults. So usually when assessing, even
orally, we just move with those who are eager, we don’t have the time or
energy to dwell on other matters

Q: **Are there any other reasons besides money?**

A: Well at College, we did some sort of a crash programme. They never really
dwelt on these other domains so we never thought much of them even after
graduation. It was still trial and error for some of us since we were the first
group to graduate from that particular college.

Q: **Why is it that even teachers who have been taught certain things on
assessment in colleges or further studies, still do not implement that
when they get into the classroom?**
A: Sometimes the time factor. We have timetables, such that by the end of the week you must make sure that you have covered A,B,C,D and sometimes disturbances make it impossible. There are many subjects to teach.

Q: **What statistics do you use here to analyse data?**
A: We use percentages.

Q: **What about the others like the standard deviation, are you aware of them?**
A: We have forgotten them.

Q: **Why are you not practicing them?**
A: Well maybe because it is a school policy to say that we should analyse data using percentages. Everything that we write we change to percentages. All these standard deviation and complicated stuff, most people are actually not aware of how to work them out, and they would rather not trouble themselves with that since they are not required to do so. And we generally have a phobia for Maths.

Q: **How do you mark essays in your classrooms?**
A: We use the ZIMSEC marking guide.

Q: **What does it say?**
A: Actually when we are marking compositions, we mark them by impression such that when you get to a shop, you prefer that dress to the other because it has impressed you. So the marks are given under impression and also orthography. Now under orthography, we look at the grammar, the punctuation and spelling. And on impression you are checking to see if the pupil has actually written according to the demands of the question, whether they have included all the facts that are required. So it's like out of 10 how
much has the child impressed you and has she/he followed the question. Under orthography, if there are too many errors... half a mark, again out of 10, is deducted for each error.

Q: Can you say you like assessment as teachers?

A: I like it because it shows me how kids are performing and which areas I must stress, or improve on.

Q: Do you think pupils like to be assessed?

A: Yes they do.

Q: Why?

A: It depends on how you do it because every fortnight when I give them a test, I change the group and every child wants to sit in Group 1. If he/she doesn’t perform well this week, he knows that next week we are going to write another test and they work harder. And there is a spirit of competition as well.

Q: What about John who always fails?

A: Every child has a subject which they are good at; they will always be a chance to be the best.

I also noted something, I teach the last class. Even if they fail in class, they can do something out there. My kids are very good at swimming and they can play Marimba so there is always somewhere they well excel in, the challenge is just that we concentrate on the intellect of the children and might not realise what the child is really good at. Otherwise every child is good at something.

Q: Is there any relationship between school effectiveness and assessment?

A: To a certain extent. We teach mainly in English here which a second language is for many pupils. So at home, if they speak English fluently, it is because of the assessment and the parents might feel that the teaching is
effective. Also we have a reading programme here whereby the child has to read to their parent and I think most parents like that.

Generally people look at the Grade 7 results and they actually want the breakdown of units to say, how many 1’s, how many 9’s and so on. This itself can however, pose problems since teachers will be tempted into drilling the pupils so that the results will be good, to get many 1s. Drilled pupils usually have problems in high school, and these others who were thought to be mediocre can just suddenly excel in high school.

Q: Can you say teachers teach for examinations?
A: Yes because in a way, that’s how they are rated whether they are good or not.

Q: So your education system is exam oriented?
A: Yes, we can say that.

Q: Do public examinations affect the way you do assessment in primary school at junior level?
A: In a way, because people take the Grade 7 exam as a yardstick. When you are asked to set a test they say, set as ZIMSEC! This might not be really necessary. But because people see it as standard, everyone wants their child to grow with the standard believing that they will not encounter problems at the end.

Well high schools will always want those who have performed excellently so hence we teach for examinations.

Q: If you were to make a choice, would you say it’s fair to teach for examinations?
A: I think it’s actually unfair because that was done to me in high school. After completing my ‘A’s, I went for an interview. At work I had to start afresh as if I had never gone to school because I knew nothing!

Q: How would you define a quality assessment?
A: It has maybe good results.

The assessment should look at all those other domains which were mentioned not just cognitive so that we build a wholistic individual, someone who can actually fit into the society.

Q: Why do other teachers copy questions from other schools’ past exam papers when asked to set an exam?
A: In the rural areas, there is a serious shortage of resources including text books so sometimes it might be difficult to come up with new questions when setting tests all the time, so sometimes doing this will help expose the child to many questions in preparation for the final exam in Grade 7.

Some teachers are just lazy to set questions and will just copy from others. Sometimes you want to meet the deadline, you just copy, and then submit to the authorities and you are done.

Q: Does class size have an impact on assessment?
A: Greatly… because that pupil teacher interaction..haa..its reduced if you have got a bigger load. You cannot actually pay attention to every kid. Remember in primary we teach 12 subjects including the co-curricular activities and for you to be so good. You just live out those that are not examined at Grade 7. You can concentrate on these other subjects which are useless after all.

Q: Do you think you have enough resources to carry out assessment in this school?
A: Yes, we have no problems even the books are enough. But in social studies there is a bit of a shortage, they have to share. This can pose problems because one child may stay too long with the book, and when the test comes, it can be unfair on the other pupils.

Q: Any last words?

A: Assessment sometimes creates hassles, whether on the teacher or on the pupil, when it is done unfairly. Sometimes you might not cover all the concepts that you intended due to disturbances beyond your control. This becomes a problem if the paper has already been set and it's unfair on the pupils because they will see some things for the first time in the exam. Sometimes the teacher can be labelled useless, say if the pupils have not performed well, like it pounces on you the teacher. As a teacher in the class I must be given the freedom to assess accordingly. When coming up with policies, let us sit together so that we come up with a policy which will be implementable.

I think assessment is a good thing since it will help you to see the ability of the child in order for you to remediate the child as well as maybe altering your way of teaching to help the children.

Assessment in some cases creates cheating especially on the side of the teacher due to harsh policies, so that they can meet the KRAs and not be stigmatised.

It’s good to assess so that I give remedial work to the children.

Q: How many staff development programmes have you had in this school with regards to assessment?
A: None, from as far as I can remember except when you came and presented a paper on testing.

Q: Is the district doing anything to improve assessment?
A: No, not really.

Q: What would you want to be improved on assessment?
A: More textbooks should be given to primary schools to improve comprehension skills of children.

The practical aspect should be included when assessing pupils not just concentrating on objective answering.

Involvement of teachers in policy making, it is better not to force down policies in the throats of teachers.

Teacher 1.1.2

Q: What is assessment?
A: Something to deal with strengths and weaknesses of a situation. I think assessment is checking for progress, Assessment is something e..... the activity whereby people take up certain task to find out if there are problems or no problems. So it is evaluating e.g. whatever is going on in the classroom.

Q: What is the role of assessment?
A: Helps to find strength and weaknesses of a learning situations, helps to check the progress to see if you are going in the right direction or whatever, helps to correct where we are going off

Q: If you think back to your days in colleges were you trained to do assessment?
A: Yes, we were taught to do assessment. We were encouraged to draft our schemes of work and make comments. We assess our pupils whether they were progressing or meeting difficulties and those kids with problems we find a way to help them. We note that through assessment.

Q: What forms of assessment do you use in this school?
A: We use test, daily exercises to check whether pupils have understood what we teach.

Q: Do you consider objectives when setting classroom tests?
A: Yes because Eee – an objective will guide you as to whether you achieved what you want to do.

Q: Which domain do you concentrate on?
A: We concentrate on cognitive domain.

Q: Why are you not concentrating on the effective and psychomotor domain?
A: We are concentrating on three domains. We teach physical education which is the psychomotor domain. We teach religious education where we test the moral values Eee there is the issue of ZIMSEC. At grade seven year courses, they centre mainly on the cognitive domain. Some of the domains are not taken care e.g. at the end of the seven year course.

We teach physical education once a time. That is when we release the children to the physical education teacher. This is because we don’t waste our time on physical education which not tested by ZIMSEC.

Q: Do you think you have the competence to do assessment?
A: I think I have the competence when you are given a class to teach eeh surely you should be able to assess, so that you will be to see where your children stand in terms of what ever is taught. Also I think I am able to assess because when you are in your class you able to assess the attitudes of your pupils by merely looking. We are able to asses, we continue to have problems and not all objectives are assessed.

Q: What statistics have you used to analyze assessment data?
A: Averages and percentages.

Q: Are our records of tests accurate?
A: Some records are not accurate; we create marks to please the head. Some records are accurate; we record the tests we give so that the head can cross-check the records to see if they are corresponding.

Q: Are there any ethical consideration you consider when setting your tests?
A: We don’t consider any ethics.

Q: Why?
A: We are not aware of that we need to consider any ethics. There are some things, teachers do not know such as statistics and ethics and yet they claim to know assessment.

Q: Do we have any policies in this school with regards to assessment?
A: Eee – we give tests monthly and at the end of the term
Yes – we do have laid down rules that is monthly we must assess our children and at the end of the term.

Q: Do we have any problems with assessment policies?
A: Yes. Policies are difficult to implement.
Q: Which group of people do you think are favored by tests?
A: Yes those who are intelligent because they are the ones who get higher marks unlike those who are not able, and those who are intelligent are favoured because they show interest in writing the test, the backward are not interested because they know they are going to fail. Even the ZIMSEC favours intelligent pupils the set the same tests for the intelligent and the backward pupils. ZIMSEC just sets the same test for the intelligent and the backward.

Teachers mainly use summative assessments.

Q: Do we have any written policies?
A: Policies are not written down. They are just internalized.

Q: Do you have any staff development programmes on assessment?
A: Yes, almost every term

Q: Do you have any other problems in carrying out assessments?
A: Yes, absenteeism, find a child comes 3 days or 2 days a week. Assessment for those who have a habit of absenteeism is difficult. Some pupils are vulnerable they don’t bring the needed things such as books, pens.

Poor health, due to HIV result in assessment problems. The concentration span of children with HIV is very slow. We also don’t have enough resources e.g. typed papers; we are required to write the tests on the board. No printers, photocopiers. Electricity is always available. It is not easy to write on the board.

Q: Why does some teacher copy tests from other schools?
A: Here we don’t copy tests but we use the syllabus to set test. Some schools have a higher pass rate and usually as teachers at times we just get a paper from that school to tests our pupils if they can perform to that level. Usually you have to set the test on the work you have done.

Q: Do we teach for examination?
A: Yes – (Laughter), especially towards examination we give a chain of tests.

Q: Why?
A: We want to equip our pupils with examination skills so that they perform well and are able to be well comed into secondary schools.

Actually we drill the pupils, so that we don’t tarnish the image of the school. If pupils fail everybody will says these teachers are not working. We drill people because of fear that pupils might fail at grade level. Even the lower classes, test are tailored towards theZIMSEC style.

If pupils fail the teacher is answerable to the District officials, so we don’t want to be caught in such a plea we end up teaching for examination.

Q: What are quality assessment?
APPENDIX 2:

INTERVIEW AND OBSERVATION PROTOCOL FOR HEAD TEACHERS

Opening Statement
I am a Doctorate learner with the Zimbabwe Open University. I am carrying out “A Study of Assessment Problems in Zimbabwe’s Primary Schools with special reference to Gweru District Primary Schools. The findings will be relevant to college curriculum developers, school staff development programmes, and policy makers and may lead to changes in primary school assessment methods.

The findings will be relevant to college curriculum developers, school staff development programmes, and policy makers and may lead to changes in primary school assessment methods.

I would like to hear your views concerning the topic under study. You are assured that data collected from this research will be treated confidentially and will be solely used for the purposes of the research. Your names will be concealed in the research report. Information you give will not be availed to parents, other teachers, supervisors or any other people with names. Participation in this research should be purely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research if you feel like doing so.

This interview is going to take 30 minutes and will be recorded using a tape recorder. Once the interviews are completed the findings will be availed to you.

PROBING QUESTIONS

1 Research Question
What sort assessment skills do classroom teachers have to enable them carry out classroom assessment?

Interview questions.

1.1 How do you define assessment?
1.2 What is the role of assessment play in the education of pupils?
1.3 What should teachers you consider when setting classroom tests?
1.4 Are objectives necessary in setting classroom tests?
1.5 What exposure on assessment were you offered by teachers’ colleges?
1.6 Do you think assessment is core to teacher training?
1.7 What assessment techniques should teachers use?
1.8 Do you think teachers have the competence to carry out assessment?
1.9 What statistics are used by to analyse assessment data?
1.10 How are test items selected by teachers?
1.11 How do teachers mark essays?
1.12 Which domain of objectives do teachers concentrate on when assessing pupils?

2 Research Question

How do teachers’ perceptions influence poor assessment procedures?

Interview Questions.

2.1 What is the importance of assessment?
2.2 What sort of assessment do you think is important for the benefit of classroom learning?
2.3 Has the Zimbabwean education system changed its assessment procedures since the colonial era? If yes /no say why this was/was not necessary?
2.4 When is it necessary to carry out assessment?
2.5 What is school effectiveness?
2.6 How is school effectiveness judged and how does this impact on assessment?
2.7 Which group of people do you think is favoured by assessment practices in Zimbabwe? Justify your answer.

3 Research Question

How do classroom procedures influence classroom assessment?

Interview Questions

3.1 What policies are in place, in your school, for performing classroom assessment?
3.2 Are there any problems with regard to the implementation of the policies by teachers? Justify your answer.
3.3 Suggest ways in which you think assessment should be done?
3.4 How often do teachers carry out assessment? Is that the requirement of policy?
3.5 What problems do teachers encounter in carrying out assessment encounter?

4 Research Question
How do public examinations cause poor assessment procedures?

Interview Questions.
4.1 How do examinations impact on the setting of tests at class level?
4.2 Do you think teachers teach for examinations? Justify your answer.
4.3 How would you define quality assessment?
4.4 How can quality assessments be achieved?
4.5 How does assessment contribute to school effectiveness?
4.6 Why do you think some teachers copy test items from past examination papers?

5 Research Question
What resources are put in place to support classroom assessment efforts?

Interview Questions
5.1 How does the size of your class affect your classroom assessment procedures?
5.5 What resources do teachers need for assessment?
5.3 How are resources impacting on your classroom assessment procedures?
5.4 Do you think adequate time and finances are allocated for assessment in your school?

Thank you very much for participating in this interview. The conversation has been recorded and will be transcribed. Soon after that I will bring back to you the transcribed schedules for you to confirm whether what was recorded is exactly what you said.
APPENDIX 2.1 Transcripts for Head Teachers.

Head teacher 2.1.1

Q What do you think is the role of assessment?
A Assessment is an academic temperature gauge for systems operations level.

Q Do you think you were taught to do assessment in colleges?
A Yes, because during our days we could see lecturers getting into the assessment of our learners performance and our own performance through the display of our pupil’s exercise books and also compare the exercise books information and the recording system.

A Assessment was also taught in professional foundations, sociology and psychology.

Q What assessment techniques do you use in this school?
A We use home work, tests and exercises.

Q When setting tests which domains do you concentrate on?
A It’s like teachers concentrate much on the cognitive domain.

Q Why?
A I would like to believe that it is on the basis of the nature of the curriculum and the nature of the testing patterns by the powers that be (i.e.)ZIMSEC and other powers that check on the performance of the schools.

Q In this school what statistics do teachers use to analyse assessment Data?
A In the majority of cases the common ones are the average and percentages.

Q Do you think teachers are aware of any other statistics?
A Teachers do not have some of these mathematical concepts used to come up with learners’ academic performance. Teachers are comfortable with percentages and averages.

Q Were statistics taught in colleges?
A Yes, for those with mathematics as a main subject, but those who did not do maths as a main subject were not exposed to the statistical component.

Q Do you have any policies with regards to assessment?
A Yes we do.

Q Are they written down for the benefit of the staff?
A Not really, but they have been written down on the basis of minuting.

Q Do you think teachers are competent to do assessment?
A Yes, but sometimes they want to run away from the element of too advanced statistical operations and analysis.

Q Do you think assessment favours a certain group of people?
A No assessment favours everybody, because for each level assessed we get a rating and a way forward mapped out. Each and every level is improved.

Q Do you think teacher pupil ratio has a negative impact on assessment?
A It does, where the teacher pupil ratio is low it becomes better assessment on the basis that a teacher will have ample time to attend to each pupil.

Q Do you think ZIMSEC examinations have an impact on assessment in this school?
A In this school we follow the ZIMSEC procedures of assessing pupils, for example ZIMSEC has re-introduced essays hense we also give essays at the end of the term and year.

Q What problems do you have in implementing assessment policies?
A Assessment is sometimes not balanced because teachers sometimes don’t get the entire class present because of the frequency of learners that are absent from school. We have child headed families as such absentees are rife in this school.

A Resources also do militate against sound assessment.

A Resources can lower the performance of pupils.

Q Do you think class size affects assessment?

A Yes, the larger the class the lesser are the chances of many assessments. So it means a smaller number is better assessed.

Q How can we rectify assessment problems you have alluded to?

A Through the injection of financial resources by the powers that be (e.g. government and the ministry.

A By reducing teacher pupil ratio to about 30.

Q Do you often hold staff development programmes on assessment?

A Yes we do.

Q How many times?

A 3 times a year. Every term we discuss the results of the tests to see how our pupils have performed.

Q How about staff developing each other on item writing?

A Really do we have such staff development programmes?

Head teacher 2.1.2

Q: How do you define assessment in this school?
A: To assess is going into the classrooms to see teachers teach and then assess the teacher; and then look at the book and also assess the teacher and then to assess the children, their performance.

Q: What role does assessment play in the education of pupils?

A: It will enable us to know their areas of strengths and weaknesses so that we can assist them with their education. It also helps us to know in which direction as far as life is concerned, they should take in terms of career. Because it’s after assessment when we can tell that this child is oriented in this or that.

Q: Were you trained to do assessment in college?

A: Ah, ini… ah, if I look back like when we were trained in Rhodesia haaa, I can’t remember. Probably I was doing it but not very very much aware of its importance. It was not really core, even how to set questions, we learnt this while we were already practicing, but in college, I don’t remember learning how to set questions, worrying about performance of the child, in terms of the assessment. Not much was done.

Q: Do you think your teachers have the competence to do assessment?

A: (laughs) Teachers change. There was a time when I thought our teachers were very good. You remember the other time when we invited you to carry out staff development on assessment; that group, the teachers were now very good. But they transferred, some went out of the country, some went to Mkoba because they stay in Mkoba, and now I have a new team and I am starting all over again. Because we just have to train each other; even that time we were laughing at each other when we looked at those questions we were setting before we had staff development because some of the questions
were very funny. Teachers really lacked the competence. But after staff
developing each other, and also you may be having one or two who are good;
and then you will be saying “look at her tests” to the others and that way you
end up improving.

Q: How often do you do staff development in this school, especially with
regards to assessment?

A: Umm, we have two staff developments per term; it depends on the areas
where you will be concentrating. Last year that’s when we worked very much
on assessment, that’s where we concentrated. So, there are times when you
see where things are lacking now. But most of the time with assessment;
each time after writing an exam, we sit down and assess the tests. So, it may
not be a staff development as such, but it ends up being staff development
because we will be commenting on how we ran the exams and how the
papers were. Emotionally at times it will be because some of the children will
have failed, the teachers will say, “the questions were not very good”, so it will
be a staff meeting, trying to see how we ran our tests but in a way it ends up
being staff development.

Q: Do you think teachers like assessment?

A: (laughs) At times they don’t want. Because at times, you know, you will be
making them see that “this has to be done again”. Especially those people
who will have a lot of corrections to make, at times they think that you are just
trying to… or you are on them heavily. And in the end you can hear some of
them saying, “haa, after all tichifira ka$100 here?” But eventually… because
we just tell them that, “if you do the things we ask you to do, no one will worry
you”. This is because we want our thing to be uniform.
Q: Do you have a policy with regards to assessment in this school?
A: Yah we have a policy on what we expect, as far as exercises are concerned.

Q: Is it from the ministry, or it’s a local policy?
A: Haa, we have our own

Q: Okay...
A: So that we use it when it comes to performance appraisal. To say, “amount of work was adequate”, how adequate according to our school policy? If you say your work is inadequate, we should know why, because we have benchmarks in our policy.

Q: Teachers have said that these policies are too demanding, as such, we end up creating marks. Do you think this is true?
A: (laughs) Haa, to some extent, it’s not true. At times, for example in our policy, we sat together with the teachers; to say what is expected and then we tried it out, and then we found out that there are some people who even do more than what we agreed to do, after trying. So when someone comes to complain, it’s just that the person is just failing to work, not that it will be too much, because we sit and agree together.

Q: Some people say the numbers are too much, number of pupils. What’s your comment?
A: When it comes to the number of pupils per class, I agree with them; especially when the number comes to 50. Now there is a dilemma there. Can we now sacrifice quality, to say now that you have 50, therefore give 4 questions or 5 questions? This will also affect the performance of pupils. Probably what we should do is to be allowed to really shrink classes up to forty or 45. In classes where they have 40/45, they have no problems. And I think we have been
managing to follow the policy at this school because we were having learners. So, when we have learner teachers in class, they can also help with the marking, which will reduce the workload.

Q: What statistics do you use to analyse assessment data in this school?
A: (laughs) When we do daily assessment, we just give a mark, and a comment. At the end of a period, we use percentages.

Q: Do the teachers ever use standard deviations, z-scores/ t-scores?
A: (laughs) haa, no!

Q: Why?
A: I don’t know but probably they don’t have the knowledge or ability to use those. And also you know, there is just too much work. To go to those extents, its someone who will be having a lot of time

Q: Are they aware of these statistics?
A: Those who have gone through the university, they know.

Q: When testing children, we concentrate on the cognitive, the affective or the psychomotor domain. Which domain do you concentrate on?
A: Aaaaah, the cognitive.

Q: Why is that?
A: I don’t know, but I think probably it is because of our education system and because even on recording, the other domains are not simple. Cognitive is a question of numbers. But when it comes to the others, you have to comment; our report doesn’t bring that much

Q: Okay, do you think pupils themselves have a positive attitude towards assessment?
A: Ummm at our level I don’t think so, I don’t know. Ah! In fact, they like to have their work marked; and those who are good, they like to have their work marked and they are happy. But those who are not doing well, probably I can’t say negative attitude, but they may not be very happy because they are not doing well but if it is the assessment that they hate, I don’t think so.

Q: What is the role of the head in promoting quality assessment?
A: Yah, that’s the duty of the head. To make sure that children are assessed properly so that you come out with the correct result. And if it’s a question of assessment in teachers, it’s so that the teacher improves.

Q: What are the problems faced by teachers in the assessment of pupils?
A: Probably that problem of having too many children; and also too many activities in a day. For example, sporting or other requirements by the ministry; at times they just come and say, “you are now taking this subject” without even considering the time table, for example, now they are talking about culture and to fit that into the timetable can be difficult. It affects the teachers because the curriculum becomes overloaded.

Q: Do you think teachers teach for the examinations?
A: Yah, if you are not very careful, especially the Grade 7s. They teach for the exam. They really teach for the exam, you have to talk to them. I want to site as an example, the Grade 7 teachers; we encourage them to include group work. At times they don’t want to use group work, because they just want to drill and go as fast as possible. They do this so that they revise and revise test papers such that the children are dosed with the same information. And I often say, “these children that we are not teaching to work in groups, when they go to the Universities, they will work alone; and working alone has no
advantages because when you go up you have to be able to work as a team. These children have no team spirit because they were not taught to work as a group.

Q: **So does it mean that the Grade 7 examinations have an impact in the way teachers assess their pupils?**

A: Especially when the region also, and the ministry work so tirelessly to ensure there is competition; as long as the competition is too tough, then the teachers are not going to worry about teaching the children these other skills. They just want the performance because it is the performance that the region will look at. How many 4s, the percentage pass rate, how high is it... and then it leaves no choice to the teachers, even the head if you are not very careful you end up drilling the Grade 7s so that you come out with good results and you ignore these others. Because there was a time at this school when they were saying, “Ah...ha, we should start overlooking home-economics and woodwork lessons”, and this was 2nd term. And you think, “Then what do we do with the home economics teacher and the woodwork teachers.” So all the pressure is just from the whole education system; because they want good results. So you just have to stand up and say, “zvimatanda zvevana zvoenda zvisina kupera nemicheka yekusona, nokuti munoda maarwsults eGrade 7?” The parents will just end up not buying those materials.

Q: **Is continuous assessment a component of assessment in this school whereby we assess pupils during the year and at the end of Grade 7 that mark is used as a final mark for their results for going to Form 1?**

A: Aaaah, there are times when that is used especially when the pupil has missing results or the results fail to come on time, they can just take that. To
some extent I may say yes because they end up using the Mid-year results to take those children to form 1.

Q: **But on their certificates, continuous assessment has no place?**

A: Haa on the certificate, nothing... and at times, some high schools are ignoring the Grade 7 certificate or even result, because they make their own assessments in the form of entrance tests. They just assess the pupils in their own way.

Q: **Why do some teachers, copy test items when asked to set tests?**

A: (laughs) They don’t have the time so they simply pick the nearest paper and copy. And if you are not very careful about it especially if you don’t moderate your papers, you will see that they can simply take the papers that have been written, and you see the results are flying colours. The teacher might have forgotten that they revised that paper and have the misjudgment that the children are passing and yet the children are just recalling what they have revised.

Q: **Do you think class size has an impact on assessment?**

A: If I look at us as a Catholic school, in a way we have our cluster. Because its strictly monitored; the way the tests are set and the way they are marked, and each school giving comments after marking. For example if we mark Loreto papers, we sit down and look at the way the children are answering, we give them a feedback on how they also do, that is done very well. But the way we do it clusterly, with the government schools, because probably because of attitude, we are not doing well. But where it’s done well, it’s beautiful.

Q: **So we are saying teachers in this school have time to share about their assessment procedures?**
A: Yes they do

Q: How are resources impacting on assessment?
A: I think at the moment I can say we have adequate resources; we managed to buy our books. Besides that, we got books from UNICEF, through MASO.

Q: What about bond paper, photocopier?
A: Because we were assisted with text books, the money we were saving for that has been diverted to other assessment tools. UNICEF gave us a lot of material even charts, paper...we have a computer, we can type; but particularly in this zone, the main drawback is electricity. If you want to type in this school, you have to come in the evening, not during the day; it's impossible because electricity is never available during the day. Especially this term (winter).

Q: What should be done to alleviate some of these assessment challenges that are met in the school?
A: I think as far as electricity is concerned, the school would be greatly aided by having a generator of some sort, since it's actually a national problem to be able to run papers in the school. It becomes easier to give tests since nowadays we have to resort to the chalkboard most of the time.

Q: What else can you say with regards to problems of assessment in the school?
A: Stability in a school is necessary. Here, there is high turnover, because of transport. Most of the teachers we have are from Mkoba transport is expensive. When you have a stable staff, you can safely say that you have improved after staff development instead of having people moving in and out; you will always have to carry out staff development.
APPENDIX 3:

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL FOR TEACHERS

Assessment Problems in the Primary School: A Case of Gweru Urban Schools

Discussion duration…………..2hrs.
Number of people ……………..6
Venue……………………………..

Group Task 1 (15 minutes)
The researcher will welcome and greet the participants as they arrive. Refreshments will be served. The researcher will explain the purpose of the study as well as assuring confidentiality.

Group Task 2 (10 minutes)
Each group member introduces her/himself and gives a preferred title she/he would want to use. The researcher will encourage each participant to make a contribution. The researcher will also spell out the manner at which the question and answers are given.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (1hour 15minutes)

1 Research question
What sort assessment skills do classroom teachers have to enable them carryout classroom assessment?

Interview Questions
1.1 How would you define assessment?
1.2 How do you use assessment information in your school?
1.3 What should you consider when setting classroom tests?
1.4 What assessment techniques do you use in the school?
1.5 Which domains do you assess?
1.6 Do you consider educational objectives in setting tests?
1.7 Which domain of objectives do teachers concentrate on when assessing pupils?
1.8 Are terms validity and reliability familiar to you?
1.9 What statistics do you use to analyse assessment data?
1.10 How do you select test items?
1.11 How do you mark essays?
1.12 What form of assessment is more fruitful in the primary school and why?
1.13 What kind of assessment feedback
1.14 What ethical considerations do you consider when setting tests?
1.15 How do you communicate assessment results to pupil?

2 Research Question

How do teachers’ perceptions influence poor assessment procedures?

Interview Questions

2.1 Why is assessment important?
2.2 What sort of assessment do you think is important to the benefit of classroom assessment?
2.3 When is it necessary to carry out assessment?
2.4 Generally, do you think assessment is well carried out in your school?
2.5 Do you think colleges adequately trained you as teachers to do assessment? Justify your answer.
2.6 Do you think you have the relevant competence to carry out assessment in the classroom?
2.7 Do you think Zimbabwean primary schools have changed their assessment procedures since independence? If yes/no say why this was/was not necessary?
2.8 Which group of people do you think is favoured by assessment practices in Zimbabwe? Justify your answer.

3 Research Question

How do classroom procedures influence classroom assessment?

Interview Questions

3.1 Are they any laid down policies with regards to assessment in your school?
3.2 Are there any problems with regard to the implementation of the policies? Justify your answer.
3.3 What sort of problems do you encounter in carrying out assessment?
3.4 How often do you carry out assessment? Is that the requirement of policy?
3.5 How would you improve assessment procedures in the school?

4 Research question
How do public examinations cause poor assessment?

Interview Question
4.1 Is there any relationship between assessment and end of year examination?
4.2 How do formal examinations affect your assessment?
4.3 How do formal examinations impact on the setting of classroom tests?
4.4 How effective schools are judged and how does this impact on assessment?
4.5 How do you define quality assessments?
4.6 How can quality assessment be achieved?

5 Research question
What resources are put in place to support classroom assessment?

Interview Questions
5.1 Do you have adequate resources to carry out assessment? Justify your response?
5.2 How does the class size affect your classroom assessment procedures?
5.3 What resources do you need for you to effectively carry out assessment?
5.4 How are resources impacting on your classroom assessment procedures?
5.5 Do you think adequate time and finances are allocated for assessment in your school?

CONCLUSION /DEBRIEFING (10 MINUTES)
Participants are asked if they have any comments to what has been said. The researcher will inform the participants of a possibility of a follow up. Participants are then thanked by the researcher. The researcher will finally handout travel expenses.
APPENDIX 3.1 Teacher focus Group Transcripts

Teacher focus group 3.1.1

Q  What is assessment
A  Eeh it is a measure of what pupils have acquired, what pupils have gained in terms of attitudes and values you name it. I feel it is a measure to which set academic objectives have been achieved. An assessment also is evaluation, placing value on what has been done.

Q  Why do you assess pupils?
A  To find out strengths and weaknesses. Ah it also helps us for preparations’, whether we have achieved the objectives.

Q  If you look back on your days in colleges, were you trained to do assessment?
A  Yaah it was theoretical, but practically we had to go out and learn on our own.

Q  What forms of assessment do you use in this school?
A  Tests, daily exercises and discussions.

Q  Do you think colleges adequately trained you to do assessment?
A  Yes, but we had 3 weeks micro-teaching where we were taught to do assessment. In three weeks we hardly grasped all there was to assessment. We were not taught how to assess but then we could implement. It was rather hidden. It was done like in sociology and psychology. It depended on one’s ability to implement theory. The theoretical part was taught in colleges. We were taught theory and practice separately and marrying the two became a problem. We were taught because we did peer teaching. We were supposed to do everything we were supposed to do in the classroom. Item
writing I met it while I was already in the field, after completing my college-
*laughter*- Even the specifications grid, I met it while I was already in the field.

**Q** When the college neglected you, how did you learn assessment?

**A** We thank God for this thing called staff development, we share on how we go about setting tests- so it’s through staff development programmes that we have in schools. Eeh experience as well is a great teacher. We learnt through trial and error. _*laughter.*

**Q** What statistics do you use to analyse assessment data?

**A** We use percentages

**Q** Why are you not using the other statistics?

**A** I think it depends on the admin. They got their own way of analyzing data so right now what we have are percentages.

**Q** In colleges were you exposed to statistics?

**A** No, we have never met statistics. In professional studies we were not exposed to statistics, but for some of us who majored in mathematics as a main subject we did a lot of statistics and I know from that how to calculate my mean and standard deviation.

**Q** Do you like statistics?

**A** Yes we do. What we lack is the knowledge of statistics. Some of us are equipped with statistics but they come to this institution and there is nowhere to apply statistics. Its only now during this discussion that we realise that there are other statistics we can use.

**Q** Do you think objectives are necessary when setting tests?

**A** Yes they act as a guide.

**Q** Which domain do you concentrate on?
A  Chorus - cognitive

Q  Why do you concentrate on cognitive?
A  Because usually we are looking forwards toward the pass rate so it barriers me from looking at other domains. Why? We focus on the cognitive domain because pupils write national examinations. ZIMSEC is interested in the cognitive domain as such as teachers we also concentrate on that domain.

Q  Do you know how to assess the other domains?
A  Teachers would need staff development on how to test the other domains because we have been hammering on the other domains.

Q  When you are setting tests, are there any ethics that you consider?
A  Its like we can consider some factors but at the moment we focus on guidelines from ZIMSEC. We are not very much aware there are some ethics to be considered. It has been happening spontaneously, but not knowing very well that we have to consider ethics.

Q  What is an effective school?
A  They look at ZIMSEC results. At the end of the year schools are ranked and its published. The district even goes further to call the heads of schools. If there is a lower pass rate, the head is blamed.

Q  In this school, do you have any policies with regards to assessment?
A  Yes we do have. Currently we assess pupils monthly, termly and yearly.

Q  Do you have any problems in implementing assessment policies?
A  Yes we do

Q  What are the problems?
A  You find come month-end you have a class of 43 children, the very day I am supposed to administer the tests the SDA chairman comes and says those
who have not paid school fees must go home. I then remain with very few children. Absentism is also very high. Some sporting activities disturb us when we are holding end of month tests that is to say 2 or 3 days we might be having competitions and yet we will be expected to assess pupils. This school is affected by a hive of activities, churches, MASO etc. Such disturbances eventually affect us. We don’t have resources e.g printing materials, photocopiers etc such writing the test on the chalkboard from one part of the board to the other is very tiresome.

Q  Do you teach for exams?
A  No we should not teach for examinations because it is not all we teach should be examined.

Q  Can you also say your assessment is biased towards ZIMSEC?
A  Yes, so that pupils can pass the examinations.

Q  How do you define quality assessment?
A  A good assessment should be a true reflection of that which we are to find on the ground. For example, the test should be in line with what has been covered.

Q  Do you think class size affects assessment?
A  Yah- the more pupils you have the less assistance you give.

Q  So do you say in this school you are affected by enrolment?
A  It varies from class to class.

Q  Any comments with regards to assessment as a way of rounding off the discussion?
A  Yeah the government should come up with a reasonable teacher:pupil ratio eeh say 20-35. If maybe eh a request is made for government to provide
resources such as computers, photocopiers so that they are exposed to printed materials instead of meeting the printed paper at Grade 7 level. As such there are disadvantages.

And also the national examination body should have a way of assessing all the three domains and not neglect the other two. It would be easier for us to implement the assessment of the other two domains.

**Teacher Focus Group 3.1.2**

**Q:** Are we all aware of what assessment is?

**A:** Eeeh...really assessment can be assessing of children or teachers work… I think it is performance measurement.

Evaluation of someone’s work.

Anything that is done to solicit information about a learner so that I am in a position to evaluate at the end

**Q:** What is the role of assessment?

**A:** It helps the teacher to evaluate himself e.g. teaching methods can be changed to suit the learner and use relevant teaching materials.

Find out my weakness as a teacher.

Find out weakness of child by comparing mark to the average.

Helps the head to find out areas which are wanting to teachers to organise staff development programmes

**Q:** Do you have staff development programmes in this school?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** What about on assessment?
A: Never had.

Q: For ALL of you?

A: Yes.

Q: What are the various forms of assessment that are carried out at this school?

A: Variety of tests, to see who needs help more or less after making an evaluation, give remedial work to see whether content is understood. We also have a teacher who stands for remedial classes for every grade. We have morning Challenge, every morning a short test on yesterday’s covered work at around 7.30 - 8.00

Q: What do you consider when setting tests?

A: Depending on the test.. in this school we can set in two different ways. The moderating board moderates tests particularly at grade level to ensure that the test is fair. We also have what are called specification grids which are used to set the tests.

Q: Are your tests affected by the way ZIMSEC sets its tests?

A: We have our assessments in two forms that is, the tests and the coursework, though the coursework is not realised at the end of it all but we have it here. We have ITR where we record the exercises that we do with the children so that at the end of the term, you can see whether the child has improved or is deteriorating. Then, in coagulation with the tests that we use,ZIMSEC and us are bound by the syllabus to the extent that the syllabus has it all. So when we set our tests, we are guided by the syllabus not the text books. But then the standard now..eh.. of measuring..eh…performance will be set by ZIMSEC
when they decide the structures of the papers and so on. There is no hide and seek.

**Q:** Is it practical for you to follow the syllabus

**A:** There are quite a number of things that are an impediment as far as assessment is concerned. One of them is pressure of work. You find that the teacher-pupil ratio is very abnormal. At the same time we have pressure from various other angles. So as a result people would still take shortcuts, though they are quite aware of the right thing to do. Therefore the results that come from the assessments that are done are not very reliable due to those problems.

It’s very difficult to follow that one, even if you look at the RME section, it demands a lot. Content has three sections: RME, Social Studies and Science. You find that the ‘O’ level syllabus is better than the primary syllabus because the primary syllabus demands from all the Old to the New Testament; from the first book of the Bible to the last. But it is only a section of the subject so when they structure the questions they can take it from any part of that one; and it’s very difficult to be umm...in commitment with what your teaching wants.

**Q:** Do you consider objectives when setting tests?

**A:** Yes, because they help you to be on track with your questioning.

**Q:** Were you trained on assessment in college?

**A:** Ha, it wasn’t done thoroughly, otherwise you discover a lot when you are in the field, we learn through discovery (laughter)

I echo those sentiments and I want to add on that this aspect of staff development is essential especially when we come to the field itself where
people from different training backgrounds come together to share ideas. In the end you end up becoming an expert in that particular field but you would have learnt that in the field, not at college.

I trained with ZINTEC. We were exposed to all this, to the evaluation. As a teacher, you were on your own; you had no mentor in the classroom so we were taught to prepare assessments as well as the records.

Even though they teach these domains in colleges, it is difficult to stick to them due to the high teacher, pupil ratio. It’s like in most cases people just give some tests which are easy to mark so that you have something to record, but the truth is if you look at the reliability or validity of those tests, they are not very valid.

Q: So some trained teachers and others didn’t?
A: Yes.

Q: Do teachers have the competence to do assessment/set tests?
A: Ah ‘ini’ I have them (laughter)

Some have and some don’t, not all of us have the skills

Q: Is the school leadership aware of such teachers who have the skills to carry out assessment?
A: Apparently they are.

Q: So the other teachers actually know they are not competent about it?
A: Firstly we are human.. eh.. and you can’t really walk up to somebody and say eh.. this you can do and this you cannot (laughter) and yet we know that we are all “trained” because some colleges did other things and some didn’t so you see we are different but we are still sailing in the same boat so the admin is ahead, but their ways will save you embarrassment, disappointment e.t.c.
But certainly there are teachers who are capable of setting tests and others who are not.

At this school we have a very powerful exams committee to the extent that each and every year they are shuffled, after they realise that you have no competence, they can shift you. The competence they see by being guided by the grid, by being guided by your questioning technique and whether it is standard. So at this school the admin must be aware of that because of the committee which is in existence.

Q: Is it true that when some teachers are asked to set tests they will copy questions from other schools’ test papers?

A: Yes it happens, but there is something I like about the way things are done here.. Eeh...before exams are set, the committee actually has a staff development session with the teachers, and this is one of the things that is emphasised... never to duplicate. And then after testing, comes moderation. And then during moderation, it can easily be picked that this paper was duplicated and so forth so you find such things are minimised at this place… so as far as that one is concerned, at this place, things are okay.

Q: What statistics do you use to analyse data in this school?

A: We use percentages, and there is continuity of assessment because I actually have access of my grade 7 pupils' grade 3 test records.

Q: How do you mark essays in this school?

A: We mark the same way asZIMSEC.

Wherever a child makes a mistake I will indicate with a stroke and that stroke represents half a mark. Then at the end I sum up the strokes; if they come up to 20 it means on orthography that particular child has got zero because total
orthography marks are 10. And then on general impression you look at the
general layout, are there any facts within the composition and whatever then
general impression is out of ten. So in total the essay is marked out of 20 so
we add the orthography and general impression to come up with the final
mark.

When marking essays I should always have a marking scheme which should
also be known by the pupils so that when I put sp the child knows that it
stands for spelling and that the spelling is incorrect. If it is grammar a gr and
so forth, so this is how we mark our essays.

**Q:** When setting tests, are there ethical considerations which you might be
afraid of violating?

**A:** When it comes to RME of course there are certain ethics that we sort of
consider since we generally take that pupils know of the important moral
value, but however, the idea of actually pin pointing so that the pupil will be in
a position to talk about his/ her own personal experiences at home of course
that one we don’t but in general we sort of talk of moral value.

We mainly consider it in RME otherwise in other subjects we don’t…it’s very
difficult to do so.

**Q:** Do you think the Zimbabwean Education system has changed its
assessment practices since independence?

**A:** It has changed because now people are now writing paper 2 at grade 7 level.
I think it has changed significantly because I have observed that the colonial
period is more reflective of people’s attitudes unlike now you find that people
are just writing exams for the sake of it and they are not really being used for
selection purposes especially at Grade 7 level. So I think there have been changes made... to suit the “Education for all” expansionist programme. During the colonial era we were taught things that completely had nothing to do with us, we could not even relate to them e.g. there was a subject called nature studies and in an exam we were asked to draw and label an armored ground cricket but there was no relevance to our life even culture, so at least now the assessment that is being done suits the Zimbabwean child.

Q: Do you think school assessment has an impact on school effectiveness? Is there a relationship?

A: There is a relationship because when I got here for the first time, I got hold of the past exam question papers and was very impressed. I am not even surprised to see that this school is competing even at provincial level when it comes to Grade 7 results. The assessment that is done here is up to standard and you can see that this has a direct bearing on the overall school effectiveness.

As long as the education system is based on examination performance and everything, school assessment will always be directly related to success in schools.

Q: Do you have policies in this school concerning assessment?

A: We are not sure.

Oh, it’s there, we give tests fortnightly

Q: Do we you problems in implementing these policies?

A: I have problems sometimes because you find in that period that I am supposed to be recording something, I will not have taught anything worth
recording, such that you find that sometimes I just record for the sake of recording to follow regulations but otherwise those records are not very valid.

I just wanted to say that as professionals we are supposed to record things that are true, so like one has said, be done unless you have taught a concept that is worth testing so there are other cases when you find that you have not covered the area that you were supposed to cover within that period of time so it will be impossible to do the assessment. In actual fact it is difficult to implement the policy.

Class size is also a problem because most of us have 52/54 pupils. So imagine that’s a hundred and chakuti eyes vs. two of the teacher (laughter)… so if you look at that, you find out that instead of testing these pupils as required, you find it better to continue teaching because you’ll have very little to record at the end of the week. And at times we always write or record marks of tests that we have not done because the teacher pupil ratio is abnormal and there is a lot of pressure because of that. Because like we mentioned earlier, every day we have morning challenge, that book has to be marked; the pupils then spend the whole day at school and have homework every day, those books also need to be marked. This means that in the morning before you even do anything, there are two piles of books waiting to be marked. Over 100 books.

Q: Do you have any other problems with regards to assessment?

A: Well I don’t know where to throw the blame, but these days we are forced to let the children do as they please because these days, any form of punishment can get you locked up in jail, for example punishing a pupil for not
doing homework. The child will just tell you that my mother did not buy the book.

Another problem when carrying out assessment is that we have to write on the board it can be strenuous. With the grade 7, you might want to give them a past exam question paper so that they practice but then you will not get a proper assessment because they have these papers at home, some have been doing them since Grade 5! They will just get everything correct not because they know, but because it has become repetition. I want to know whether they have grasped the concept I am teaching or they have just crammed the answers. A pupil might know the correct answer on the question paper without understanding the concept in that particular question. So to get a proper assessment you have to set your own test and write it on the board, which is time consuming since you have to write and rub continuously.

Q: Do teachers teach for examinations or they teach for life?
A: To say the truth, currently we say they are teaching for examinations due to shortage of resources. You might have the will and the skills but due to shortage of proper equipment you are forced to use a certain approach… that will leave you with a good name in the end. Though you know the right thing to do and all the policies, you can sometimes be forced to take certain shortcuts to please whoever is above you… (lol).

Well on the sidelines I am happy that ZIMSEC introduces the paper two, because long back, experienced teachers could easily make their pupils pass with flying colours, the whole class since it was multiple choice. But now with the paper 2, structured questions have no shortcuts. We had also suggested
to ZIMSEC to introduce paper 3… this was suggested 2, 3, and 4 years ago I don’t know how far it is now. Paper 3 was supposed to be coursework whereby all the marks of the child from say Grade 3 that was recorded on the ITR were submitted to ZIMSEC every term so that people avoid teaching for exams. Also even when a child falls ill during exam time, they will still come out with something, since the coursework was supposed to have a better percentage.

**Q:** How does the class size affect classroom assessment procedures?

**A:** It affects in so many ways, one which is, you find that you are well versed in your staff, that you want to teach your pupils, but due to the pressure for example; setting fortnightly tests; the fact that you have got 54 pupils you are forced to set simple tests which you can easily mark and finish, so you can see that is a drawback as far as assessment is concerned. Another thing is, you find that due to the big classes that we have you don’t actually implement fully what you would have learnt at college which dictates to you to use certain methods of assessment, but due to the pressure, you end up using substandard methods of assessment.

If I had 25 – 30 pupils to teach for the whole term, I think these pupils would pass with flying colours. You know, when it comes to reading, our pupils have problems when it comes to that. The reason being that I have to take these pupils individually so that they read to me so thinking of the size of the class, you know, and the time that I have, 30 minutes it is impossible.

**Q:** What kind of resources do you need when carrying out assessment?

**A:** Textbooks for reading.
Personally I feel that the boards we have in our classes are not enough. Personally when I take a class for the first time, I don’t start with the book, when I want to teach comprehension, I start at the board. So you can see how small it is, not to mention the fact that other subjects need to be accommodated on that board. We need more boards.

We need a variety of question papers, even past exam question papers. The teacher can also improvise by making reading cards for the pupils to read.

Q: Which one is more effective, formative or summative assessment?
A: I believe that the summative really evaluates the capacity of the child in terms of retention. Is he/she still remembering what they were taught? i.e. weekly, fortnightly, monthly or termly.

I feel that the formative is more important for example in Grade 7. Now it cannot unless a pupil is well equipped from the base that he/she can make it at the top. So the continuous assessment that is done by the teacher in the class, it actually enables immediate remediation yet with summative, once you have failed that’s the end you cannot give any remediation at all and the pupil might never know where they went wrong. So at the moment the teacher applies what he/she is supposed to apply in the class; that can actually enable the pupil to do very well at the end.

Q: Any last words?
A: Thanks for refreshing our rusting minds.

We used to have the DEOs coming to do spot checks in the schools and this seems to have died a natural death. I think these were good because we would do our jobs effectively knowing that we could be assessed anytime.
I feel that the abnormal teacher pupil ratio, it’s greatly hindering the effectiveness of assessment, so if that can be corrected we will be ok. Otherwise teachers are getting bad labels which do not belong to them actually because of the situation on the ground.

I am concerned about the General paper which covers three subjects. I think it would be better to have separate papers for Social studies, RME and Environmental Science respectively, both Paper 1 and 2.

I am happy that even high schools are no longer just considering the Grade 7 results of summative assessment, but some schools actually ask for the pupils’ grade 6 reports before issuing places to individuals, which shows that there is that shift of the power of the Grade 7 final exams.
APPENDIX 4:

INTERVIEW AND OBSERVATION PROTOCOL FOR THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SPORT, ARTS AND CULTURE OFFICERS

Opening Statement

I am a Doctorate learner with the Zimbabwe Open University. I am carrying out “A Study of Assessment Problems in Zimbabwe’s Primary Schools with special reference to Gweru District Primary Schools. The findings will be relevant to college curriculum developers, school staff development programmes, and policy makers and may lead to changes in primary school assessment methods.

I would like to hear your views concerning the topic under study. You are assured that data collected from this research will be treated confidentially and will be solely used for the purposes of the research. Your names will be concealed in the research report. Information you give will not be availed to parents, other teachers, supervisors or any other people with names. Participation in this research should be purely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research if you feel like doing so.

This interview is going to take 30 minutes and will be recorded using a tape recorder. Once the interviews are completed the findings will be availed to you.

PROBING QUESTIONS

1 Research Question

What sort assessment skills do classroom teachers have to enable them carry out classroom assessment?

Interview questions

1.1 How do you define assessment
1.2 What is the role of assessment play in the education of pupils?
1.3 What should teachers consider when setting classroom tests?
1.4 Are objectives necessary in setting classroom tests?
1.5 What exposure on assessment were you offered by teachers’ colleges?
1.6 Do you think assessment is core to teacher training?
1.7 What assessment techniques should teachers use?
1.8 Do you think teachers have the competence to carry out assessment?
1.9 Do you think the college curriculum adequately prepares teachers to carry out assessments?
1.10 What statistics are used by to analyse assessment data?
1.11 How are test items selected by teachers?
1.12 How do teachers mark essays?
1.13 Which domain of objectives do teachers concentrate on when assessing pupils?
1.14 Do you think the ZIMSEC Grade Seven examinations consider all the domains of learning?
1.15 What is the relationship between your department and ZIMSEC?
1.16 What is the mandate of your department with regards to assessment in the primary school?
1.17 What is the ministry doing to equip teachers with the relevant assessment skills?
1.18 Do you have in-service programmes for teachers on assessment?

2 Research Question

How do teachers’ perceptions influence poor assessment procedures?

Interview Questions

2.1 What is the importance of assessment?
2.2 What sort of assessment do you think is important for the benefit of classroom learning?
2.3 When is it necessary to carry out assessment?
2.4 What is school effectiveness?
2.5 How school effectiveness is judged and how does this impact on assessment?
2.6 Which group of people do you think is favoured by assessment practices in Zimbabwe? Justify your answer.
3 Research Question

*How do classroom procedures influence classroom assessment?*

**Interview Questions**

3.1 What policies are in place, in the primary schools, for performing classroom assessment?
3.2 Do you have any policies with regard to assessment in the primary schools?
3.3 Are there any problems with regards to the implementation of the policies by teachers? Justify your answer.
3.4 Suggest ways in which you think assessment should be done?
3.5 How often do teachers carry out assessment? Is that the requirement of policy?
3.6 What problems do you encounter with regards to assessment in the primary schools?

4 Research Question

*How do public examinations cause poor assessment procedures?*

**Interview Questions**

4.1 How do examinations impact on the setting of tests at classlevel?
4.2 Do you think teachers teach for examinations? Justify your answer.
4.3 How would you define quality assessment?
4.4 How can quality assessments be achieved?
4.5 How does assessment contribute to school effectiveness?
4.6 Why do you think some teachers copy test items from past examination papers?

5 Research Question

*What resources are put in place to support classroom assessment efforts?*

**Interview Questions**

5.1 How does class size affect classroom assessment?
5.2 What resources do teachers need for assessment?
5.3 How are resources impacting on your classroom assessment procedures?
5.4 Do you think adequate time and finances are allocated for assessment in the primary schools?

5.5 Are there any comments or burning issues you would want me to know with regards to this interview

Thank you very much for participating in this interview. The conversation has been recorded and will be transcribed. Soon after that I will bring back to you the transcribed schedules for you to confirm whether what was recorded is exactly what you said.
APPENDIX 4.1 Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture transcripts.

Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture Officer 4.1.1

Q What do you understand by the term assessment?
A Assessment is that process of making observations on the outputs, outcomes the impact of the teaching learning process in the system and making value judgement on those issues as to whether they are meeting set standards or they fall short to facilitate the situation where if they are performance gaps then in service programmes are mounted to bridge that particular gap and ensure that people perform according to the accepted standards.

Q Do you have in service programmes on assessment in the primary schools?
A Yes we do. Starting perhaps with the district education officers that when they go into schools what is that they look for and then we have instrument that we have devised so it’s a checklist to see whether the school is performing at an expected level or not.

Q Do you think teachers are competent enough to carry out assessment?
A Teachers in the primary school in terms of competence-in a way yes because they heed to assess themselves and their effectiveness, but the question is do they have the motivation to do that extra mile of doing self assessment or self evaluation and the administration do they have time to identify the needs of the teachers and the performance of the learners themselves to look at the impact of the teaching-learning situation.
Q  If you look at our environment today would you say teachers are motivated?
A  To say the honest fact, they are totally demotivated because of the pay package and they would rather spend more time doing other things that bring some income to themselves rather than the core business.

Q  Do you think the teacher’s college curriculum equips teachers well to do assessment?
A  In terms of lesson delivery preparation and scheming on those aspects I think the training is adequate. It’s a question of changing of attitudes of those teachers during training so that they focus more on their core business rather than looking at the teaching process.

Q  Why is the situation like this?
A  The ministry is interested in using the different statistical information but the teachers are not exposed to statistics. The Ministry has not demanded that from them that so they go that extra mile. Things are just silent. When it comes to the district office we expect the education officer to go that extra mile and do all the analytical process.

Q  Which domain of learning do primary teachers concentrate on when assessing teachers?
A  Usually when assessing people teachers concentrate on the cognitive and the psychomotor domain but not on the affective domain.

Q  Why is the situation like this?
A  I think teachers just follow the easier route. They don’t want to bother themselves with the affective issues yet they are critical in the development of the child.
Q  Do you think the ZIMSEC Grade 7 examinations consider all the domains of education?
A  The interesting aspect is that it is the teachers themselves who do the setting if they are not trained in those areas they will largely concentrate on the cognitive and ignore the other domains yet the skills according to ZIMSEC structure must be there, there must be questions that are balanced to cater for all those domains. Yaah.

Q  Is there any relationship between your department and ZIMSEC?
A  Yes the relationship is that ZIMSEC is responsible for setting question papers distributing question papers to schools and Ministry takes over in terms of monitoring the conduct of examinations and the collection of question papers. ZIMSEC takes over to do the marking and the publication of results.

Q  If there is a problem in assessment who has the mandate to train the teachers?
A  If it is the question of setting questions, ZIMSEC has the mandate but it is the question of other assessment in the school. It is the mandate of the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture in liaison with ZIMSEC. The Ministry can invite ZIMSEC to do the training, the facilitators from ZIMSEC to the training to come and facilitate within the school system.

Q  At the moment what is being done equip teachers with more skills to do assessment?
A  The Ministry has CEM. The better schools programme and that is deliberately designed to ensure that we create a better school environment, better teaching, and better learning. It has a number of resource centres. In each district there is a resource centre where we expect the better schools
programme to organise workshops for the teachers so that they develop themselves through peer coaching and sometimes we get facilitators from outside the provincial offices.

One thing we encourage is that eeh that there is a coordinator at the provincial offices who know after identifying schools that are faultering in the assessment area, then they organise people from the school that are doing well to go and share the practices with the school that is not doing well so as to motivate them to do much better, because we find that peer coaching is more effective than when it comes from an official.

Q I made an observation that ZIMSEC concentrates on summative assessment. What is your department doing about formative assessment in the primary schools?

A Actually what we have encouraged in all the schools is that aah they keep profiles of each pupil right from the zero grade so that the profile in terms of progress records when they get to secondary the primary school head should now hand over the profile of each child to the secondary school. The secondary school heads should know the entire performance of the child right from the primary level so that they are able to channel the learners to areas of her competencies. The aptitudes, is it vocational technical etc and academic.

Q Is it already happening?

A It’s happening. Children should have continuous assessment.

Q How accurate are these formative assessments because teachers have told me that the curriculum is loaded and they do not come up with
some form of assessment, rather they just create record marks from their heads?

A That is very unfortunate, we don’t expect that to happen because whatever we encourage primary schools for instance is that practical subjects for example music, physical education, art and craft were recommending that they ask for specialist teachers in those who will take the subject across Grade 1 to Grade 7 and the teachers are kept with more time to do academic subjects. The implementation of that has not taken root as we would want but that I the direction we are moving towards so that the question of the curriculum being overloaded would not arise with specialist people handling other areas.

Q Do you have any policies with regards assessment in the primary schools?

A Yes we do because we have got to start off with internal assessment by the school itself. We have got a policy that learners have to assess the performance of their school. The SDC members should assess their schools and its performance and the head and deputy head should do their own assessment and submit reports to the district office. Some reports are submitted to the provincial offices to that we identify the gaps and some are submitted to the head office. If they are of a policy nature they go to head offices so that policies can be made. We have a number of forms (and where listed)

Q Do you have any problems in implementing school assessment policies?
A Yes a number of problems. We start off with school based assessment. Attitudes of the teachers and the heads. They don’t think that pupils should assess them so resistance by the player within the school yet that should be the in thing. Secondly for external inspectors and supervisors our problem is mainly transport to get to Point A Point B. We also don’t have computers to produce reports and provide feedback to schools. At times feedback is received as forms for two terms. Often it has been overtaken by events.

Q Do you think the ZIMSEC examinations have an impact on classroom assessment?

A To a certin extent and to a large extent yes. Because if you look at ZIMSEC most of the papers used to be free response papers which is relatively easy to teach and implement but now ZIMSEC has reverted to the long type of answer type questions and know teachers have not been used to teach that type of response from the pupils and this why the results have gone down because teachers have to adjust their teaching to that level where pupils are able to communicate effectively in answering the questions.

The teachers are trying to do that because workshops have been held through the better schools programme to reskill them in handling such types of questions and assisting the pupils to be able to answer the questions. And some of the problems that we are facing is the language barrier where yes we encourage the use of vernacular languages but the medium of communication is English. Some of the English from the teachers themselves is not up to scratch up to the standard when it comes to Maths some teachers themselves
have a negative attitude in Mathematics. They do not do well in Mathematics, so teaching mathematics to them is just a duty and is not being done properly.

And I have noticed that we lack largely teaching aids where you find the teacher using just the chalk and the board. You can’t develop mathematical concepts properly using only the chalk and the board.

Q  Do you think that teachers teach for examinations?

A  To a very large extent yes because you find that to the subjects that are non-examinable the teachers give a cursory attention to those they attend to the subjects which they know examinations will be examining at the end of the year. So they are teaching for examinations rather than teaching for knowledge’s sake.

Q  How can this be improved upon because children would want to learn from all spheres of the curriculum?

A  Perhaps what I think should happen is we need as a system to move away from depending entirely on examinations but instead have continuous assessment. Which should be taken on board together with examinations to get the final grade.

Q  Do you think the teachers colleges are aware of that continuous aspect?

A  I don’t think they are because there is minimal communications between the ministry and teachers colleges. I think there should be more communication between the two ministries so that when they design their syllabuses they are designed to the level of the user Ministry in terms and purposes because right now we have introduced the child friendly schools. When we brought the teachers colleges aboard they expressing the ahaa type of experience to say
no we must adjust ourselves so that they are in line with new information. It must be done across the board.

Q  Do you think class size has an impact on assessment?
A  To a very large extent because in some areas you find class as large as 84 to me there is no effective teaching and learning, its more like addressing a rally and when you are addressing a rally only a few pupils can pick the concepts as opposed to individual teaching which results in individual attention if the teacher has a large class of 50/60. He/ She has no time to attend to individuals.

Q  Do you think teachers have enough resources to carryout assessment?
A  Resource they don’t. This is one issue where we have problems with internal assessment. We are saying how you produce this large volume of paper if we don’t have the resources. We don’t have the means to do that. That’s why they are resisting doing the actual assessment because they don’t have resources.

Q  Are there any other issues you might want me to know in terms of assessment?
A  Yes there are some other outstanding issues when it comes to subjects like Shona where there are several dialects Zezuru, Karanga, Manyika etc . Then you ask someone who is Zezuru to set a paper fo Shona other dialects are actually disadvantaged because you will have a focus on Zezuru. That disadvantages a lot of children. So the need for standardisation of some sort to see how best we can amalgamate the effects of the various dialects.

And when it comes to th setting of the questions we had a paradigm shift where we specifically ensure that the standard of questions meet a set criteria
in terms of validity, in terms of assessing the various levels of skill so that we
cater for both the affective domain, the cognitive and the psychomotor
domains.

**Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture Officer 4.1.2**

Q: **What is the role of assessment in the education of pupils?**

A: As teachers, we are offering... well it is not a service as such, but remember
we are giving knowledge, skills and values to these children. At the end of it
you need to check; has that knowledge been acquired? Have the pupils
acquired those skills? Do they have those values which we aim to give?
That's why assessment is there.

Q: **What should teachers consider when setting classroom tests?**

A: The guide which teachers should always work with, we have a syllabus. And
every syllabus has assessment objectives. The unfortunate part I think is that
eh, the teachers don't necessarily look at the assessment objectives which
are in the syllabus, so when the teacher is testing, he/she should go back to
the assessment objectives in the syllabus and say, have I achieved what the
syllabus requirements want me to achieve.

Q: **Which domain do teachers concentrate on when setting tests?**

A: Ummm, the teachers naturally concentrate on the cognitive.

Q: **Why?**

A: Because perhaps we have an assertion, the acquiring of knowledge is all that
is required in learning and teaching. The other reason is that the others are a
bit difficult to assess. When you come up with questions now which look at
other domains, it requires a teacher perhaps who is well prepared from
teacher training. And as you have already alluded to that, the impression we have is that the teachers we get have not quite been exposed to the requirements of assessing children. It is a side thing to their training; it is not the main thing when in fact it should be the core. Its peripheral and the teachers are not quite ready. Even in that cognitive, you find that teachers have a tendency of setting questions which require recall; because they are easier for them, and also easier for the children. They don’t want to dwell into questions which require them to look into ‘how do you use this knowledge in your day-to-day life’.

Q: Is it true that when you visit schools, you also concentrate on the cognitive domain?

A: Yes sometimes I think to some extent yes. I wish perhaps I had our pro-formas we use to carry out assessment but those pro-formers I think basically concentrate to a greater extent on the cognitive domain because when we get to a lesson, we want to see them teach and advise whether they are teaching properly or the teaching is not proper. And after doing that we look at their records, their test records, exercises given, individual progress on the cognitive part, that’s what we look at. And then we go away. We produce a report on that. And even our culture as a nation, we are exam oriented, that’s what we look at. And even when a child comes for grade 1, the parent will not look at other aspects. They will simply assess the progress of the pupil say, by asking them to write their name for them or to count up to ten (laughs), because the parent is making an assessment on the impact of education on the child. Everybody has been put into that (cognitive) frame and they cannot move out of it.
Q: Did you manage to look at the syllabus for teacher training, since you agreed that teachers are inadequately prepared for assessment during training?
A: I have not managed to look at it but I am only reflecting back to my experiences as a learner, both at college and at University. I now realise that most of the time was spent on the theory and very little was spent on assessment. It might be a module in the course which one has to go through, but that’s all.

Q: Do you expect teachers to use any sort of statistics when analysing assessment data?
A: Normally (laughs), you should be able to come up with your mean so that you can say these children are above or these children are below. Surely that is simple statistics. A teacher should be able to do that, but teachers avoid anything which has to do with failures, that are one problem.

Q: And who is to blame for this?
A: The people who produce them, the whole system starting with the primary schools and then the secondary schools. Our people are not conscious of the fact that they are collecting and analysing data on a daily basis even in their daily lives but as a teacher that data is very important. When I go to Guinea Fowl to consult the teacher on my child’s progress, the teacher must be able to explain to me how my child is fairing in relation to the other children, in relation to a set standard but the teachers are not able to do that.

Q: What can you say about the general competence of teachers as percentages in terms of assessment?
A: See it is very difficult now you came up with another answer. If I look at it rationally or objectively I’d say, they are just on the average. But if you look at it from the way our learners perform at national examinations, then I would have to qualify that. Because the exams which are set, seem to be giving teachers the impression that they are doing well; because the assessments they do in preparation for the exams, produce the results which we see. You look at schools like Bata and Stanley.. they are always in the 90% range, they are well above average. But when you look at the quality of the product and the other domains, that is when you begin to see that uh uh; this is not a complete child, because the assessments have only been focusing on one domain.

Q: Teachers told me that they teach for exams because of the uproar that will be made by authorities if the school performs badly at provincial regional or national level. How far true is this?

A: Yes, until we get to that extent that we use the daily assessment in order to determine whether one has passed a grade or not, teachers will still teach for exams.. and the exams again, are focused towards this one domain

Q: Is our system interested in formative assessment or summative?

A: They are very few subjects where we have formative assessment. You look at the practicals, because of their nature, somebody is doing home economics and the requirements of the syllabus say this learner must produce a garment to fit. They is no way they can do this if they don’t work on it throughout the course and er you are looking at metal work or wood work where they have to produce an item. Hence, the assessment is continuous in these practical subjects. But in Mathematics, it is just the two papers you are sitting for. What
you have been doing all along is irrelevant. In English it is the composition you wrote on this day, no matter how well you have been writing the compositions in the past, it becomes irrelevant, so this is summative.

**Q:** Since it is said that formative assessment is more useful, are you looking at introducing it in the primary schools?

**A:** Yes er...we have discussed these things...eh, because you see, we need to come up with the change of a mindset. The whole nation, the mindset should change. If we change our mindset to say, ‘now we are doing away with this evaluation, and now we want to look at the formative evaluation where we are moving with the child, then it can work’. If you look at now what is happening at the university, I think they are moving closer to that now, where they are saying coursework I taking care of so much and examinations are taking care of so much. That sort of progress is not there in the school examinations.

**Q:** What is the relationship of your department with ZIMSEC?

**A:** ZIMSEC is a parastatal of the Ministry. It is there to administer the exams and nothing else.

**Q:** Now that we have realised that there are shortcomings with teachers with regards to assessment, do you mount any staff development programmes with regards to assessment and how often?

**A:** Yes, staff development programmes are mounted at school level. You see, I think you remember even during your days that er, we have the appraisal system, where we capture training needs. Then we respond to those training needs, by holding workshops at the school level, at cluster level, at district level, at provincial level and sometimes at national level. Yes workshops are held but the question that is there is the mindset; remember that mindset that
we talked about. Who is facilitating at that workshop, with what mindset? So the facilitator with that mindset is drilling in a certain mindset into the participants of that workshop. And the mindset is that, ‘Examinations are important’.

Q: So what is really the mandate of your department with regards to assessment in the primary schools?

A: Our mandate is to ensure that we have prepared children for the terminal examinations at Grade 7! Yes, at the end of Grade 7, our children must be prepared for examinations because that’s where the whole country will be saying, we want to see how you have been doing. We are judged. We are either doing well or not well, depending on the outcome of the Grade 7 results.

Q: What is the Ministry doing to equip teachers with the relevant assessment skills?

A: I think what the Ministry is doing is encouraging that there be staff development sessions. At school level, there should be staff development programmes at infant level. When you go to assess a school, you always want to know that what their staff development programme is like. Where do they get the topics which they include in their staff development programme. And besides the school, we have now encouraged schools to partner with their neighbours into a cluster and have staff development programs within the cluster so that they can share ideas. And from that level, there is an officer in the ministry who is appointed at district level, to be in charge of training. The person we refer to as the district resource teacher. This person does not do any other thing other than identifying needs and organising workshops.
Q: Some teachers have said that we are sick and tired of staff development workshops; we were thoroughly trained at college. Secondly they say their curriculum is overloaded and hence they are not prepared to take on another load in the form of these workshops. How can we go around such a problem?

A: The only way is to improve the status of the teacher by paying a living salary. Yes we have identified, as is said we have this person who is in charge of training at district level. Yes it only works if this person is prepared to work, and the others are prepared to listen to him; the others are prepared to give him information. If this person is not given information, if he organises a workshop, then people come and sit there and they don’t participate then there is nothing we can do.

Q: Do you have any policies with regards to assessment probably at provincial level?

A: Yes policies are there, you see policies like er, and when a teacher delivers a lesson in Mathematics, that lesson must always end with some written work being done by the children as feedback. At primary school level, the higher grades should write a composition in two languages every week. And in Content there should be written work which is marked by the teacher, two Content exercises every week but that does not look at the quality of the written work given.

Q: It looks at the quantity?

A: Okay well, when you say have you given the composition and I say yes, and I’m satisfied that the children are writing the composition, that’s not adequate. I think we should even go beyond the quantities and look at the quality of work.
given. Does it relate to those assessment objectives that I earlier talked about? If it doesn’t, it might be misplaced again. Those are some of the challenges we get when we get to assessing teachers. You get to assess the teachers and because of the low morale, you find they are there teaching Mathematics in the classroom but there is no written work at the end of the lesson and the compositions you want to be written every week are not written because of the low morale in the teachers.

Q: Are there any other problems you encounter in implementing these policies?

A: Yes I’ve been to some schools where I saw that; it might be interesting; poverty is an issue. I got into a school and had a lesson with teachers and well at the end, children were given written work to do and I went out just to see what the children were doing and I realised some 5-6 children were not writing so I said why? One said, I don’t have an exercise book, another said I am waiting for my mother to sell groundnuts so that she can buy me a book. Then I went back to the teacher and said, are you aware that some children are not writing. How are you getting your feedback? She said I have been trying, I’ve given all paper I have in this classroom, you can check there is no lose paper. I’ve given extra pens to these children to use, i have no more to give, so that is a challenge, poverty is a challenge. In the rural areas especially during the rainy season, parents might decide that it is more sensible to sow something in the field than to go to school. But you know that in some of these subjects, we are building blocks, as soon as you miss a lesson because you are absent, you can never catch up unless the teacher is
able to go back with you to where you were left out, and take you up. If that
does not happen, then it becomes a challenge

Q: **How do public examinations impact the setting of tests in the primary
schools?**

A: Er, there is a grid reference which the syllabus talks about. So the teacher
who is setting the test is making sure that he is setting tests according to that
grid reference. So many questions will test recall, so many will test
knowledge, so many will test application and so on. That’s what they will be
doing. But remember, we are taking it for-granted that all the children who are
in Grade 7 are able to read English or African languages. We take it for
granted, but are you aware that there are some pupils who are non-readers at
Grade 7, so what are we testing then? We are giving them a composition
when we know that they are not able to read.

Q: **According to some teachers, assessments favour the intelligent pupils. Is this true?**

A: To an extent, yes. The person who is able to read, but we also have the
disabled who are not favoured by our assessment at the end of the day. Why?
Remember, we just had a workshop a few months ago on the hearing
impaired. We teach them in sign language, but now when we want an exam,
we want them to write. In sign language they do not write complete sentences
but in the exam we expect them to write complete sentences. All pupils write
the same exam but it is not fair for everybody. And the visually handicapped,
a complicated diagram, which the sighted can be tested on, cannot produce
that diagram in Braille. So not everyone is advantaged, and those pupils are
assessed equally. That’s where formative assessment should come in but it is not available.

Q: **How does class size affect assessment?**

A: A lot of teachers have argued. I have been involved in teacher human policies. And there have been arguments about class size and I will tell you, I was surprised in one meeting that I attended where one professor said; I’m surprised you people are talking about class size. Research has shown that teachers perform best with a very large class. The teacher’s creativity is at its best. As you reduce the numbers, the teacher’s creativity also goes down. That was his opinion.

Q: **But what is your own observation with regard to the situation on the ground?**

A: If we look at our own situation and just pick one school, unfortunately there are very few schools, where the teacher pupil ratio is 1:15, you would want to believe that Midlands Christian should perform far much better than the other schools but it doesn’t. And a school where the ratio is 1:45 can surpass their performance. Class size therefore can be an issue because teachers’ load increases with class size, but the argument which is brought on the other side that a teacher with more pupils can produce better results than a teacher with less is a valid one.

Q: **As a ministry, do you provide schools with resources to carry out assessment effectively like photocopiers, printers e.t.c?**

A: Ah, my sister, there should be a photocopier naturally in this office but there isn’t. The whole complex, we don’t have a photocopier and parents now realise that photocopiers, rhizographs and the like are necessary tools in a
school and they buy those for schools. And the government, with its poverty, is not able to attend to those. You go overseas today and we are talking about everybody is having their laptop but here; you look even at the top most office, that laptop is not there. So when donors come in, yes things improve. For now UNICEF has come in and supplied stationery to all schools; text books for core subjects. But government per se from our budget, there is nothing. We can budget for that, but I wish you could go and research and go into what we have called resettlement schools. You people who are in higher education I think it would be nice if you go to those resettlement schools. It has been 10 years now. Go there and see what we are calling a school, there is nothing.

Q: How many schools do we have in Gweru District?
A: There are 92 primary.

Q: Do you happen to know the number of teachers?
A: In total primary, their teachers should be just over 2000

Q: What about the enrollment?
A: About 13000

Q: Do you have any burning issues on assessment and what do you think can be done to improve assessment in the primary schools?
A: I think as we have discussed, what we have to do is to move away from the exam oriented education system to an education system that looks at perhaps testing all the domains where you are expecting development in the whole individual through formative evaluation. I agree with you, but that requires a complete change of the mindset
Q: ZIMSEC said they recommended the ministry to introduce formative evaluation. Do you take these recommendations/reports and try to implement?

A: Yes, You see it is very difficult to change anything in government you will agree with me. So these reports are written every year. They are looked at by government and government takes time to respond. Because the questions being asked, if you want formative evaluation, what are you really saying? You need to staff develop the teachers such that you build a culture where the teachers will be very professional so that I do not produce marks for a child which are based on nothing. So you need to build capacity in the teachers to be able to handle that. And that’s the starting point; if you want to go anywhere you have to build the capacity first. If you started without capacity in the teachers you will create more problems.

Q: Any other burning issues?

A: We have so many universities in the country; they have to actually make these researches. When it is done, they should be published for discussion. Some people might not agree with what you have come up with but it is important that this research is made available for discussion by the ministry even for implementation. There are a lot of researches which have been made by your learners but nothing is being done about that and a lot of information has been researched about and nothing has been done.
APPENDIX 5:
INTERVIEW AND OBSERVATION PROTOCOL FOR (ZIMSEC) ZIMBABWE SCHOOLS EXAMINATION COUNCIL OFFICERS

Opening Statement
I am a Doctorate learner with the Zimbabwe Open University. I am carrying out a case study research on Assessment Problems in The Primary Schools. The case is Gweru Urban primary schools. The findings will be relevant to college curriculum developers, school staff development programmes, and policy makers and may lead to changes in primary school assessment methods.

I would like to hear your views concerning the topic under study. You are assured that data collected from this research will be treated confidentially and will be solely used for the purposes of the research. Your names will be concealed in the research report. The information you give will not be availed to parents, other teachers, supervisors or any other people. Participation in this research should be purely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time from the research if you feel like doing so.

This interview is going to be recorded using a tape recorder. Once the interviews are completed the findings will be availed to you.

PROBING QUESTIONS
1 Research Question
What sort assessment skills do classroom teachers have to enable them carryout classroom assessment?

Interview questions.
1.1 How do you define assessment?
1.2 What role does assessment play in the education of pupils
1.3 Would you please tell me the roles of ZIMSEC in assessing pupils?
1.4 What do you consider when setting classroom tests?
1.5 Are objectives necessary in setting classroom tests?
1.6 What assessment exposure do you give to teachers in the primary schools?
1.7 Do you think assessment is core to teacher training?
1.8 What assessment techniques do you use for assessing primary schools pupils?
1.9 Do you think teachers have the proper exposure to assessment considering their training and in service training?
1.10 Do you think teachers have the competence to carry out assessment?
1.11 How do you select your test items?
1.12 How do you mark essays
1.13 Which domain of objectives do you concentrate on when assessing pupils?
1.14 What ethical consideration should teachers consider when setting tests?

2 Research Question
How do teachers’ perceptions influence poor assessment procedures?

Interview Questions
2.1 Do you think teachers view assessment as important?
2.2 What sort of assessment do you think is important for the benefit of classroom learning?
2.3 Has the Zimbabwean education system changed its assessment procedures since the colonial era? If yes /no say why this was/was not necessary?
2.4 When is it necessary to carry out assessment?
2.5 Which groups of people are favoured by assessment practices in Zimbabwe?
2.6 Justify your answer.

3 Research Question
How do classroom procedures influence classroom assessment?

Interview Questions
3.1 What policies are in place, in your organization, for performing classroom assessment?
3.2 Are there any problems with regard to implementation of assessment policies in the primary schools? Justify your answer.

3.3 Suggest ways in which you think assessment should be improved in the primary schools?

3.4 How often do you carry out assessment?

3.5 What problems do you meet in carrying out assessment in the primary schools?

4 Research Question
How do public examinations cause poor assessment procedures?

Interview Questions.
4.1 Does ZIMSEC have an influence on assessment in primary schools?
4.2 Do you think teachers teach for examinations? Justify your answer
4.3 How would you define quality assessment?
4.4 How can quality learning be achieved through assessment?
4.5 How does assessment contribute to school effectiveness?
4.6 Do think class size has a bearing on classroom assessment?

5 Research Question
What resources are put in place to support classroom assessment efforts?

Interview Questions
5.1 How does the size of your class affect your classroom assessment procedures?
5.2 How are resources impacting on your classroom assessment procedures?
5.3 Do you think adequate time and finances are allocated for assessment?
5.4 Can you make any other comments with regard to assessment in the primary school?

Thank you very much for participating in this interview. The conversation has been recorded and will be transcribed. Soon after that I will bring back to you the
transcribed schedules for you to confirm whether what was recorded is exactly what you said.
APPENDIX 5.1 ZIMSEC Officer Transcripts

ZIMSEC Officer 5.1.1

Q Would you please tell me the roles of ZIMSEC with reference to assessment in the primary schools?

A ZIMSEC is a parastatal of Government under the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture and its mandate is to assess the performance of candidates at different terminal stages. For the primary school assessment is carried out at Grade 7 and for the secondary school it is at Ordinary Level and Advanced Level. Basically the mandate of ZIMSEC is to assess candidates and determining how much candidates have learnt throughout the period of study. 7 year primary schools and 4 years secondary schools and for 2 years in high school.

Q Do you have an influence on assessment in the primary school?

A Maybe let’s look at assessment in two forms. If you are referring to formative assessment eeh ZIMSEC does not have an input as far as formative assessment of primary is concerned because we believe teachers or schools set their own tests on a weekly basis or fortnightly basis or on monthly basis. Some schools have midterm tests other schools have end of term tests. These are purely school based and they are set and marked at the school. ZIMSEC does not have an influence on that kind of assessment. But when it comes to summative assessment where candidates are expected to be assessed through a public examination, ZIMSEC will set the test for Grade 7, ZIMSEC will organises the marking of those tests at Grade 7 and ZIMSEC will also organises the production of results and issuing of certificates at Grade 7 in form of summative assessments.
ZIMSEC comes only at Grade 7 level. It has nothing to do with the other levels. At Grade 7 ZIMSEC is only interested in summative assessment.

Q  Do you think it’s fair for teachers to follow the ZIMSEC style even if they are doing formative assessment?

A  I don’t know what they mean if they say that they follow ZIMSEC style.

Q  Meaning that they do summative assessment even during the term because they say the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture comes to school to see if they have recorded marks for end of week and end of term and I want to consider that all these are summative.

A  I think it will depend on how these marks will be used. Let us take for example during the first term of a particular year be it at Grade 1 right through to Grade 7, if a school decides to give weekly tests and those weekly tests are then used to compute the end of term mark then we can consider that as formative assessment but if these weekly tests are not used to compute the end of term mark then that becomes summative.

Q  According to you, what do you consider when setting tests?

A  At primary school we are given a syllabus by the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture and in the syllabus you have your aims and the test blueprint. The test blueprint includes the marking scheme that particular syllabus where we are saying at grade 7 for all our 4 subjects that are examined at Grade 7 each syllabus provides for the assessment of candidates in two papers. Paper 1 is the multiple choice paper and paper two is the structured paper. ZIMSEC will follow the syllabus and set tests following that test blueprint. We will produce question papers for multiple choice and a question paper for the structured tests.
Q Which domain of objectives does ZIMSEC concentrate on?

A ZIMSEC will cover all the three domains. In what ways? We have our examinations are based on the content in the syllabus and Grade 7 we are saying there are only 4 subjects that are examined and these will include English Language, Shona, General Paper and Mathematics. Right, so there are other subjects which are not in this mainstream area, where we are considering subjects like physical education, art, music you have technical subjects like woodwork, metalwork, technical graphics, building.

We have primary schools that are teaching these subjects but these subjects are not examined by ZIMSEC at Grade 7. Right, in terms of the domain of learning. If we are to structure or compartmentalise these subjects and say Art, Music and Metalwork these wild test the psychomotor domain. They say Maths, Eng, Shona and General Paper will test the other domain. Eeh I think from a psychological point of view that is not correct. Because we are saying even if we are dealing with Mathematics as a discipline we can test all these domains in Mathematics, we can do the same in English Language and all the other subjects, the opposite will be true when we test music, we can assess the cognitive domain in music the same as we can assess the psychomotor domain in English.

I think it is proper to say ZIMSEC does not assess candidates at Grade 7 in specific subjects but does the assessment of candidates at Grade 7 in specific subjects but other subjects.

Q Do you think that teachers have the proper exposure to assessment?

A At the moment I will say the bulk of our teachers were not trained in assessment theory either at pre-training or during training because when you
look at the course outline at most of our primary school colleges the assessment component is not emphasised. It may be true to say most of the teachers who are coming out of our primary teacher training college are not strong in assessment theory because they are not exposed to that element.

Q  **Do you offer any staff development programmes with regards to assessment?**

A  At ZIMSEC we don’t have a deliberate thrust to train teachers in assessment but what we do is our training is demand driven.

Q  **Do you offer any staff development courses to teachers just to help them gain the competence in assessment?**

A  At ZIMSEC we don’t have a deliberate thrust to train teachers in assessment but what we do is our training is demand driven. If an institution or an organisation approaches ZIMSEC on NGOs to say can you train these teachers in assessment we will do that. We have done that they are organisations that have approached us and through our research division at head office we managed to train teachers in assessment.

Q  **So you don’t initiate the training?**

A  Yes we don’t because mandates as indicated, we are an urgent of the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture who are given candidates by the ministry to assess. When we do our assessment we give our results back to the ministry of education. So the onus is on the ministry to say fine these are the weaknesses which we are identifying, can you tailor make a programme to address the weaknesses but we have also contributed to the training of readers in assessment in as much as we use these teachers to set the tests which we give to the Grade 7 candidates as public examinations,
because when we are developing the question paper we first of all call for test items from practising teachers, know these practicing teachers are not merely picked arbitrary. We select them and we train them in item writing then they become our database for the provision of items to include in our test.

So throughout the country we have individual teachers whom we have trained as item writers. And these are the people whom we use from year to year when we are developing our database.

Q  Do you also consider the rural teacher when you are inviting teachers for training?

A  Definitely. Because from the syllabus you will notice that our questions should cover the vast backgrounds of candidates that we have, candidates who come from a rural setting farming setting and urban setting and we try to include all these.

Q  Ok, do you think when you set examinations, your papers favour a certain group of people?

A  The papers do not favour any group of people because when we set a draft question paper, in fact when we invite item writers to give us items. After we have received those items from the item setters there is someone at ZIMSEC Head Office who is assigned to a specific subject. That individual will check the items and produce a question paper depending on the structure of the paper, that person will select questions to put in section A, B and C.

When the exercise is complete the draft question paper is taken for pre-test. And our pre-test target candidates from different backgrounds ie rural school and urban school, a farming school. It is also pretested in a private school and in a mission school. So we are saying we are looking at all the different types
of schools that we have and we subject our instrument to those candidates to see how the instrument performs.

When we get the results we will then be able to see if there are forty items in that question paper, we will assess and analyse each item on how it has performed in the different settings that we have pretested it. Some test items prove very difficult for almost all the pupils, some will prove very simple for almost all pupils. Some will prove very simple for almost all pupils and those are the items which we remove from the test because they don’t discriminate. So definitely at Grade 7 all examinations are pretested before they are given out.

Q  What sort of assessment do you think benefits classroom assessment, formative or summative?

A  Eeh I will look at that question mainly from two different angles. Current research has shown that formative assessment will benefit the candidate more than summative, and I think the reasons are varied and they tend to be convincing because summative assessment will allow the teacher to supervise the candidate and assess how the candidate is progressing maybe on a daily basis or on a weekly basis and the teacher is able to intervene and assist the candidate following the results that the teacher will get from the candidates.

The teacher will benefit and the candidates will also benefit. Then we also find that formative assessment allows the candidate to work in a relaxed atmosphere because they are not assessed over a very short period but they
are assessed over a long period and sometimes they are able to get assistance from their colleagues which is not found in a normal examination.

Q  Are there any intentions from ZIMSEC to introduce formative assessment in the primary schools?
A  Definitely there are because what ZIMSEC has done at the present moment is to introduce formative assessment at Ordinary Level and A Level. Although this formative assessment is not done throughout the whole syllabus, it is done to one or two papers in the syllabus. You may have a subject assessed in three papers one of the subjects is assessed formatively then the other two are assessed through summative assessment. But it is the thrust of ZIMSEC to provide the same in the primary schools.

Q  What is ZIMSEC intending to do to equip colleges and teachers with the skills to do formative assessment?
A  Unfortunately the staff development of teachers is not under ZIMSEC but what ZIMSEC has done is to give research data to the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture to say these are the advantages of formative assessment and these are the advantages of summative assessment. ZIMSEC has recommended that we move over from summative assessment to formative assessment and ZIMSEC has also recommended before we can move over to formative assessment what is critical is for teacher development and that has to be done by the Ministry.

Q  Do you want me to believe that the Ministry is aware of the shortcomings of summative assessment when you consider the
recommendations which you made to the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture?

A It’s a debate that has been ongoing and I think that it’s not only the Ministry even the parents also need to be aware because sometimes it is difficult to sell an idea to a group of people. We are saying before ZIMSEC or the Ministry can recommend that we move over formative assessment all the stakeholders must buy into the idea. Because sometimes the parents will say that they themselves are not a product of summative assessment and they may think they may have their own ideas should be done. Parents must understand why you are moving over to formative assessment. Teachers colleges, universities should also understand why we are moving over to formative assessment. Even the employer would want to know the prospective employee whom she/ he is receiving is coming from a background they have known all along. Some of them may think the caliber of candidates we are producing through formative assessment may not be the same as the one we have produced under summative assessment. So I was saying that it is critical that all stakeholders buy into the idea.

Q Do you think class size affects assessment in the primary school because most of the classes range from 40-50?

A Yes it does in the sense that if class sizes are smaller the teacher is able to offer individual assistance to the candidates and prepare them better for the examinations as compared to a very large class where most candidates are not able to get access to the individual and really in terms of preparation for the examination smaller classes are an advantage.

Q What ratio would you recommend?
Q  Do you think resources are negatively impacting on assessment in the primary schools?

A  Yes. One there is no reading materials and candidates will not…

   Physical infrastructure in some schools. Some pupils are learning under very difficult conditions, some children have no chairs, desks, some of them are writing on their laps that will invariably impact negatively on preparation of candidates for examinations.

Q  Do you have any other comments to make with regards to assessment in the primary school?

A  I think basically it is the area of manpower where we are saying our teachers do not have information because if they had information on assessment they would definitely be able to prepare their candidates better for public examinations. They will also be able to prepare their own authentic tests in a manner that is different from what they are doing now. I will give you an example of a situation where if you ask an ordinary teacher at the moment to give you the different parts of a test item they may not be able to tell you what a stern is response is. They will not be able to tell you how a test item discriminates between a slow candidate and an intelligent candidate and yet we are saying that basic information that a teacher should have before they sit down to start drawing up a test some of them might not even know the different types of tests if you ask them to differentiate between a structured test, a multiple choice test, and an essay type test, they may not really be able to give you such type of information.
So we are saying that it is critical that these people are trained not only at colleges but even after, during teaching they need to be staff developed because assessment is changing its fluid discipline. You might find that what someone is hanging onto for a long time is not relevant in any way.

I also think the other area that need to be addressed is the availability of resources because if you look at the average national pass rate at Grade 7 even at O’ Level or A ‘Level, the bulk of our candidates even before they start writing. If we say at any one point you get only about 13 to14% passing Grade 7 or 14% passing O’Level then what happens to the rest? It simply means that they are not prepared therefore we need to move over from summative assessment to formative assessment because research has proved that formative assessment has the effect of improving the pass rate. It also improves the quality of grades. Because it’s a different situation where we are saying we have assessed a candidate over a two year period as compared to a candidate that we have given a test paper to sit for one and a half hours. So in terms of psychological preparation they do prepare in formative assessment as compared to how they will perform over a 1 hour paper.

Q What would you say is a quality assessment?

A Quality assessment… Quality assessment well has various variables that we have to look at. One of them is that the assessment instrument must be accurate. In other words if you give a candidate a test paper, that test paper should be able to assess what the candidate has learnt. In other words we don’t want question papers that are not in the syllabus. That’s very important because we don’t want you to ambush the candidate. You have given the candidate a syllabus which indicates the content that you expect to go through
so we expect the test paper to reflect the content which is in syllabus. We don’t want something imported out of the syllabus.

Secondly we want the test items in terms of difficulty to be within the capability of what we will call well prepared candidates. We don’t want questions that are too difficult; we don’t want questions that are too simple. Then the marking scheme that you are going to use to assess what the candidate has given should cover all possible responses to the questions that are given. Sometimes you will discover that the marking scheme wants a specific answer and yet there are several answers that can be given to the same question. So want the marking scheme to be able to capture those various answers.

Then in terms of the candidate itself quality assessment will demand that the candidate is well prepared. I will take you back to the last two to three years where due to the difficulties that we were having as a nation candidates sometimes did not go to school. There were no teachers in the school. Even if the teachers were there there were no resources. So in terms of assessment we are saying unfortunately ZIMSEC will not alter the standard of a question paper from one year to the next. For the simple reason that we want to maintain the same standard across the different candidates that we have. If we give a candidate an A this year in Maths at O’Level and we have another candidate getting an A last year in the same level, those two as should be comparable. In terms of the grade cut off point. If the Grade cut off point is 70% we will not change it to 60% this year because those candidates did not go to school.

Q: So your grading is norm referenced?
A Yes its norm referenced. So we want candidates to be well prepared to be able to say our assessment is of high quality.
APPENDIX 6:
INTERVIEW AND OBSERVATION PROTOCOL FOR COLLEGE LECTURERS

Opening Statement
I am a Doctorate learner with the Zimbabwe Open University. I am carrying out a case study research on Assessment Problems in The Primary Schools. The case is Gweru Urban primary schools. The findings will be relevant to college curriculum developers, school staff development programmes, and policy makers and may lead to changes in primary school assessment methods.

I would like to hear your views concerning the topic under study. You are assured that data collected from this research will be treated confidentially and will be solely used for the purposes of the research. Your names will be concealed in the research report. Information you give will not be availed to parents, other teachers, supervisors or any other people with names. Participation in this research should be purely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research if you feel like doing so.

This interview is going to take 30 minutes and will be recorded using a tape recorder. Once the interviews are completed the findings will be availed to you.

PROBING QUESTIONS

1 Research Question
What sort assessment skills do classroom teachers have to enable them carryout classroom assessment?

Interview questions
1.1 How do you define assessment?
1.2 What is the role of assessment play in the education of pupils?
1.3 What should teachers consider when setting classroom tests?
1.4 Are objectives necessary in setting classroom tests?
1.5 What exposure on assessment do teachers’ colleges offer to teachers?
1.6 Do you think assessment is core to teacher training?
1.7 What assessment techniques should teachers use?
1.8 How much time is allocated on teaching teachers about assessment?
1.9 Do you think teachers have the competence to carry out assessment?
1.10 What statistics do you expose learners to for analyzing assessment data?
1.11 How are test items selected by teachers?
1.12 How do teachers mark essays?
1.13 Which domain of objectives do teachers concentrate on when assessing pupils?
1.14 Do you think teachers and ZIMSEC are right to say teachers colleges did not give teachers adequate skills?
1.15 Do you think you have the competence to equip learners with assessment skills?

2 Research Question

*How do teachers’ perceptions influence poor assessment procedures?*

**Interview Questions**

2.1 What is the importance of assessment?
2.2 What sort of assessment do you think is important for the benefit of classroom learning?
2.3 When is it necessary to carry out assessment?
2.4 Which group of people do you think is favoured by assessment practices in Zimbabwe? Justify your answer.

3 Research Question

*How do classroom procedures influence classroom assessment?*

**Interview Question**

3.1 How often do teachers carry out assessment? Is that the requirement of policy?
3.2 What problems do teachers encounter in carrying out assessment?
3.3 Suggest ways in which you think assessment should be done in schools.
4 Research Question

How do public examinations cause poor assessment procedures?

Interview Questions.

4.1 How do examinations impact on the setting of tests?
4.2 Do you think teachers teach for examinations? Justify your answer.
4.3 How would you define quality assessment?
4.4 How can quality assessments be achieved?
4.5 How does assessment contribute to school effectiveness?
4.6 Why do you think some teachers copy test items from past examination papers?

5 Research Question

What resources are put in place to support classroom assessment efforts?

Interview Questions

5.1 How does the size of your class affect your classroom assessment procedures?
5.2 What resources do teachers need for assessment?
5.3 How are resources impacting on your classroom assessment procedures?
5.4 Do you think adequate time and finances are allocated to assessment in the primary schools?
5.5 Do you have any burning issues questions with regards to our discussion?

Thank you very much for participating in this interview. The conversation has been recorded and will be transcribed. Soon after that I will bring back to you the transcribed schedules for you to confirm whether what was recorded is exactly what you said.
APPENDIX 6.1 College lecturers’ transcripts

Head of Professional Studies 6.1.1

Q How far do you cater for assessment in the teacher’s college?

A Well I am convinced although I have no basis as far as other colleges are concerned but I am convinced that colleges do take a cursory approach to assessment in the training of teachers and em since I have been in this college, I don’t remember a lecturer programme that had assessment as a topic. I don’t remember. We tend to assume that these learner teachers know how to assess as just marking. So we debated this in professional studies 2008 I think. And in our review of the professional studies A we included assessment as a serious topic.

What made me want it to be reviewed is that I realised some exercises from one school. I noticed the way they were marked, I was impressed. Then I went no to find out from the teacher why he marked that way and he told me that he is a Grade 7 examiner and thus how they mark ZIMSEC examination. Then I asked him whether that kind of marking was applied right from Grade 1 so that these learners know what is expected from them right from the word go. And he wasn’t sure so when I came here as HOD then we started talking about it often we included assessment, because assessment is more than just marking.

With our present intake which started the course this year 2011, thus the group that is going to learn assessment as a topic. Otherwise we didn’t offer that. We talked about summative assessment and formative assessment but
that was theoretical, simply giving them theories. Eeh my vision is a situation whereby the learner teacher gives pupils written work and after written work has been given it should be marked and when it has been marked that learner should be assessed on the marking he/she has done. They should be assessed on the kind of marking they have done. How are they marking, is the marking instructive. It is helping the learner to learn, because if we talk of assessment in terms of summative assessment.

We sort of ignore the factors that will build up to what we will find in summative assessment. Formative assessment is not necessarily written work. It involves looking at pupils and redirecting teaching. This is the kind of theory we are talking about. I want to say assessment is cursory.

Q: Do you think ZIMSEC and teachers are right to say colleges did not give teachers the requisite assessment skills. True. “Why?”

A: Well, personally I think there is an over-emphasis on education foundations in teacher education. I will say in as far as teacher education is concerned prominence is given to theory of education. If it’s taken very seriously and then we have professional studies or applied education running parallel to theory of education. If it’s taken very seriously and then we have professional studies or applied education running parallel to theory of education. Yet in my opinion the major thing should be applied education. And the theory should be infused in the applied education. What is the purpose of theory that has no application? Tradition is difficult to do away with. That’s where our problem is. We are training teachers the way we were trained. And then those teachers go and teach the way they were taught thus perpetuating that vicious circle.
We need to think outside the box and say this is what we used to do, this is what we were trained is thus best.

When I trained as a Cambridge examiner, I learnt assessment that I was taught in colleges. That's where I learnt assessment, which I had not learnt anywhere but when I come back here at college to say right this is what I know about assessment, but do these know it. And when we discuss in general.

In the record books, learners are not taught to interpret what they see to say ok so agrees is like this. They are not taught and it is there to be given to the headmaster when he asks for.

Q Teachers say we learn assessment when we go for teaching practice do you think they benefit much from the mentors?

A I don’t think so, we tend to want to believe so much that our learners benefit from the mentor. What is it that the learner is learning from the mentor? Because we don’t know this mentor and we don’t know what the mentor knows. We have done no orientation with the mentor and even if we did, is the learner not being taught shortcuts, is the learner not learning how to cheat. I as you have just said they cook marks. Is the learner not learning how to cook marks from the mentor? Because we have not taught the learner we will have created the vacuum will be filled in by the mentor.

Q What statistics are learners exposed to in analysing assessment data?

A They are not exposed to any statistics for assessment purposes. Even when it comes to item writing. Yes we can talk about item writing, we talk about
grading the items we talk about but it is theoretical and where they talk of questions begin with the simplest to the complex but its theoretical. The college does not look at the structure of test items.

Q  Do you ever talk of the domains of learning in terms of assessment?
A  Theoretically yes we talk about Blooms of educational objectives theoretical. We do not come down to say in this domain how do you assess we don’t get to that. However, we concentrate on the cognitive and even within the cognitive we concentrate on the first two levels which are knowledge and comprehension to show.

Q  Whose fault?
A  The learner doesn’t know how to assess, analyse and apply.

Q  Do you think the lecturers you have are competent enough to teach assessment to the learner
A  I don’t think so.

Q  Why do you say so?
A  Look when we advertise for teachers we want somebody who at least has a first degree and a minimum of three years teaching experience. If this person has a first degree where assessment was not dealt with and has a minimum three years teaching experience. If this person has a first degree where assessment was not dealt with and has a minimum three years teaching experience where he was teaching the way he was taught and assessing the way he was assessed then we are obviously looking at a person who hasn’t really gone into assessment.

I told you that I learnt assessment when I became an examiner when I was trained as an examiner thus when I learnt assessment. What about all these
people we have here who have never been examiners where could they have learnt assessment? Another problem we have is that some of these lecturers are secondary trained. All they know about primary education is what they went through as pupils, they have never taught in primary school.

I know there used to be a system which has long gone extinct where a newly appointed lecturer who has never taught in a primary school would go to St Pauls and teach for two weeks, planning lessons and teaching before teaching learners so that they get a feel of it and learn from a mentor and come back here and start teaching learners. These days they no longer do it. They come straight from Ascot High and staff start teaching.

We have had workshops in this college on other areas, but I feel that workshops are not the best but to discuss these issues in small groups and talk about assessment. Because in a workshop people will be closing off.

**Q** Why do they close off? How often do you have these staff developments?

**A** We have at least two workshops every term but we have not yet had anything on assessment but our experience as I will tell you is that even if we hold a workshop we find that the traditional practice continues. People don’t want to change. So you begin to say that it is really worthy having a workshop. It is not better to talk about these things in small groups. So that we understand each other at that level.

**Q** Do you have a timetable of syllabus to show how far you go with assessment?
A Yes. The old and the new. In the old there is nothing like what we are talking about.

Q What are your comments with regards our discussion?
A Perhaps assessment is a mammoth task to bring in assessment in all primary schools is really difficult. It won’t be easy it won’t take time. And the situation, the economic situation with regards to teacher’s remuneration won’t help the situation. They are not motivated. You might want them to change?

Teachers college Focus Group 6.1.2

Q How would you define the term assessment?
A Assessment entails a process of getting the performance of the learners through formative and summative tests. It is a means of checking children’s progress. Assessment is a process of gathering information and making decisions about the information you have gained.

Q Why do you do assessment?
A To map the way forward. To check our own progress as teachers and to check the progress of pupils so that we can employ remediation if necessary.

Q Do you think the teachers you produce have the competence to carry out assessment?
A Oh yes, they are satisfactorily competent I can say given the scenario of lack of certain resources. Eh which we would want to use during their training and subsequently shortage of resources when they are in the schools which they would also want to use to teach the learner. Given that scenario we would want to say that, their assessment although they would need it to be excellent
and outstanding as much as possible that would not be realised in the sense that materials are in short supply.

Q  Do you think that assessment is core to the training of teachers?
A  (Silence) Attempts are being made to bring in every possible tool and produce a competent teacher but I would want to say that we teach them assessment we are trying to ascertain certain skills so that when we go out there they encalcate the same skills in the learners but in so as wether we give the necessary tools that we revert back to the earlier question that materials are in short supply but the skills are there to be imparted and developed.

Q  What sort of assessment techniques do you equip teachers with?
A  Teachers can use daily exercises, they can use tests, informal ways especially in reading.

Q  Do you actually teach them how to do that?
A  Yah at times we teach them the questioning techniques so that they get what they want. They can ask high order questions and low order questions so that at times the way you ask can mislead you.

Q  Do you teach teachers on how to assess all the domains of learning, the cognitive, the psychomotor and affective domains.
A  Yeah, well I personally feel that all the domains are taught in one way or the other. You know we have in theory of education they hammer on that although it is too theoretical. But we believe in transfer of knowledge. If they learn that in theory of education that should be translated into action when they go to the professional studies. Methodology part, I would want to believe that all the domains are taught.
Q  Why is it not taught?
A  In fact in terms of application, they are being taught when we say look at the questions, look at the cognitive levels of the learners, consider the maturation of the learners and arrange the questions in such a manner that at the end of the day each learner is able to see, so we actually teach them item writing in a way but know the bottom line is a situation where they are saying we have never been taught how to set a test so to speak.

But otherwise generally speaking in terms of how to set questions they are taught but then a test is a duplication of these things but they don’t sit to say this is a test, but the same principles apply.

All the skills of questioning are taught to the extent that they should not face any problems. All the taxonomies are also taught to the extent that they should not face any problems in so far as item writing is concerned.

Q  To what extent do you expose learners to the statistics so that they are able to analyse assessment data?
A  *Laughter* The problem is the nature of the programme, there isn’t much time of go into all the details. So I think basically they just get the basics. Even when it comes to marrying the theory and the practice there is not much time for that, the programme is congested. Because you are supposed to give them the theory before they go into the field for teaching practice and they now have to spend more time in the field so it is very difficult to get into details of all those statistics. While it will be ideal but there is just no time for that.
The only moment I would say they will have a sort of eeh glean into that is when they gather information, is that they do their curriculum depth study and they gather information here and there pertaining pupils performance, they have their schedules and then you would ask them to analyse the data thus the only stage where they can be exposed to statistics.

Q Do you think the mentors are effective assessors of pupils?
A -e-e It’s a mixed bag. Some are effective and others have problems also. Perhaps in addition that kind of scenario might also require staff development of the mentors so that they can keep abreast of current trends in assessment. Some of the mentors are temporary teachers who also need help from the learners in so far as teaching is concerned.

Q Why do you think when teachers in the field concentrate on summative assessment.
A I disagree with you that they concentrate on summative assessment. They do both because generally every day teachers give exercises but basically they are concentrating on examinable subjects leaving out practical subjects but in terms of English, Shona Mathematics, and Content, they give daily exercises because in performance management they have a standard to say in each pupils exercise book there should be so many exercises so they are eventually giving them. Now summative comes as weekly tests, mid term tests and end of year tests so there is a mixture of both formative and summative and yet at the same time the teacher himself as he/she gets into the classroom is continuously asssssing pupils. Assessment is an ongoing process.
Q  Besides daily exercises, what other forms of assessment do you give to pupils?

A  Informal assessments. The teacher just observes as pupils are carrying out various activities. And during practical subjects such as PE and Music we always carry out formative assessment.

Q  What sort of assessments do you think are important for the benefit of classroom practice?

A  In ECD the most important form of assessment is authentic assessment where the teacher carries out on the spot just as it happens and the teacher is there to observe and assess the children here and there.

Yah I would say both summative and formative are vital but, summative assessment eventually builds the learner into a competent test taker. If formative assessment is done well, the end result is the summative assessment would just be a walk over but if formative assessment is not done properly, then the learner will face problems in the end.

If you look at this problem with ZIMSEC the way it assesses learners is more of summative. That’s why you think teachers in the schools are running away from teaching pupils, they are now teaching pupils to pass. As a result you see that we teach pupils here, we impart them with skills on how to do this and that but when they go into the field they are forced to leave what we taught then and what those old horses in schools are doing for the sake of achieving results.

The unfortunate part of it is that those who are setting exams in ZIMSEC are not in line with what we are doing. They set the examinations using their own
criteria ZIMSEC and for Ministry are not working together with teachers colleges. Each system does its own thing.

Q Do you think resources are impacting negatively on assessment procedures in the schools?

A Very much in the sense that the teachers might not find themselves acting as effectively as they should. We are thinking of materials like readers, textbooks, and other media to use during teaching. If those are not available the teacher will only try to improvise and to give imaginative work, in the end that type of learning will not be of any use to the learner and subsequently the product produced will not be of any use.

Time factor, the timetables are congested in the schools to the extent that teachers may not give adequate exercises and activities, so assessment may be negatively affected. There isn’t much time to marry the theory and the practice such that you might find that others still have difficulties in assessment. Shortage of resources. The other thing is morale is just low because of remuneration.

A problem of trying to match what they get here at the college with the demands of ZIMSEC and concentrate on examinable subjects. And yet when they are here we try to teach them to take care of all the subjects.

Assessments should be made care of by the training of teachers. ZIMSEC, Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture and Teacher’s Colleges need to work together in the production of a college syllabus on assessment.
Private colleges produce good results not because they teach but it's just drilling.

A system of the result based management is a problem. How can we have results without a process, you are worried about what I have but you are not worried about how I got it.

ZIMSEC is not worried about equity issues all schools are put on the secure graph and they are compared and this does not make sense.

Q  Do you think your syllabus is adequate in terms of equipping teachers with assessment skills?
A  I think it is very adequate because we keep on reviewing in line with current trends. It is adequate but the problem is implementing it given the time we have. At the end of the day you have to look at how best you can deal with the situation. If you can take A and leave B and go to D trying to cover up because there is no time.

Q  How long do you think the teachers stay in college?
A  We teach them for 2 terms then they go for teaching practice for 5 terms then they come back for two terms.

Q  Why did you come with such a programme?
A  This is a government policy. The programme is dictated to us by the powers that be. We have made noise about it but the answer is always that its policy and it won’t change. We have highlighted the difficulties. You have a learner and you just give the learner information for two terms then you say five terms
go to the field and when they come back they will be preparing to write examinations.

We have complained about the programme but all they are saying is that you change you approach to teaching and produce modules and other materials which they can use when they are on teaching practice to cover for the gaps and we are still battling to have that in place.
## APPENDIX 7:

### PERSONAL DETAILS OF TEACHERS

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APPENDIX 8:

CHECKLIST FOR SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE

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APPENDIX 9:

PERSONAL DETAILS FOR HEAD TEACHERS

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APPENDIX 10:

PERSONAL DETAILS FOR ZIMSEC OFFICERS

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**APPENDIX 11:**

**PERSONAL DETAILS FOR MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SPORT, ARTS AND CULTURE OFFICERS**

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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of years with Ministry</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of years at present post</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX 12:

### PERSONAL DETAILS FOR COLLEGE LECTURERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Academic Qualifications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Professional Qualifications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of years as a lecturer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of years at present college</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 13:

PRIMARY SCHOOL STANDARD SCHOOL POLICY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>NUMBER OF EXERCISES</th>
<th>AMOUNT OF WORK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LANGUAGES</td>
<td>3 or 4 exercises a week</td>
<td>10 or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 revision fortnightly</td>
<td>15 or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 composition weekly</td>
<td>¾ to a full page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATHS</td>
<td>5 daily exercises</td>
<td>10 or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Maths mental a week</td>
<td>15/20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 revision fortnightly</td>
<td>15 or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENV. SCIENCE</td>
<td>1 exercise a week + tables, maps, graphs</td>
<td>10 or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL STUDIES</td>
<td>1 exercise a week + tables, maps, graphs</td>
<td>10 or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R.M.E.</td>
<td>1 exercise a week</td>
<td>10 or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HE &amp; MUSIC AIDS</td>
<td>According to teacher’s needs and requirements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TIMETABLE (BASIC)

- 7.20 a.m. Assembly Monday & Friday
- 2pm – 3pm Study
- 3pm – 4pm Afternoon activity
- 4pm Dismissal time
- 7.15 a.m. Mass on Fridays: fortnightly
APPENDIX 14:

PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH FROM THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SPORT, ARTS AND CULTURE
APPENDIX 15:
PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH FROM ZIMSEC.
APPENDIX 16:
PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH FROM THE SECRETARY FOR HIGHER AND TERTIARY EDUCATION.
APPENDIX I7:
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SPORT, ARTS AND CULTURE
NARRATIVE REPORT ON A TEACHER.
APPENDIX 18:

BOOK INSPECTION REPORT
APPENDIX 19

PROFESSIONAL STUDIES SYLLABUS