CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENTS AT THE TECHNICAL EDUCATION VOCATIONAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP TRAINING AUTHORITY IN ZAMBIA.

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1.0 BACKGROUND OF RPL IN ZAMBIA

❑1969: The Statement of Intent on Technical Education and Vocational Training (TEVT)- the first post independence policy on TEVT was issued.

❑1996: Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training (TEVET) Policy– second edition.

❑1997: In the 1997 Strategy Paper on Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training, Government of the Republic of Zambia adopted a TEVET Learner Progression path model.

❑ 1998: Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Act, No.13 of 1998– established TEVETA.

BACKGROUND OF RPL IN ZAMBIA CONT….

❑2005: Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training (Amendment) Act No. 11 of 2005 more functions to TEVETA, establishment of TEVET Fund through Skills Levy.

❑ 2011: Zambia Qualifications Authority Act No. 13 of 2011– Establishment of ZAQA with mandate to develop national policy on RPL

❑2020: National Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Policy– RPL comes out strongly

2.0 INTRODUCTION

❑ The implementing agency of RPL (informal and non-formal learning) is the Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Authority (TEVETA).

❑ It Sets guidelines and standards for RPL in the TEVET sub sector.

❑ • Accredits RPL centers and assessors. Currently there are only six accredited RPL centres in Zambia

❑ • Awards recognition certificates at appropriate qualification levels to successful candidates.

INTRODUCTION CONT…..

❑ Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) at the Technical, Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Authority (TEVETA) in Zambia has been applied at trade test level despite having a framework even at higher levels.

❑ Tevet policy aims at creating a system that recognizes learning that takes place in non-formal and informal sectors.

❑ The current system of RPL at TEVETA is under-utilized.

❑ Most people who possess these skills are not certified and hence not recognized

INTRODUCTION CONT…….

❑ . There is need to reinforce the RPL system to ensure smooth implementation of recognition of prior learning (RPL) processes in Zambia.

❑ RPL addresses issues of lifelong learning, access, and social justice.

❑ The period under review is from 2021 to 2024 respectively. The total number of in enrolments in different skill areas is 2,150 todate.

3.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

❑ Despite Zambia having interventions that promote the implementation of RPL assessment system, there are still challenges to successful implementation.

❑ This paper has been produced, with the aim of addressing such challenges and possible opportunities to establish an effective, RPL assessment system in Zambia

4.0 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

❑ To evaluate the entire RPL assessment process used in Zambia

❑ To establish methods of RPL assessments used in Zambia.

❑ To determine the possible challenges experienced during the RPL assessments.

❑ To determine the possible opportunities available in implementing RPL assessment

5.0 METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research design:

❑ A qualitative approach with the use of phenomenological design was employed in the study.

❑ The researcher came to understand participants' feelings, beliefs and views.

❑ The researcher was able to perceive the stated RPL assessment notion in TEVET institutions

5.2 Population and sampling:

❑ This study used the purposive sampling method to select respondents from the population of 1,500.

❑ The sample consisted of 2 TEVETA employees, 2 Heads of the assessment centers, 3 assessors and 8 graduates from different skill areas.

❑ Purposive strategy was significant to select informants who were perceived to possess vital information on rpl to answer the research questions.

5.3 Data collection and analysis

❑ Data collection was undertaken using self-administered structured interview guides.

❑ The data collection process was first done by seeking consent from the 15 respondents,

❑ Qualitative data analysis was undertaken using nvivo software.

❑ Since interview questions were recorded, data were transcribed into text, thematic analysis became relevant to analyse the data.

❑ The thematic analysis resulted in the identification of themes .

❑ The researcher identified patterns by noticing similarities, differences, frequency and context, creating notes and identifying words and phrases in the content to form the basis of initial inductive coding.

❑ The observations were then documented in a shared file and ongoing discussions throughout this process allowed the researcher to share, challenge and calibrate interpretations.

6.1. Evaluate the entire RPL assessment process used in Zambia

6.1.1. NVivo Codes   Responses on Evaluation RPL Assessments cont.. Processes.

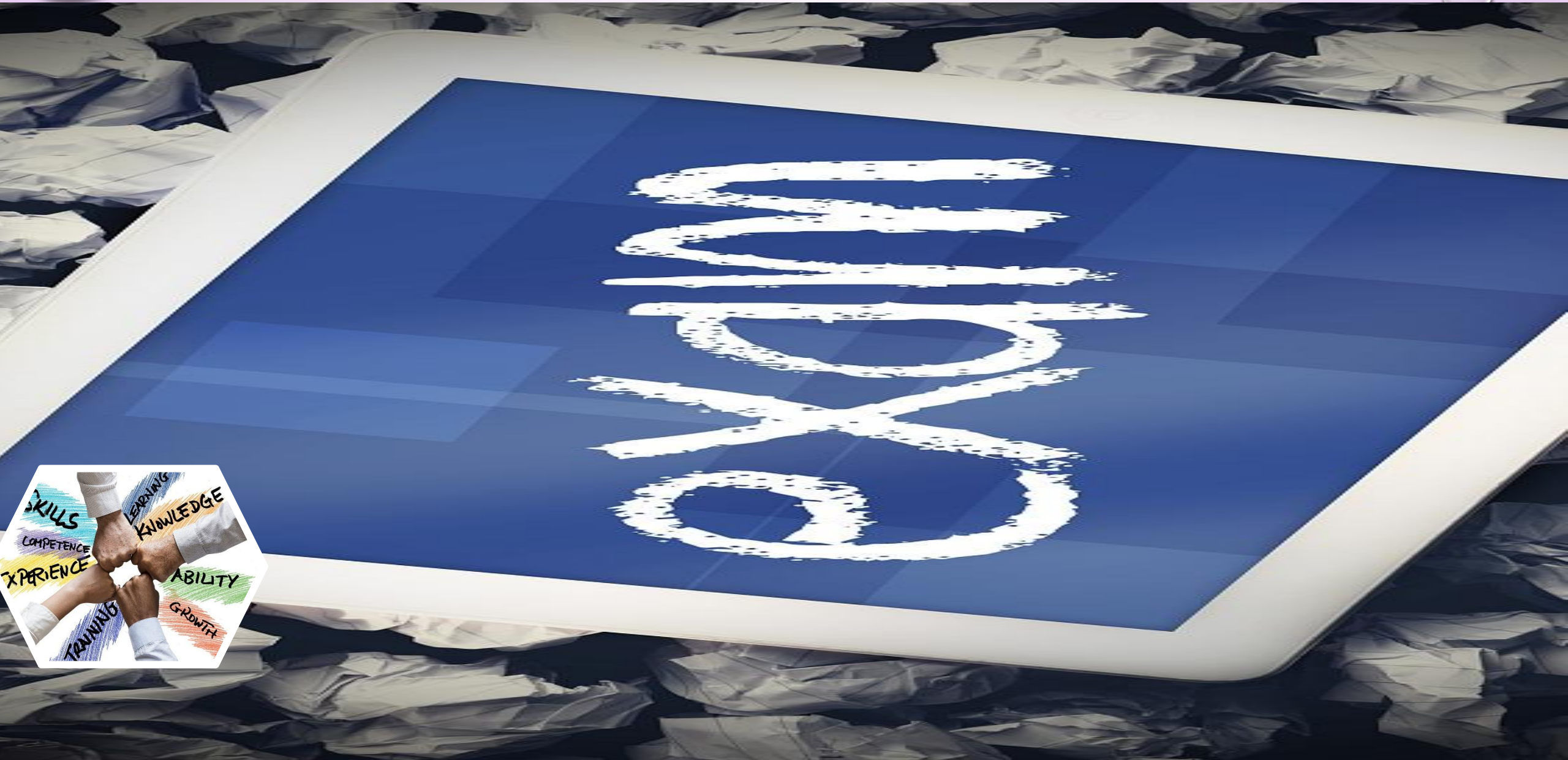| Code	Description	Verbatim
Inconsistent Processes	Variation in procedures among institutions	"There's no standardized RPL process; every institution does it differently." (Participant 4)
Policy Gaps	Absence of comprehensive RPL policy	"The current policy doesn't clearly state how RPL should be done." (Participant 5)
Low Awareness	Limited knowledge among public and stakeholders	"Many people don't even know what RPL is." (Participant 3)

6.1.2. Interpretation

❑ The findings suggest that although the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is formally acknowledged within TEVETA's mandate, its practical implementation is significantly constrained by the absence of standardized operational guidelines and insufficient awareness-raising efforts.

❑ This disconnect between policy intention and implementation practice has created inconsistencies across institutions and has limited the uptake of RPL assessments.

6.2.1 Nvivo Codes – Determine Methods of RPL Assessments

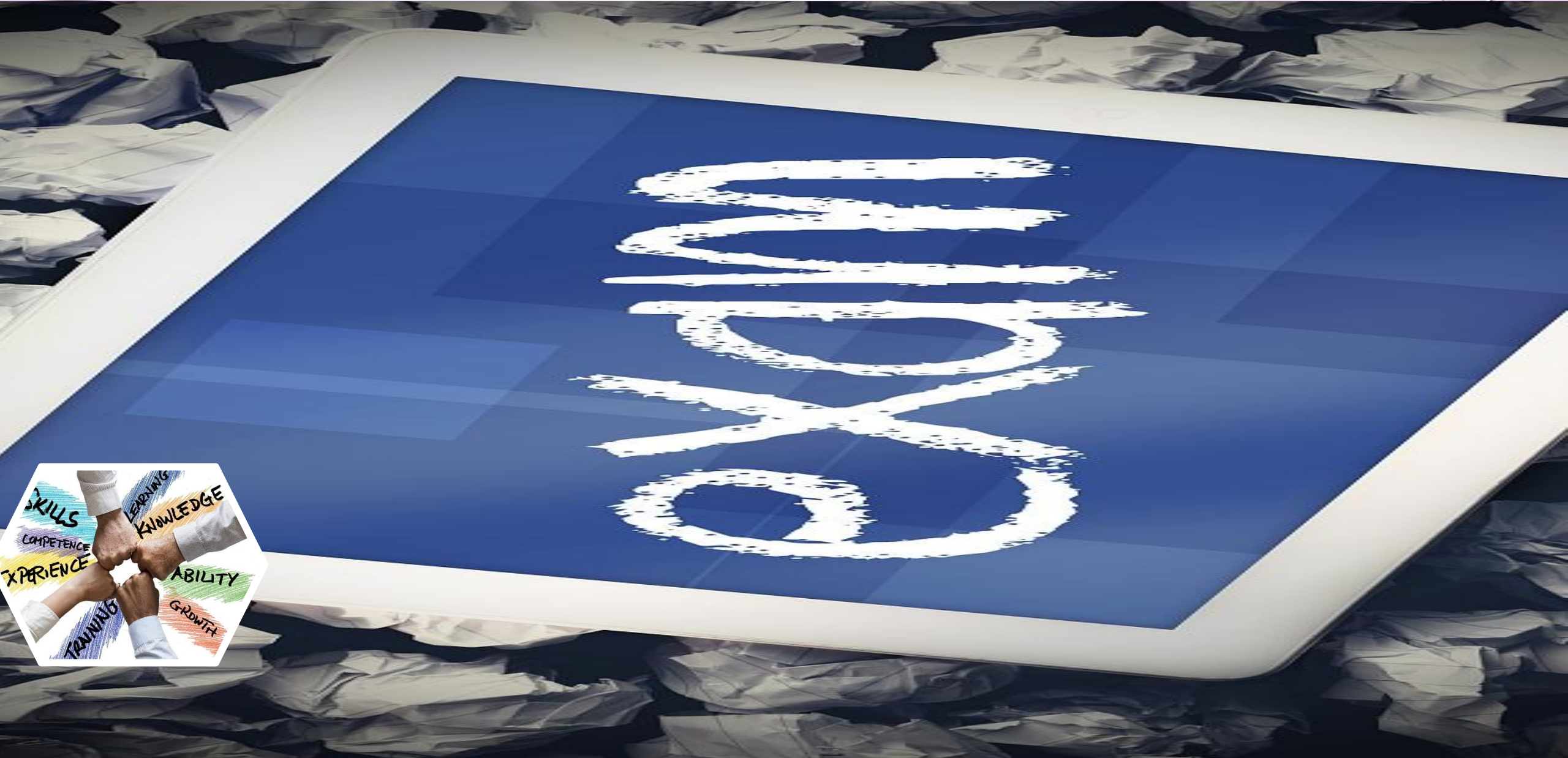| Code	Description	Verbatim
Portfolio Assessment	Evaluation based on prior work or documentation	"We ask candidates to bring portfolios showing what they've done." (Participant 6)
Oral Interviews	Verbal validation of knowledge	"Some assessors rely mainly on oral questioning." (Participant 5)
Practical Demos	Demonstration of actual skills	"They perform tasks in front of the assessor to prove competence." (Participant 9)
Assessor Variance	Lack of training and consistency	"We use portfolios, yes. But there's no consistency." (Participant 8)

6.2.2 Interpretation

❑ The findings highlight a critical need for the development and implementation of a nationally coordinated training program for RPL assessors, as well as the standardization of assessment tools and procedures.

❑ The use of diverse methods such as portfolio reviews, oral interviews, and practical demonstrations reflects an effort to adopt a comprehensive approach to assessing prior learning.

❑ However, the inconsistent application of these methods across institutions, coupled with limited assessor training, undermines the reliability and fairness of the RPL process.

6.3.1 Nvivo codes - Challenges in the Implementation of RPL

Code	Description	Verbatim
Lack of Awareness	RPL poorly communicated to the public	"Most people, if you ask them, may not even know what it is." (participant 2)
Limited Funding	Insufficient resources for effective rollout	"Without money, you can't conduct proper assessments or train assessors." (Participant 1)
Assessor Shortages	Few trained professionals	"Assessors are not trained specifically for RPL." (Participant 5)
Institutional Resistance	Pushback from academic institutions	"Some colleges don't support RPL because it bypasses formal systems." (10)

6.3.2 Interpretation:

❑ The scalability of RPL initiatives is significantly hindered by a range of systemic and institutional barriers.

❑ inadequate funding is one of the primary constraints , which affects the capacity of institutions to invest in infrastructure, technology, and trained personnel required for effective RPL implementation.

❑ Without sustainable financial support, RPL programs remain limited in reach and quality, often restricted to pilot projects or small-scale initiatives.

Interpretation Cont…….

❑ Where policies do not exist, RPL may be poorly coordinated, inconsistently applied, or lacking in clear implementation guidelines.

❑ This results in uncertainty among stakeholders and limited institutional commitment.

Code	Description	Verbatim
Inclusion of Informal Skills	Recognizing job-learned skills	"RPL is a game-changer for people who've learned on the job." (Participant 7)
Certification Access	Second chances for non-traditional learners	"This is a second chance for those who missed school." (Participant Nsama)
Workforce Development	Better job access and upskilling	"It helps people formalize the skills they've learned

6.4.2 Interpretation:

❑ Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) serves as a strategic pathway toward achieving equity in skills recognition.

❑ RPL enhances social inclusion, allowing a broader spectrum of the population to access education credentials, job opportunities, and career advancement

❑ RPL has the potential to significantly contribute to Zambia's economic development.

Interpretation Cont……

- By validating and integrating informal skills into the formal economy, RPL can help address skills shortages in key sectors, increase productivity, and improve workforce competitiveness.

- It supports government efforts in aligning education and training systems with labor market demands, thus fostering a more inclusive, flexible, and responsive economy.

- RPL is more than an educational tool; it is a development strategy that can drive inclusive growth, reduce inequality, and enhance national human capital.

7.0 Conclusion

❑ The RPL assessment system in Zambia is at its infancy in the TEVET sector.

❑ Relevant legal provisions and operational tools for the provision of assessments have been developed and very few institutions have been accredited to conduct RPL assessments.

❑ The RPL assessments is facing some challenges such as but not limited to lack of awareness, lack of trust and confidence in the system, few competent assessors.

❑ The possible opportunities of conducting RPL assessments were bridging the skills gap, enhancing inclusivity and access, improved competences, accelerating career development and partnering with the government in RPL developments

8.0 Recommendations

❑ Launch RPL awareness campaigns using local language and visual media.

❑ Standardize RPL assessor training through national certification programs.

❑ Incentivize institutions to support RPL via policy mandates or funding schemes.

❑ Expand RPL assessments into community and workplace settings to boost access.

❑ Collaborate with industry bodies for credibility and curriculum alignment.