



The Use of Assessment Data for Decision-Making and Accountability: A Desk Review of Educational Assessment Data in Ethiopia, since 2000.

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Background of the review

- Ethiopia has a lengthy history of educational assessments practice.
- The National Examination at the end of Grade 6 was first administered in 1946 (Adugnaw 2017).
- In 1950, the MoE began offering national exams for Grades 8 and 12 (ESLCE Office 1985).
- Since 1946, the Ministry of Education (MoE), in collaboration with the ESLCE Office and Educational Assessment and Examinations Service (EAES), formerly NOE and NEAEA, until now **administering all national assessments, including high-stakes and low-stakes assessment's to guarantee conformity with curriculum content and materials** (ESLCE Office 1985 cited in Arega et al. 2023).
- Since 2000, national learning assessments have been a major factor in exposing the quality of education and the level of student achievement, especially in Grades 4 and 8.
- To support curriculum development, guide resource allocation, and influence national education policy, Ethiopia has made impressive steps toward institutionalizing national learning assessments and standardized testing.

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- The efficient use of assessment results to improve educational outcomes is still hampered by serious problems, notwithstanding these advancements.
- The limited ability of legislators as well as policy-makers, and educators to properly apply assessment data in the execution of policies and decision-making constitutes a fundamental problem.
- The discrepancy between high-stakes national tests and classroom-level assessments causes an inconsistency that compromises the efficacy of teaching and learning (Dawit, 2024). This lack of alignment, combined with inadequate responsibility systems, reduces the possibility of assessments motivating educational development.
- The full possibilities of national assessments to inform and improve the quality of education remain unrealized without sufficient resources, professional development, and coherent policies. Developing data-sharing systems and promoting an evidence-based culture of evidence-based decision-making is critically needed,
- Therefore, **this study aimed** to evaluate how educational assessment data in Ethiopia have been leveraged for decision-making and accountability in the education sector **since the 2000s**. This study specifically examines how low-stakes educational assessments, such as national learning assessments and high-stakes public examination initiatives, influence decision-making, accountability, and policy reforms.

Statement of the problem

- A policy document- ETP 1994, NETP2023, and ESDP I-VI, states that assessment and examinations are key instruments for quality assurance within the educational system.
- Therefore, the importance of assessments and examinations is evident in monitoring the quality and equity of the education system and providing feedback to all stakeholders involved.
- Despite this significance, the lack of accountability for assessment findings, the absence of an integrated digital data management system, and delays in disseminating assessment results to various key stakeholders have posed major challenges over the years (ESDP, 2021).
- Furthermore, issues such as the limited number of experts in assessment-related fields, like psychometrics, to analyze and interpret assessment data, and the lack of a data-sharing policy are considered major bottlenecks in using assessment data for decision-making and accountability within the Ethiopian education system.

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- The findings can inform the Ministry of Education, Ethiopia's Educational Assessment and Examination Service, and educators on improving evaluation systems, public exams, and the use of formative assessments.
- Therefore, to address the above-mentioned challenges and gaps in utilizing assessment data for decision-making and accountability, **conducting evaluative research is seen as vital for establishing robust quality assurance methods in the Ethiopian education system.**

Research Questions

- How has educational assessment data been used to inform decision-making and accountability in Ethiopia since the 2000s?
- What are the key barriers to the effective utilization of assessment data?
- What policy outcomes have been influenced by assessment findings?
- How do stakeholders understand and apply assessment results?

Research Objectives

General Research Objective

- The general objective of the study is to evaluate the use of educational assessment data in Ethiopia that has been leveraged for accountability and decision-making since the 2000s.

Specific Research Objectives

- To investigate how educational assessment data have been applied to inform responsibility and decision-making in Ethiopia since the 2000s.
- To identify the main obstacles preventing efficient utilization of assessment data.
- To examine how assessment results have impacted policy outcomes.
- To investigate how different stakeholders perceive, analyze, and use assessment findings in educational policy and practice.

Literature Review

The review was used Key theories or models for Using Assessment Data

1. **Data-Informed/Data-Based Decision Making (DIDM):**
2. **Operations Triad Model (OTM) and Evidence-Based Assessment (EBA)**
3. **School Value-Added Models (SVAM) and Value-Added Modeling (VAM)**
4. **Adaptive Comparative Judgment and Evidence-Centered Design (ECD)**
5. **Formal Models of Decision Science & Bias Awareness:**

Major findings from previous studies

- **Ethiopian research has repeatedly demonstrated that having data in schools does not guarantee that it will be used effectively.**
- Ahmed (2015) discovered that **although schools frequently had access to data, their use varied widely and was mostly determined by the organizational culture and leadership.** His findings highlight how crucial it is to match accountability incentives with ethical and responsible data use in order to lower the possibility of systemic gaming (Ahmed, 2019).
- According to the Ordofa and Asgedom (2024) , accountability systems should give priority to important learning metrics like financial inputs, motivational supports, timely information, and delegated responsibility in order to support **learning outcomes**
- According to Asgedom, Woldehanna, Hailu, & Yorke, (2025), **learning outcomes received little attention at different policy and implementation levels, while inputs such as student enrollment received disproportionate attention.** To facilitate informed and significant decision-making, the researchers emphasized the necessity of shifting accountability targets toward meaningful learning metrics (Asgedom, Woldehanna, Hailu, & Yorke, 2025).

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- These conclusions were supported by the Research for Equitable Access and Learning (RISE) Ethiopia study (2023), which noted that despite **declining learning outcomes**, there were insufficient **diagnostic tests and intervention strategies**.
- Both policymaking and school-level responsiveness are hampered by the **lack of formative feedback mechanisms**.
- In order to promote improvement, the study emphasizes the need to connect diagnostic testing with tangible assistance and follow-up interventions (RISE Ethiopia, 2023).
- There is little evidence that the data were widely used to improve teaching quality or strengthen system-wide accountability (NEAEA reports, 2000–2019; academic analyses).
- There is minimal evidence that the results of [EGRA&EGMA] had a significant impact on curriculum design or teacher training tactics, despite the fact that these findings spurred stakeholder engagement and national scale-up discussions (USAID, NEAEA reports, scholarly reviews).

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- Only roughly 3.2–3.3% of students received at least 50% on the Grade 12 Public Examination (Matriculation) in 2022 and 2023, indicating incredibly low pass rates at the upper secondary level.
- University exam administration decreased cheating, but it **had no effect on low learning outcomes.**
- Furthermore, **there were significant doubts regarding the validity of assessment-driven reform due to the ongoing discrepancy between test results and real classroom learning.**
- Test results have rarely been used to update teacher preparation programs or in-service professional development strategies, despite public pressure (PSI, 2023; Ethiopian Journal articles).

Research Gap

- Several studies on educational assessment in Ethiopia were based on the level of student achievement.
- They also provided insightful recommendations for stakeholders. However, aside from policy documents like ESDP, GEQIP, assessment magazines, official reports, and speeches by government officials, few scholarly research has been conducted regarding the use of educational assessment data for accountability and decision-making.
- Thus, few studies have addressed the topic of leveraging educational assessment data for these purposes.
- This study, therefore, aims to fill this gap by evaluating how educational assessment data has been utilized in Ethiopia for accountability and decision-making since the 2000s.
- Consequently, the study will seek to answer the research question: How has the leveraging of educational assessment data in Ethiopia impacted accountability and decision-making since 2000?

Methodology

- To give a thorough grasp of how assessment data is used for accountability and decision-making in Ethiopia, a descriptive survey methodology was employed.
- A desk review method was used to collect data for the study.
- In order to contextualize past and present difficulties and achievements, the Desk Review entailed examining existing literature, scholarly articles, policy documents, frameworks, bulletins, and government reports.
- Thematic analysis of the qualitative data gathered using this approach revealed recurring themes and valuable information on the advantages and disadvantages of the assessment procedures in use today.
- With the help of evidence-based data and the study's theoretical frameworks, the results were combined to give a comprehensive picture of Ethiopia's assessment environment.

Ethical consideration

- When gathering data and drawing results, the researchers followed ethical standards.
- All information was examined in confidence and properly referenced to avoid plagiarism. Ethical standards were closely adhered to, and sensitive information was not shared.
- To ensure transparency throughout the research process and improve the findings' **validity and reliability**, triangulation was employed (published & unpublished materials triangulated with assessment magazines, official reports, and speeches).

Limitations of the study

The study's primary drawback was its limited time frame, which limited the amount of time available for in-depth investigation and analysis.

Despite this, the methodology provided a thorough and contextualized understanding of the problems, providing insightful information about the current state of assessment data use in Ethiopia.

Findings and Discussion

- This study evaluated Ethiopia's usage of educational assessment data, which has been used since the 2000s for decision-making and accountability.
- The review examined Ethiopia's current assessment processes, highlighting their advantages and disadvantages while drawing on international research that highlights the influence of assessments on educational achievements.

Table 1: The Ethiopian National Learning Assessments data (ENLA) evaluated

Year	NLA Conducted	Grade	Findings	Remark
2000	Baseline or the First National Learning Assessment	Grades 4 and 8	no one region scored above the acceptable minimum level of 50% achievement (NOE, 2002 cited in 5 th NLA, 2016)	Passing mark 50% and above sated by ETP, 1994 &NETP 2023
2004	2 nd NLA	Grades 4 and 8	Below 50%	
2008	3 rd NLA	Grades 4 and 8	Below 50%	
2011/12	4 th NLA	Grades 4 and 8	Below 50%	
2012	5 th NLA	Grades 4 and 8	Below 50%	
2010	NLA	Grades 10 and 12	Below 50%	
2023	7 th NLA	Grades 4 and 8	Below 50%	

Source: Compiled by Authors from disseminated NLA research papers and NEAEA: Mizena annual Magazine August 2020

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- According to the Ethiopian Fourth National Learning Assessment was conducted in 2011/2012 (2004 E.C), the result of the first, second, third Ethiopian National Learning Assessments and the fourth NLA results was similar and showed that the composite achievement scores at national level for both Grades 4 and 8 were **less than the expected minimum standards set by the Ministry of Education**. The achievement of students as measured by the composite scores at national level were less than the minimum expected score (50%) by the Ethiopian education and training policy.
- Similarly, Ethiopia has been conducting public (national) tests at the sixth grade level since 1946, and at the eighth and twelfth grades since 1950. Ethiopia currently holds annual national examinations for grades six, eight, and twelve. The Ethiopian educational assessment system generated a large volume of assessment data. **However, both the goal and objective of the assessment are not met. This is because stakeholders do not make appropriate use of assessment data.**

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- According to MoE press release (September 9, 2024), the three year grade twelve national examinations result shows as around 96% of students achieved below 50%. See table 2
- Table 2: Students achievement of national examination (grade 12) by Sex

Sex	No. of examinees			No. of examinees scored 50 and Above					
	2014/2022	2015/2023	2016/2024	2022	%	2023	%	2024	%
Male	485393	447567	357810	20438	4.2	18383	4.1	27103	6.5
Female	411127	397532	316963	9596	2.3	8884	2.2	13306	4.2
Total	896520	845099	674773	30034	3.3	27267	3.2	36409	5.4

Objective 1. The utilization of assessment results

- In order to enhance national dialogue on educational quality through robust assessment system, EAES, launched National Conference on Educational Assessment and journal of Educational Assessment and Examinations (JEAE), since 2024.
- Moreover, the **utilization of assessment results for policy reform and overall learning improvement remains limited.**
- To address the gaps, the EAES hosts an annual conference where scholars present research findings, EAES disseminates national learning assessment and examination results, and engages in discussing ways forward (EAES, 2024).

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- Despite the efforts have been made to implement large-scale national examinations and assessments, **the utilization of the data to guide the decision-making process and accountability is limited** in Ethiopia.
- Though the EAES and regional education Bureau have collected the data periodically, and its incorporation into policy documents, reports and planning has been **minimal** (MoE, 2020).
- “For all assessments and examinations there is an urgent need during ESDP V to (a) harmonise assessments with the curriculum; (b) standardise assessment tools to allow fair comparison across years; and (c) ensure that all assessments and examinations are accessible for all students, irrespective of their needs.” (ESDP V).
- **But this round of planning remained unfruitful, because of this another round of planning was needed. So the six round of the strategic plan also reconsidered about assessment in 2021 (ESDP VI, 2021)**

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- According to ESDP VI, “Lack of **accountability** for the assessment findings, lack of an integrated **digital data management system** and **lack of timely dissemination** of assessment results to the various key stakeholders were also some **major challenges faced in the past five years.**”
- In over all due to the above mentioned reasons, educational importance of assessment data and its potential for driving accountability and reform remains underutilized by stakeholders.

Objective 2.To identify the main obstacles preventing efficient utilization of assessment data.

- According to UNESCO IIEP (2019) and MOE (2021), several challenges hinder the **efficient utilization of assessment data**, including:
 - lack of accountability for the assessment findings,
 - lack of an integrated digital data management system, and
 - Lack of timely dissemination of assessment results to various key stakeholders.
 - Lack of data sharing policy as well as protocols

Objective 3. To examine how national and regional assessment results have impacted policy outcomes.

- Although they haven't significantly affected how policies are implemented, assessment results have occasionally influenced policy discussions, like the revision of the General Education Quality Improvement Programme (GEQIP).
- For instance, the NEAEA's periodic reports have sometimes resulted in recommendations for curriculum changes or teacher training.
- However, due to weak institutional frameworks and a lack of accountability mechanisms, these outcomes frequently remain at the planning level without substantial execution (World Bank, 2018; ESDP V, 2021).
- In conclusion, while policy discussions have been influenced by assessment results, substantial systemic changes that improve student performance have rarely occurred.

Objective 4. To investigate how different stakeholders perceive, analyze, and use assessment findings in educational policy and practice.

- The understanding and application of assessment results by stakeholders are often **limited and vary widely**.
- Inadequate training on how to interpret and respond to assessment results is a common grievance among school administrators and teachers (MoE, 2020).
- As a result, data are rarely used for instructional planning or school improvement, even when they are available.
- Additionally, due to a lack of timely dissemination and user-friendly formats, many stakeholders find assessment reports unreadable or irrelevant to their immediate context (ESDP V, 2021).
- Furthermore, regional offices and national agencies do not collaborate to support the use of assessment data for school-based management or professional development.
- Without a clear framework for using data to drive change or a culture of accountability, stakeholders often remain passive.

Conclusion

- The Ethiopian educational system has made great steps toward institutionalizing educational assessments.
- The use of assessment data for decision-making and accountability, however, has not advanced much.
- Problems like inadequate data management infrastructure, a lack of accountability systems, and a lack of technical expertise have greatly diminished the value of these assessments.
- Furthermore, the ultimate goals of improving educational quality and student achievement have not been achieved, highlighting the need for systemic adjustments in both practice and policy.

Recommendations

Based on findings and conclusions of the study the following recommendations are forwarded.

- Increase **teachers' assessment literacy** by providing them with specialized professional development courses that emphasize data interpretation and instructional modification.
- To **promote shared accountability and data-driven instructional planning, institute cooperative data review procedures at the school level.**
- To guarantee prompt access and distribution of assessment data at all levels, **create an integrated digital education data management system.**
- Establish a national data sharing and accountability **policy** with distinct roles and responsibilities for utilizing assessment results to guide practice and policy.
- To improve the analysis and interpretation of assessment data, **invest in developing local capacity by educating specialists in educational measurement and psychometrics.**
- Connect assessment goals to practical objectives by directly connecting findings to strategies for resource allocation and educational reform.

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