Regional TALENT Capacity-building Workshop on the development & strategic use of national large-scale learning assessments

December 3-5, 2019, Yaoundé, Cameroon

Why this piece?

Unprecedented expansion (and attention) but increased tensions related to large-scale learning assessments (LSLA)

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Comparability	⟷	Relevance for policy / desirability
Inclusiveness	⟷	Sufficiently discriminating
Intended purpose	⟷	Actual (mis)use

Growing number of *global, regional* and *national* initiatives supporting the measurement of learning outcomes and use of resulting data for policy and practice

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UNBALANCED DISCUSSION
on large-scale learning assessment

BENEFITS

RISKS
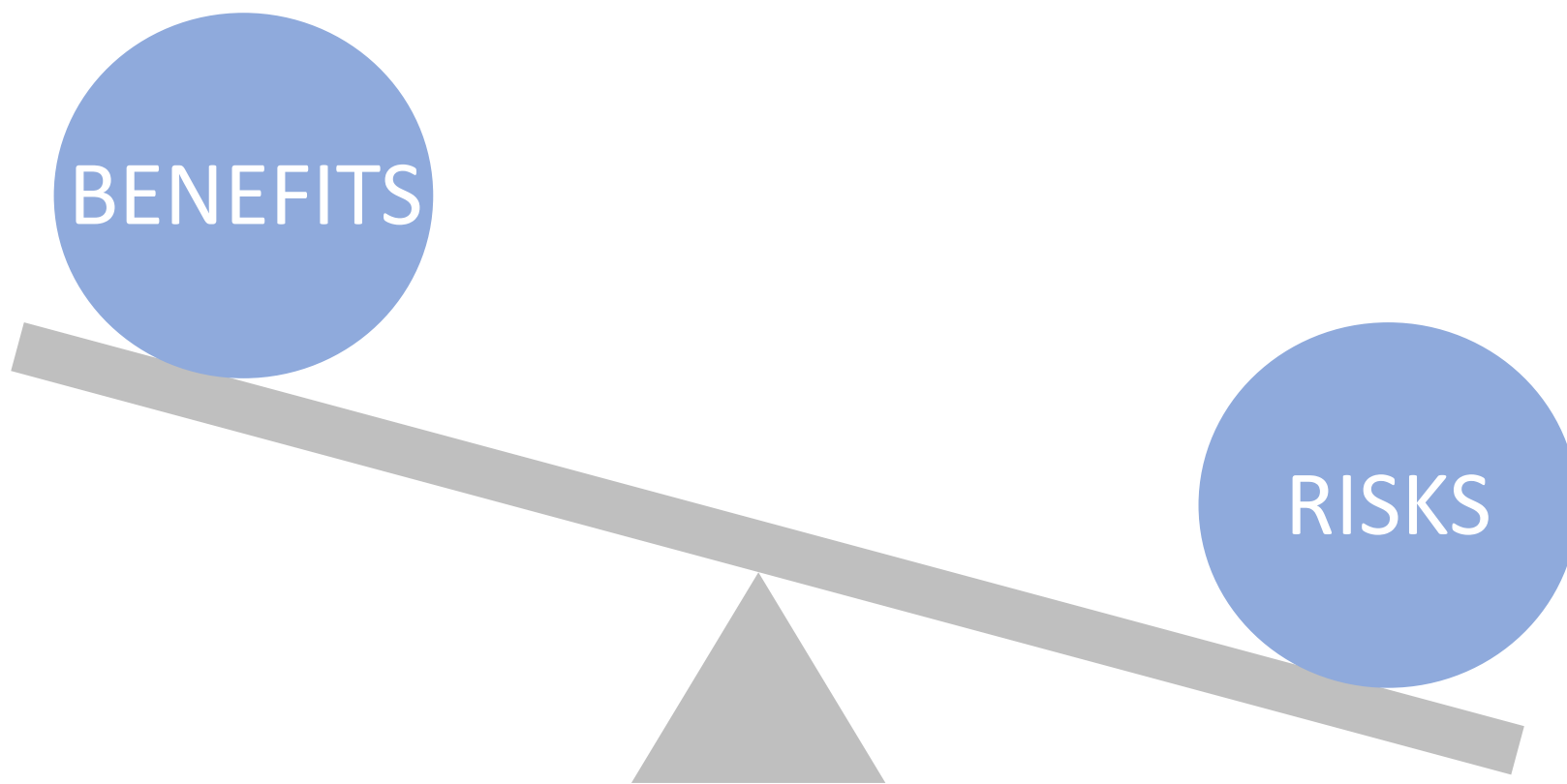
A fuller understanding of the concerns related to #LSLA design and uses can help ensure that they contribute more effectively to improving learning #quality and #equity - New @UNESCO book on #learningassessment

Une meilleure compréhension des préoccupations liées à la conception et aux utilisations des #évaluations a grade échelle peut aider à garantir qu'elles contribuent plus efficacement à l'amélioration de la #qualité et de #l'équité des apprentissages - Nouveau livre @UNESCO sur #l'évaluationdesapprentissages

LSLAs are widely accepted as key instruments to support equity and quality in education

CHAPTERS 1+2: DRIVERS BEHIND THE RISE IN LSLAs

- Changing global education policy discourse and interlinking of education quality, learning outcomes, and large-scale assessments

- Multiple rationales and perceived benefits beyond the ''traditional''

- Encouraged by donors and development partners

- Important means of providing evidence to monitor learning-related commitments in context of SDG4 agenda.

LSLAs are widely accepted as key instruments to support equity and quality in education

... but also a cause for concern

Concerns stemming from characteristics inherent to the design of LSLAs

Concerns stemming from the (mis)use of LSLAs

Valuing more than what can be measured: Limits related to design of large-scale learning assessments

Constraining the conceptualization of education and learning

UNESCO's approach to education and learning

- Multiple purposes of Education for individuals and communities alike.
- Integrated approach to learning

LSLAs focus on a limited range of learning dimensions and address a finite number of the multiple purposes of education

This is not inherently problematic… unless, LSLAs acquire a dissportinate prominence over other education dimensions, and alternative forms of assessment.

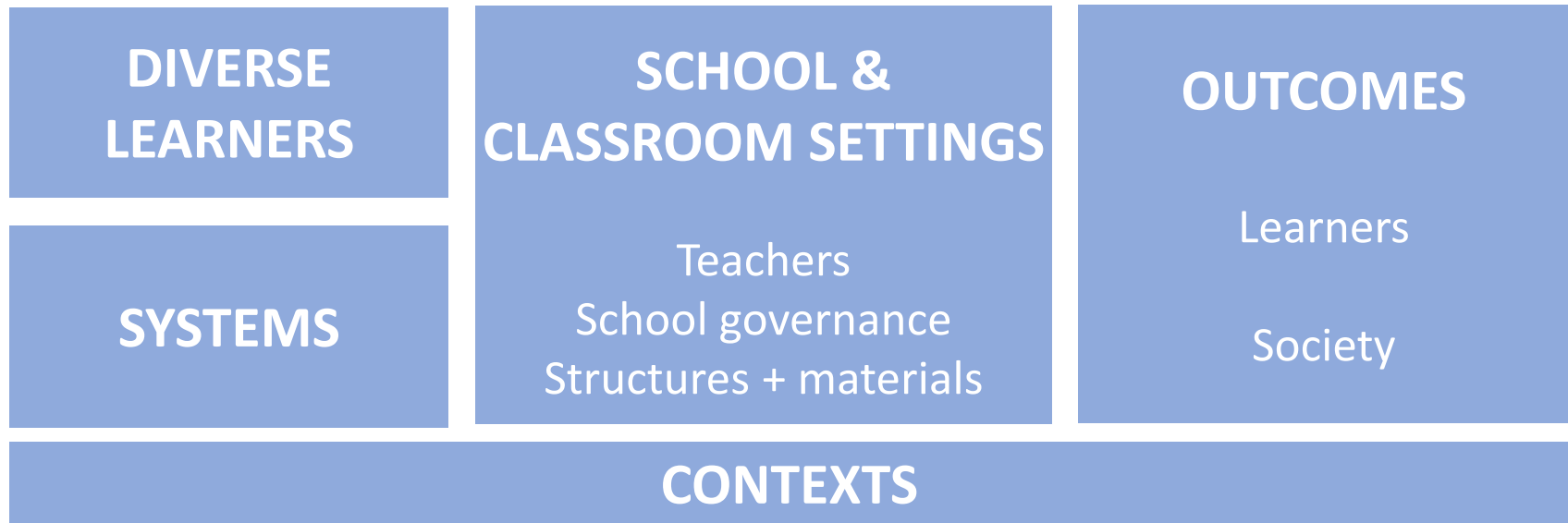Too much attention to #LSLAs risks undermining multiple purposes of ED and integrated approach to learning #4pillars – new @UNESCO book on #learning assessment

Une attention disproportionnée aux évaluations des apprentissages risque d'ébranler les objectifs multiples de l'éducation et l'approche intégrée aux apprentissages #4pilliers - nouveau livre @UNESCO

Narrowed understanding of education quality

Learning outcomes increasingly used as a proxy of education quality.

DIVERSE LEARNERS	SCHOOL & CLASSROOM SETTINGS	OUTCOMES
SYSTEMS	Teachers School governance Structures + materials	Learners Society

CONTEXTS

Source: Adapted from UNESCO, 2016

Yet, individual outcomes cannot be understood in isolation - other crucial dimensions include:

- Societal outcomes – behaviors regarding collective challenges.
- School processes and classroom settings.
- Macro-level determinants – social and economic contexts

#learningdata is crucial to evaluate ED #quality, but can restrict what we recognize as 'educational quality' – new @UNESCO book

Les #données sur les #apprentissages sont essentielles pour évaluer la #qualité de l'éducation, mais peuvent limiter ce que nous reconnaissons comme «qualité de l'éducation» - nouveau livre @UNESCO

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Restricting *what we value*

Limited number of targeted domains as an intrinsic feature of the LSLAs

- Neglect of a broad range of knowledges & competencies
- Emphasis on knowledge & comprehension over attitudes & perceptions
- Insufficiently attentive to the breadth of knowledge even within selected domains.

Yet, efforts to diversify the scope of assessments and to address this limitation are proving challenging (e.g. technical difficulties and desirability of certain metrics)…

Effects on *who we value*

LSLAs hold great potential to advance the equity agenda – but often exclude the most vulnerable of marginalized

Need to ensure *inclusion* in order to facilitate *disaggregation* by a wide range of dimensions.

Key implications over:

- Design of the test – that sufficiently differentiates between learners.

- Translation and adaptation of test materials.

- Accommodating learners with special needs.

- Ensuring incorporation of vulnerable and minority populations in sufficient sample sizes.

Despite their potential to advance #equity agenda, #LSLAs are insufficiently considerate to diversity and disadvantage – new @UNESCO book

En dépit de leur potentiel pour faire avancer le programme #équité, les #évaluations a grande échelle ne tiennent pas suffisamment compte de la diversité et des désavantages - nouveau livre @UNESCO

Beyond data as an end in itself: Limits related to the use of large-scale learning assessments

LSLA PREREQUISITES TO ENABLE DATA USE

- Designed and implemented with a certain level of standards

- Ethical, fair and inclusive of target population

The many uses of assessment data

- Monitoring and evaluating policy.

- Informing policy formulation.

- Agenda-setting – raising awareness and stimulating debate.

- Accountability purposes.

- In-depth analysis.

- …

But: limited understanding on *when* and *under which circumstances* these dynamics are more likely to occur.

Under-using assessment data

Emerging discussion on the barriers to data use at a country level >> specific dynamics faced by low-income countries or late-adopters only recently addressed

Key constraints resulting from *limited ownership*:

- Dependence on external financing >> irregular cycles of administration; limited alignment with curriculum
- Outsourcing to private organizations of international agencies >> limited control over design and data management
- Strict dissemination schedules of cross-national initiatives

#underuse of #LSLA #data can result in policy inaction, be perceived as a waste of resources, and can even distort policy priorities and favor ill-suited reforms - new @UNESCO book

une #sous-utilisation des #données des #évaluations des apprentissages peut entraîner l'inaction des politiques ou être perçue comme un gaspillage de ressources, voire même fausser les priorités politiques et favoriser des réformes mal adaptées - nouveau livre @UNESCO

Excessive focus, attention or credence to assessment results >> misleading effect over the behavior of a wide range of stakeholders.

This is more likely to occur in the context of:

- High levels of media resonance
- Use of certain formats - ranking and league tables
- Emphasis on cross-country comparisons
- Use of LSLA as a proxy of national progress

Four mechanisms behind over-use dynamics:

- **Incentivizing** *policy action* >> significant risks if efforts are exclusively oriented to *improve the figures* – rather than engaging in structural change

- **Encouraging** *policy borrowing* with little regard for cultural context or overall policy coherence

- **Stimulating** *misleading statements of causality* – e.g., use of LSLAs as predictors of economic growth

- **Informing** *results-based funding* **schemes** >> risk of encouraging practices of "gaming the system" (selective sampling, etc)

Coupling assessment with accountability

- LSLAs: low-stakes for students but high stakes for teachers, principals and schools - particularly in the context of *managerial or test-based accountability frameworks*.

- Explicit sanctions and rewards may encourage opportunistic behaviors >> disruptive effects:

Grade inflation	**Misleading monitoring efforts**	**Undermining equity and quality**	**Informal narrowing of the curriculum**

- Recent rise of high-stakes accountability frameworks - although limited and uneven.

- Recent debate on the effects of sample-based and cross-national LSLAs >> risk of triggering opportunistic behaviors given symbolic and reputational consequences.

(1) #Ethics of #LSLAs (2) Involvement of #privateproviders (3) assessment as #bigdata - remain under-researched and insufficiently debated areas – New @UNESCO book on #learningassessment

(1) #L'éthique de l'évaluation (2) le rôle du #secteurprivé (3) l'évaluation comme #mégadonnées restent des sujets sous-recherchées et insuffisamment débattues - nouveau livre @UNESCO sur #l'évaluationdesapprentissages

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A *subset* of the Education Research and Foresight Working Papers examine issues related to the evolving nature of assessment practices, and their potential longer-term implications. ERF papers are published in English, French, Spanish and Arabic.

- [Digital Learning Assessment and Big Data](#)

- [Beyond Is It Worth It? Rationales for (non)participation in cross-national assessments](#)

- [Beyond the Conceptual Maze: The notion of quality in education](#)

EDUCATION RESEARCH AND FORESIGHT

WORKING PAPERS

June 2019

24

IS IT WORTH IT?

Rationales for (non)participation in international large-scale learning assessments

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ABSTRACT

The implementation and impact of international large-scale learning assessments (ILSAs) has grown significantly over the past two decades. The aim of this paper is to identify and understand the reasons for participation and non-participation, in order to inform debates about the costs and benefits of ILSAs for participating countries, international organizations and the international community more broadly. Participation can be understood from multiple perspectives, with different implications for how we conceive appropriate use and misuse, and thus for evaluating the benefits of participation in relation to the costs. The paper provides a short history of the ILSA phenomenon, before reviewing different rationales that governments have for participating or not participating in ILSAs, organised into a four-dimensional framework: political, economic, technical and socio-cultural. We argue that debates about whether ILSA participation is 'worth it' must take account of the diverse purposes of participants in these assessments.

Introduction

The evolution of ILSAs: from initial scepticism to essential for policymaking

Why do governments participate in ILSAs?

Why do governments choose not to participate in ILSAs?

Conclusion: the futures of ILSAs

1   The authors are very grateful to Chloe O'Connor for her excellent research assistance and to the reviewers of the paper. They can be contacted at addey@tc.columbia.edu and s.sellar@mmu.ac.uk.

ED-2019/WP/2

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The promise of large-scale learning assessments
Acknowledging limits to unlock opportunities

La promesa de las evaluaciones de aprendizaje a gran escala
Reconocer los límites para generar oportunidades

La promesse de l'évaluation à grande échelle des apprentissages
Reconnaître les limites pour libérer les potentialités

ARABIC,
PORTUGUESE,
RUSSIAN
(Forthcoming, 2020)

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Help us spread the messages …

#UNDERSTANDING #LSLA #DESIGN #USES #QUALITY #EQUITY #LEARNING

Jaakko Kauko @jaakkokauko · Aug 3
This is important: understanding large-scale learning assessments' problems and limits - and bringing this issue on the agenda of international organisations.

Noah Sobe @noahsobe · Aug 2
Replying to @noahsobe
new @UNESCO report on large-scale learning assessment calls for
* more safeguards
* greater caution in design
* more attention to mis-use
all of which is a reminder that assessment is not simply a #technical undertaking but #political and #ethical

Edúcate sin temor @EducaTsinTemor
Replying to @LilMirand and @noahsobe
Creo que las conclusiones mayores del documento estuvieron siempre bajo tus recomendaciones , ¿algún aspecto específico que remarcar? Yo me quedo con dos básicos 👇🏼👇🏾👇🏿 y esperamos tu libro en la feria 2020 tienes mucho que decir en este tema.

The Promise of Large-Scale Learning Assessments: Acknowledging Limits to Unlock Opportunities by Sobhi Tawil and Maya Prince

Link to blogpost

Thank you

Learn more: www.unesco.org/education

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Write a letter to your Minister of Education

The Ministry of Education has just received a grant for strengthening its national learning assessment system. Based on our discussion today, what would you want to tell / advise your minister, with regards to:

- The current design of your national learning assessment. How can it be improved?

- The way in which data is being analyzed and disseminated.

- How the data is being used in general. Could you do more (or less) with the data?

- Additional policies and strategies to improve equity and learning.