



Regional workshop on the design and strategic use of large-scale learning assessments

Date: December 3-5, 2019

Venue: Yaoundé, Cameroon

Concept note

Context of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4-Education 2030 Agenda

Key to SDG 4 are quality in education and ensuring that all members of society have equitable access to education opportunities. Quality in education has been defined by SDG 4 in a number of ways¹. However, the major component is that various members of the population should attain a minimum level of knowledge and skills in certain learning domains. Reporting progress towards these targets, notably SDG4 target 4.1, require countries to assess learning outcomes.²

According to the PASEC 2014 assessment, among grade 6 students in West and Central Africa, nearly 58% are not sufficiently competent in reading or mathematics to continue schooling. Similarly, the most recently available SACMEQ regional assessment of grade 6 primary school students in Southern and East Africa (from 2007) shows that 37% are not competent in reading, and more than 60% are not competent in mathematics³. While the number of countries conducting national, regional, or international assessments has significantly increased over time⁴, about 100 national education systems, still do not systematically assess student learning outcomes⁵.

About half of developing countries have a systematic national learning assessment at primary school level. At lower-secondary level, this figure stands at only 7% of low-income countries and 26% of lower-middle-income countries⁶. Finally, fewer than 30% of developing countries participate in some kind of international or regional assessment⁷. Given that data on learning are often missing from education management statistics, it is not surprising that existing learning gaps are not always identified and remain unaddressed⁸.

While in some situations the key problem is the unavailability of learning assessment data and/ or their low quality, in others data are increasingly available and yet are still often not used in policymaking. The regional misbalance is salient as the use of learning data is

¹ Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, 2016

² Principles of Good Practice in Learning Assessment, ACER-UIS

³ World Bank, 2018: 71

⁴ UNESCO, 2015

⁵ UIS, 2017

⁶ Education Commission, 2016

⁷ Education Commission, 2016

⁸ Raudonyte I., "Use of Learning assessment data in education policy-making", UNESCO IIEP, April 2019



particularly low in Africa as well as Southern and East Asia, whereas it is much higher in Europe, Australia, and North America⁹.

Workshop rationale

Throughout the last 2 decades, large-scale learning assessments (LSLA) have gained popularity around the world. They are now regarded as being critical to improve the quality of education and they have contributed greatly to strengthening policies and strategies aimed at enhancing effective and relevant learning¹⁰. This type of assessment can be international, regional or national in scope.

The benefits and advantages of LSLAs have been extensively reviewed in specialized literature, and there is growing recognition of the potential of assessment data to inform policy. As a result, increasingly higher expectations have been placed on LSLAs as drivers of policy change over the past few decades. They are indeed expected to serve a range of uses, including monitoring, accountability, agenda-setting and analysis. The potential of such tools reaches far beyond reporting purposes. They can provide insight into areas in need of improvement and help pinpoint the most appropriate, promising and effective policy interventions¹¹.

Although there are multiple examples of how learning data inform policies, in many cases the use of data remains limited. This may be explained by a number of barriers and by a lack of pre-conditions that limit their use in education policy-making. Limited factors can be grouped into the following categories: (i) reliability and relevance of the data collected, (ii) financial and technical capacities, (iii) coordination and dissemination channels of data and (iv) political and institutional factors¹².

In some cases, overreliance on assessment data and on the impact of certain variables resulted in inadequate policy reforms that had a negative translation into reality. Quite often, this is linked to methodological issues or to the use of single-score testing to trigger policy reforms. An often-disregarded dimension of the lack of strategic use of learning assessments in policy-making is the political dimension that drives planners and decision makers either to overlook the use of evidence issuing from LSLAs or to legitimize pre-defined agendas¹³.

The regional platform Teaching and Learning Educators' Network for Transformation (TALENT) has been working on the quality of education since its foundation in 2016. In 2017, TALENT

⁹ Raudonyte I., "Use of Learning assessment data in education policy-making", UNESCO IIEP, April 2019

¹⁰ The promise of large-scale learning assessments, UNESCO 2019

¹¹ The promise of large-scale learning assessments, UNESCO 2019

¹² Raudonyte I., "Use of Learning assessment data in education policy-making", UNESCO IIEP, April 2019

¹³ Raudonyte I., "Use of Learning assessment data in education policy-making", UNESCO IIEP, April 2019



organized a stocktaking workshop for sub-Saharan African countries to understand common capacity-building needs in the area of learning assessments¹⁴.

Within the framework of a GPE- funded project on learning assessments, TALENT organizes a regional knowledge-sharing and capacity-strengthening workshop on the design and strategic use of Large-Scale learning assessments, with a particular focus on the national and sub-national scale. The workshop will look at best practices adopted by countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere to overcome common challenges in the design and implementation phase of these types of assessments, looking at the strategic choices to be made for an effective and efficient use of assessment data in education planning.

Workshop objectives and expected outcomes

The regional workshop aims to strengthen the capacities of ministries of education to improve the quality of the design and strategic use of large-scale learning assessments, but also to encourage national authorities to learn from each other and adapt best practices when they consider it necessary.

At the end of the workshop, delegates from participating countries will be able to:

- Identify common challenges in the design, implementation and strategic use of large-scale learning assessments (national, sub-national and international);
- Identify key planning elements for sustainable national large-scale assessment programs aimed at assessing and improving quality of education;
- Learn from best practices and identify suitable approaches and tools (including ICT) in terms of development, implementation and strategic use of efficient large-scale learning assessments according to different contexts;
- Analyze their own learning assessment system, review previous experience and identify potential improvement paths for future implementation of different types of large-scale learning assessments;
- Networking among experienced practitioners, experts and educational cooperation institutions.

Workshop participants and methodology

The three-day workshop is intended for national teams composed of high-level directors and national experts on large-scale learning assessment. The workshop is targeting a variety of profiles nominated by the Minister of Education: the director of education planning and the director of learning assessment unit. Countries who wish to sponsor additional high-level decision-makers and technical officers may do so with their own funding.

¹⁴ http://www.education2030-africa.org/images/talent/atelier061217/FinalReport_TALENTWorkshopDec2017_ENG_15.03.18.pdf



A mixed team composed by international experts on the topic of large-scale learning assessments and TALENT member organizations experts will lead the workshop.

The workshop will be conducted in the form of plenary presentations, group discussions and hands-on activities and it will be preceded by a preparatory phase to start one month before the workshop.

As part of the pre-workshop assignment, participants will be asked to:

- Conduct a review of their current experience in participating in international large-scale learning assessments (only for countries currently participating in ILSA);
- The preparatory phase consists in completion of a survey on classroom-based formative assessment practices and the role of this type of assessment in teacher training curriculum and education quality management. During the preparatory phase, selected participants will be asked to read a series of documents to set a common ground on the issue and prepare a selection of challenges and best practices to be presented and discussed during the workshop.

Logistics

The workshop will take place in Yaoundé, Cameroon from 3 to 5 December, 2019.

The workshop organizers will sponsor the participation of two national-level directors from up to 12 eligible countries from Sub-Saharan Africa (only Global Partnership for Education's Development Counties Partners are eligible for sponsorship). Sponsored countries that wish to include other participants may do it with their own funding and prior agreement with TALENT. A maximum of five additional countries may be granted participation in the workshop, either on government own funding or with the support of their local education group.

The sponsorship offered by the organizers includes round-trip air ticket (economy class), accommodation and meals.

For further information on the logistics of the workshop, please contact the TALENT Secretariat team: d.ruscelli@unesco.org and m.gueye@unesco.org.

TALENT is designed to serve as a thematic platform to support the implementation of the Framework for Action of the Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Education by 2030. TALENT has been one of the task teams of the Regional Coordination Group on SDG4-Education 2030 in West and Central Africa since June 2016.

The focus area of the network is teaching and learning, paying particular attention to alignment of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, as well as issues related to institutional environment to support effective learning. The network operates through research, knowledge sharing, and capacity building activities.