

Regional TALENT Capacity-building Workshop on classroom-based formative assessment

Round Table “Tensions between Classroom-based formative assessments and standardized evaluations”

The Round Table “*Tensions between Classroom-based formative assessments and standardized evaluations*” envisages promoting a debate among practitioners on two student assessment devices: classroom assessments and standardized evaluations. Classroom assessment and standardized evaluations share a formative purpose: they help identifying what students have actually learnt, providing evidence based on which actors at different levels of the system can make decisions leading all learners in the course of their school life. Despite their common formative purpose, classroom assessment and standardized evaluations are essentially different devices to steer quality in basic education.

In part, standardized evaluations are intended to compensate for some of the purported limits of classroom assessments. Standardized evaluations are supposed to provide actors at the higher levels of the administration with “credible comparable” data on student performance, informing thereby on the education system’s performance. Usually based on relatively small but statistically representative samples, standardized evaluations are not expected to report on the performance of individuals, but of larger/agglomerated units: the whole country, geographical regions, specific types of schools, etc. Standardized evaluations very often also try to collect data helping to unveil factors seeming to affect learning: these factors can be placed at the level of the individual and be linked to his or her socio-cultural and economic backgrounds. They can also be identified at the level of the classroom and the larger school environment. Sometimes, it is also possible to track factors linked to specific policies and programmes, therefore informing on the efficacy of some policy interventions. At least in its origins, standardized evaluations were conceived as tools for policy makers. However, it has been argued that, since standardized evaluation data can be used to inform on the effectiveness of classroom practices, the results of these evaluations should reach classroom practitioners, i.e. teachers,. This seems to be inspiring a panoply of innovations in different countries.

Aiming to provide more detailed, disaggregated information on students’ performance, several countries are currently thriving to implement standardized evaluation at a larger scale, i.e. covering larger school samples, sometimes actually envisaging universal coverage. In some places, teachers and school heads receive reports on the performance of their students having participating in standardized evaluations. More and more, average scores obtained in standardized evaluations are also incorporated into dashboards / score cards/ “tableaux de bord” and used as benchmarks against which to evaluate the performance of a specific school district. In some cases, school budget is tied to performance in standardized evaluations. While these are certainly some forms of ensuring some “feedback” to actors having been “evaluated” and of incorporating evaluation results into the policy making process, the extent to which these practices actually contribute to improving teaching and learning is less clear.

A closer look on what happens in the classrooms following the consolidation, routinization and/or the enlargement of standardized evaluations suggests that “teaching to the test” may actually be jeopardizing the positive intended effects of this assessment device. Very often, teachers do not see standardized evaluation as a tool to support them, but to control. Standardized evaluations are also frequently blamed for being far-detached from what teachers actually do in the classroom, what they are actually able to teach. Among teachers, standardized evaluations are often seen as an attack to their autonomy and to the professionalization of teaching. Teachers in these contexts often claim greater autonomy to assess their students, they want to “re-gain” the autonomy “lost” by the introduction of large-scale standardized evaluation. A new point is then made in favor of “more and better classroom assessment”. The point is also made for innovating the way standardized evaluations are conceived and used. Some countries currently try to implement processes ensuring that evaluation items are developed taking into consideration what is actually taught in a particular school term. Other initiatives consist of using standardized evaluations to assess students’ competences at the beginning of the school year, so that results can be used by teachers to adapt their planning to students’ profiles. These examples seem to suggest that classroom assessment and standardized evaluations can become less differentiated devices. Is this a promising way for achieving better aligned assessment systems? This round table wants to explore this question based on the exchange of country experiences.

The **Round Table** envisages promoting a debate among practitioners on the limits and potentialities of these assessment devices to help education systems achieving higher learning levels for all students. Based on their country experiences, panelists are expected to reflect on the challenges to ensure effective alignment of different initiatives related to the assessment of students’ performance, as well as on the challenges to use standardized evaluation results to effectively orient teaching and learning. As a result, it is expected that workshop participants be able to draw some practical hints for the improvement of their own learning assessment systems.

Panelists :

- ✓ Cameroon, Mme. Madeleine MAMAT DAIFERLE, National Inspector, PASEC Coordinator
- ✓ Senegal, Mr. Cheikhena LAM, Director a.i. of the National Institute of Study and Action for the Development of Education (INEADE)
- ✓ Tanzania, Mr. Alfred Mdimba, Head of Research and Evaluation Unit, National Exams Council of Tanzania
- ✓ Tchad, Dr. Aboubakar Ali Kore, Director general of the National Curricula Centre
- ✓ Moderator: Mr. Marcelo Souto Simao, expert in education planning and institutional analysis, UNESCO International Institute of Educational Planning, Pôle de Dakar (IIEP/UNESCO-Pôle de Dakar).

The Round table is organized by the Regional Programme in Support of Quality Management of Basic Education in Sub-Saharan African Countries, of IIEP/UNESCO Pôle de Dakar. For more information, visit our website: <https://poledakar.iiep.unesco.org>.

The members of the TALENT steering group are:

