

Learning From Learning Assessments: The Politics and Policies of Attaining Quality Education

A NORRAG joint event with Brookings, in association with PASEC

June 23, 2016, Geneva, Switzerland

Context

In response to both the achievements and disappointments related to the MDGs, and to the new aspirations under the SDGs, there is an increasing emphasis globally on identifying the appropriate indicators for learning achievements. In that vein, international and regional assessments are playing an important role in education policy-making and reform. At the same time, national efforts designed to measure aspects of learning and education quality have in some cases been developed as supplements or alternatives to international assessment regimes. Whether they operate at the national, regional, or international level, assessments are based on the assumption that data can strengthen accountability and guide policy to make education more efficient and equitable. The current reality, however, is that assessment data are frequently not used or misused, and do not positively influence policy-making or student learning. Can the measurement of learning outcomes lead to quality education for all? If so, how?

Objectives

NORRAG's Global Governance of Education and Training (GGET) programme of work aims to reflect critically on key issues of governance in the fields of education and training. International learning assessments are an increasingly important feature of that landscape. While they are becoming more common, their spread globally has not happened evenly. Moreover, international learning assessments are not a single tool that is used uniformly but rather they are a set of diverse instruments. This raises additional questions about different and sometimes competing methods and priorities, as well as the relationship between assessments and policy making and delivery.

This event is an outcome of collaboration among NORRAG, the Center for Universal Education (CUE) at Brookings and PASEC, which will critically tackle the following questions:

- Do assessment regimes actually capture the information that they intend to?
- How has the reliance on quantifying learning outcomes influenced – both positively and negatively - policy-making and policy delivery at the national level?
- What are the experiences across national contexts, both in terms of positive outcomes and unintended consequences?
- How do different large scale assessments, such as PASEC and PISA for Development, relate to one another and to the national context in terms of content and capacity?
- How do initiatives such as the Learning Metrics Task Force (LMTF) - convened by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and the Center for Universal Education (CUE) at Brookings - shed light on country needs and perspectives in this context?

The event will allow targeted stakeholders to engage in discussion of the development and implementation of learning assessments, including comparisons of methods, rationales, and lessons learned. It will also include a consultation on a new effort to measure the breadth of learning opportunities an education system provides, led by CUE and Education International. By convening key partners from developing countries and engaging with international experts, the event aims for a balanced overview of the politics and policies of learning assessments.

Target participants

To address the above mentioned issues, this event will engage with 30-40 participants with expertise in learning assessments, education policy-making and classroom experience. The focus will be on first-hand knowledge of the implementation of learning assessments. The event will also convene assessment experts and policy-makers who may lack familiarity with the LMTF and learning assessments such as PASEC, as well as instruments such as PISA for Development. By inviting officials from Geneva-based international organisations, particularly those who have employed assessments in different fields like health or economic development, we can identify parallels and draw on others' experiences and lessons learned and apply them to education.

Event Agenda

08:30 – 09:00 Registration (interpetale)

09:00 – 09:10 Welcome address (room S8)

Speaker:

- Joost Monks, Managing Director, NORRAG

09:10 – 09:30 Keynote address – Learning from learning assessments

Speaker:

- Esther Care, Center for Universal Education, Brookings

Framing remarks for the plenary discussions and break-out sessions, with an emphasis on learning assessments as multi-layered governance models existing at the national, regional and international levels. How can we make sense and take stock of the expanding global exercise of assessing education performance? How best to measure breadth of learning opportunities and employ assessments to affect education policy-making and contribute positively to education system reform?

09:30 – 11:00 Plenary Session 1 – LMTF “learning champions”: what did they learn?

Moderator:

- Alexandra Draxler, Education and Development Consultant, and NORRAG

Speakers:

- Angel Kaliminwa, Examinations Council of Zambia
- Mohammad Matar, Palestine Ministry of Education and Higher Education
- Charles Kado, Kenya Primary School Headteachers' Association

Reflections on the similarities and differences of applying the LMTF approach, and recommendations from different countries. Disseminating results from LMTF 2.0 case studies.

11:00 – 11:15 Coffee break (interpetale)

11:15 – 12:45 Plenary Sessions 2 – PASEC and PISA for Development: Theory and Practice

Moderator:

- Camilla Addey, Humboldt University Berlin

Speakers:

- Pablo Zoido, Analyst and Technical Lead of PISA for Development, OECD

- Jacques Malpel, PASEC, (TBC via Skype)
- Mame Ibra Bâ, INEADE
- Oren Pizmony-Levy, Assistant Professor, International and Comparative Education, Columbia University
- Michel Carton, Executive Director, NORRAG

Reflections on the similarities and differences (e.g. methods, outcomes) of applying different assessment models at the country level. What were the challenges and opportunities faced, how do we move from theory to practice in using assessments models to improve education policy-making and delivery in the country?

12:45 – 14:00 Lunch break (interpetale)

14:00 – 15:15 Break-out sessions

Session 1 – The use of learning assessment data: policy perception and implications (room S8)

Framing remarks:

- Gita Steiner-Khamsi, Professor of Comparative and International Education, Teachers College, Columbia University

Despite the growing popularity of learning assessments, the current reality is that assessment data are sometimes not used or misused in policy development, and do not necessarily influence student learning in a positive manner. Important questions remain unanswered about how to actually incorporate the use of data in policy making and tailor it to local contexts and needs.

Possible questions to address: To what extent and how the data captured are received, perceived and used by education policy-makers and teachers? What are some of the challenges associated with using the data from learning assessments to reform education systems? How can they be overcome?

Session 2 – Reflections on the assessments of different skills (room S7)

Framing Remarks:

- Raymond Saner, Professor, Basel University, and Founder, Centre for Socio-Economic Development

The notion of skills is both in vogue in the fields of education and training, as well as under attack for its reductionist dimension compared to knowledge. This goes for all learning sectors (basic education, literacy, TVET, higher education, Life Long Learning) and for social and productive sectors (covering soft skills, basic skills, life skills, skills for work, specialized skills, transversal, communication, cooperation, negotiation skills, etc).

Possible questions to address: What are the similarities and differences in the assessments of these skills, as implemented by different stakeholders pursuing specific learning achievements? Is there a one size fits all learning assessment instrument or a tool that can help others think more broadly, especially for those skills that are less tangible but more broadly applicable in education, the economy and the society at large?

Session 3 – Learning Assessments and the SDGs (room S6)

Framing remarks:

- Patrick Monjourides, Programme Specialist, UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS)

- Kenneth King, Emeritus Professor at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland and NORRAG News Editor

There is an increasing emphasis globally on identifying the appropriate indicators for learning achievements, especially with respect to the SDGs. However important decisions need to be made about what to measure, who measures it, and how the data will be actually used to inform policy at the local and national levels to better attain development objectives.

Possible questions to address: What kind of improved role can learning assessments play in working towards attaining the sustainable development goals? How can the different assessment instruments (PASEC, PISA) coordinate with the global infrastructure for reaching the SDGs? Which actors should have priority in reporting on the education and training related indicators?

15:15 – 15:30 Coffee break (interpetale)

15:30 – 17:15 Plenary Session 3 - Assessing the Breadth of Learning (room S8)

Participants will be invited to give feedback on a proposed framework for measuring breadth of learning opportunities. This framework will propose a methodology for collecting information on the learning domains covered in curriculum, teaching, and assessment. The tool will look at how the domains are incorporated at the national, local, and classroom level to determine where the gaps and barriers are. This will be tested with teachers as well as with policy makers to make it useful for multiple audiences.

Moderator:

- Antoni Verger, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Speakers:

- Seamus Hegarty, Independent Consultant
- Martin Henry, Education International
- Kate Anderson, Center for Universal Education
- Mame Ibra Bâ, INEADE, Senegal (TBC)

17:15 - 17:45 Wrap up & concluding remarks

- Esther Care, Center for Universal Education
- Joost Monks, Managing Director, NORRAG

18:00 – 20:00 Cocktail Reception (interpetale)