Learning assessment at UNESCO

Ensuring effective and relevant learning for all
Learning in a rapidly changing world

The fast changing and increasingly interconnected and interdependent world in which we live poses new challenges and offers new opportunities for ensuring sustainable, human and social development. At the heart of these processes of transformation is learning. Learning is both the process of acquiring or developing knowledge, skills and attitudes all underpinned by values, as well as the result of that process. While learning can be deliberate, intentional, purposeful and organized, it is also often much less institutionalized and may take place in various activities of daily life, in the work place or non-formal education programmes, in the local community, on a self-, family- or socially-directed basis.  

An integrated approach to learning

As part of its humanistic tradition, UNESCO supports an integrated approach to learning throughout life - one which is relevant to the various dimensions of personal and collective human development. It is a holistic approach which attempts to balance and integrate the social, economic, cultural, ethical, environmental, spiritual, political and other purposes of education. This integrated approach is well captured in the four pillars of learning – learning to know, to do, to be and to live together - and is arguably even more relevant for sustainable human and social development in today’s rapidly changing world. This is reflected through the growing interest in areas such as intercultural learning, digital media literacy and global citizenship education.

Renewed focus on equitable quality learning for all by 2030

Education 2030 has refocused attention on learning, as echoed in Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” The goal implies effective acquisition of foundational and transferrable skills as the basis for learning throughout life, as well as a focus on to the relevance of learning - both for the world of work, and for personal, civic and social life. This focus has implications in areas that are critical to improving learning processes and outcomes. These include teacher education, training and professional development, curriculum development, and the design of teaching and learning materials, as well as learning assessment.

1 See UNESCO. 2015. Rethinking Education: Towards a global common good?. Paris, UNESCO.
Learning assessment to enable learning

Learning assessment is part of evaluating and monitoring education more broadly. It refers to a wide range of methods and tools used to evaluate, measure and document learning outcomes and learning progress. It is about gathering information from multiple sources on what learners know and what they can do with what they have learnt. It also provides information on the process and context that enable learning, as well as those that may be hindering the learning process.

Learning assessment can address the needs of a range of actors – including learners and their families, teachers and school-administrators, policy and decision makers, donors and society. It generally serves at least one of the following purposes:

- **Certifying and validating learning**: at the system-level, summative assessment (or assessment of learning) is used to certify or select learners for a given grade or age, for further education, training or for work.
- **Providing an evidence base for policy development**: it provides evidence for monitoring, policy-making, planning and programme design.
- **Ensuring accountability for results**: it enhances accountability, transparency and better governance among a range of stakeholders (families, communities, teachers, ministries, employers, civil society groups and donors).
- **Informing teaching and learning practice**: from a pedagogical perspective, it serves to inform teaching and learning practices. Often referred to as assessment for learning, it generally focuses on the use of formative assessment strategies. It also helps learners identify their strengths and areas that need improvement, and motivates them to learn in sustainable ways, including through self-assessment, or assessment as learning.

Learning assessment is therefore not an end in itself. Regardless of its purpose, scope, object or nature, it is conducted with the ultimate goal of improving equity and learning for individuals, communities and society.

UNESCO network for learning assessment

A network comprised of UNESCO sectors, specialized institutes, as well as regional and country offices supports Member States in areas that are critical to improving learning processes and outcomes such as curriculum, pedagogy, teacher training, and assessment systems. The activities address a range of assessment issues, for learners of all ages, in a broad range of domains, in both formal and non-formal settings.

The types of support and activities undertaken on learning assessment reflect the UNESCO’s core functions in standard setting, capacity development, knowledge sharing and cooperation. These include:

- Supporting direct assessment of learning outcomes
- Knowledge sharing and building networks for planning, design and use of learning assessments
- Providing a space where issues can be openly discussed and debated to identify and address country needs for improving the quality of their education systems
Strengthening individual and institutional capacity through training and tailored technical assistance

Consolidating and standardizing existing data for monitoring progress at national, regional and global levels

Producing research to inform policies and strategies for improving learning and equity

Through coordinated efforts, the network strengthens coherence and cooperation at national, regional and international levels and supports Member States in translating the Education 2030 commitments into strategies for improved equity and learning outcomes for all.

**Global initiatives**

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**Regional networks**

- **Network on Education Quality Monitoring in Asia-Pacific**
- **Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education**
- **Africa's Teaching and Learning Educators’ Network for Transformation**
A selection of publications on learning assessment

More than one-half of children and adolescents are not learning worldwide

Analyzing and Utilizing Assessment Data for Better Learning Outcomes

Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes

Monitoring Progress towards SDG 4.1: Initial Analysis of National Assessment Frameworks for Mathematics

Assessment of Transversal Competencies

Third and sixth grade teachers in Latin America and the Caribbean

Ten notes on learning assessment systems

TERCE: Gender inequality in learning achievement in primary education

Regional mapping report on assessment in the Arab States

Global Media and Information Literacy Assessment Framework

Smaller, Quicker, Cheaper: Improving learning assessments for developing countries
UNESCO Education Sector

Education is UNESCO’s top priority because it is a basic human right and the foundation on which to build peace and drive sustainable development. UNESCO is the United Nations’ specialized agency for education and the Education Sector provides global and regional leadership in education, strengthens national education systems and responds to contemporary global challenges through education with a special focus on gender equality and Africa.

The Global Education 2030 Agenda

UNESCO, as the United Nations’ specialized agency for education, is entrusted to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 Agenda, which is part of a global movement to eradicate poverty through 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Education, essential to achieve all of these goals, has its own dedicated Goal 4, which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” The Education 2030 Framework for Action provides guidance for the implementation of this ambitious goal and commitments.

For more information:

Section of Partnerships, Cooperation and Research Division for Education 2030 Support and Coordination UNESCO

7, place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris France

ESC-PCR@unesco.org
en.unesco.org/themes/learning-assessment
@Education2030UN