MONITORING TRENDS IN EDUCATIONAL GROWTH IN AFGHANISTAN: CLASS 6 2013

ACER

IN 2013, the Learning Assessment Unit of the Afghanistan Ministry of Education, in conjunction with the Centre for Global Education Monitoring at the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER-GEM), launched the Monitoring Trends in Educational Growth (MTEG) study in Afghanistan. Class 6 students in 13 provinces in Afghanistan were assessed in mathematics, reading and writing. In total, 5,979 students took the test in either Dari or Pashto, depending on their language of instruction.

The purpose of MTEG is to provide information to education policy makers on the quality of education outcomes in Afghanistan. In addition, MTEG will inform educational practitioners by clearly demonstrating what students in Class 6 can and cannot do in an assessment situation. The initial results, presented here in brief, show some promising outcomes as well as highlighting areas that require attention.

The results of MTEG 2013 Class 6 indicate that:

- a wide range of abilities is demonstrated by Class 6 students in mathematical, reading and writing literacy;

- the majority of Class 6 students demonstrate 'basic proficiencies' such as the ability to do basic mathematical operations, identify directly stated information in short texts on familiar topics, and write one or two very basic sentences; and

- a substantial minority of Class 6 students in Afghanistan did not demonstrate these 'basic proficiencies'.

By providing data on students' achievement in mathematical, reading and writing literacy, MTEG can assist in the development of education policy and practice. An advantage of MTEG's qualitative and quantitative descriptions is that benchmarks can be set against well-defined descriptions of knowledge, skills and understanding. Future rounds of MTEG assessments could then measure growth in educational achievement over time, and result in new standards being set.

Mathematics achievement in Class 6

Towards the top end of the scale in mathematics, 9% of Class 6 students can understand important mathematical terms and show developing skills in abstract reasoning. These students can do linked calculations that involve a number of steps, can perform calculations involving one-digit and two-digit numbers, and work with time. They can also use data in tables and graph form.

While these results are encouraging, there is also a large percentage of students performing at the lower end of the proficiency scale. Thirty-seven per cent of students in Class 6 were unable to perform basic arithmetic operations, such as adding two-digit numbers; interpreting text describing a familiar situation involving mathematical ideas; or using standard graphical representations of data and of relative quantities.

Examples of the kinds of questions administered in the test are shown in *Example mathematics question 1* and *Example mathematics question 2*. The percentage of students who got these questions right in the test is also shown.

Example mathematics question 1

Najia buys 7 apples. They have a weight of 850 grams altogether. What is the approximate weight of one apple?

A.   about 12 grams

B.   about 80 grams

C.   about 120 grams

D.   about 600 grams

30% of students given this question correctly chose answer C.

Example mathematics question 2

$13 \times 6 = ?$

A.   68

B.   78

C.   603

D.   618

58% of students given this question correctly chose answer B.

Reading achievement in Class 6

Promisingly, a large majority of students are able to demonstrate fundamental reading skills – such as recognising the meaning of single sentences on familiar topics – and a significant if small proportion of the population is performing well on relatively difficult reading tasks.

At the top end of the range, 12% of students were able to identify the main message in short texts on familiar topics, and 3% of Class 6 students could explain the behaviour and emotions of characters in a narrative text.

The results for reading show that at the lower end of the proficiency range, 23% of Class 6 students did not demonstrate the reading ability required to recognise simple and explicitly-stated details, in a very short text such as a note to a relative. Nor were they able to identify the message of a narrative supported by repetition in the text. Most of these students were able to match one of four given words to a simple illustration of a single, highly familiar object such as the wheel shown in the *Example reading question*.

Example reading question

(Select the word which matches the picture)

A. Car
B. Shoe
C. Wheel
D. Goat

88% of students given this question correctly chose answer C.

Writing achievement in Class 6

Results from the writing assessment provide important information on the range of abilities in the Class 6 cohort.

At the lower end of the scale, forty-five per cent of Class 6 students in Afghanistan were unable to demonstrate the ability to write two basic sentences using correct grammar. Some of these students showed the ability to label an everyday object using a correctly spelled single word, but 31% of Class 6 students did not demonstrate this basic skill. *Example writing question 1* is an illustration of the word-labelling question type.

Example writing question 1

Write the correct word for this object.

80% of students given this question were able to write a recognisably correct version of the word for 'foot'.

On the other hand, 19% of students demonstrated the ability to form simple sentences correctly and use vocabulary adequately to convey important elements of a short and simple message. They could include important elements that are characteristic of the kind of writing required, for example, using persuasion in a message to a family member or writing an introduction and ending in a narrative. They could also use basic punctuation correctly in a story.

Example writing question 2 is another example of the kinds of tasks students were administered in the test.

Example writing question 2

Write two sentences to describe this picture.

1. _____
2. _____

58% of Class 6 students given this question were able to write at least one sentence to describe the picture.

60% of students given this question could use at least three relevant content words – nouns, verbs or adjectives – when writing about this picture.

The initial results from MTEG provide a baseline for monitoring the learning outcomes of students in Afghanistan in the years ahead. Testing of the Class 3 and Class 9 cohorts will add to the picture of Afghan students' educational outcomes. The results from the 2013 Class 6 assessment are encouraging, showing that many students are demonstrating basic skills. When compared with international results, however, it is clear that for many students in Afghanistan there is still a lot to be learned.

Having taken the important step of implementing an assessment of reading, writing and mathematical proficiency, Afghanistan has recognised that high-quality education is fundamental to addressing the needs of its population, now and in future generations. MTEG data collected now and in subsequent assessments can inform education policy and practice and form an integral part of the Ministry's work towards providing Afghanistan's students with the skills, knowledge and understanding to succeed on the global stage.

For more information on the results of the
2013 MTEG assessment of Class 6 students in Afghanistan, please refer to Class 6 Proficiency in Afghanistan 2013, available at
http://www.acer.edu.au/gem/activities/mteg/products

More information about the MTEG program is available at
www.acer.edu.au/gem/activities/mteg

More information about ACER-GEM is available at
http://www.acer.edu.au/gem

More information about the Learning Assessment Unit of the Afghanistan Ministry of Education is available at
http://moe.gov.af/en/page/lau

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