

Developing a tool for analysing national assessment systems



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A joint initiative between the Global Partnership for Education and ACER supports countries in analysing national learning assessment systems.



Countries around the globe are consolidating efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal for Education that emphasises improving the quality of education. Data on learning outcomes provide empirical evidence on the quality of education and support building stronger education systems.

A report released by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics in 2017 highlighted the worldwide 'learning crisis', with an estimated 617 million children and adolescents finding it difficult to read a sentence or perform simple mathematics despite attending school. Clearly, the quality of education systems is a huge challenge in many contexts.

In this context, there has been an increasing emphasis on learning assessment. Regardless of the kind of assessment, be it large-scale assessments at national, regional or international levels, public examinations or classroom assessments, the evidence gathered can be powerful if used for decision making. Practitioners can use the data to inform teaching and learning, while policymakers can make informed decisions for system-level planning purposes.

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Secretariat appointed the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to develop a tool for analysing national assessment systems and identifying areas for improvement. Known as the Analysis of National Learning Assessment Systems (ANLAS), it provides a framework and tools that help countries, particularly GPE partner developing countries, to examine their national learning assessments and design strategies to address any gaps.

This work is part of GPE's broader commitment to improving learning outcomes and building effective and efficient learning systems, which are two of the three goals in its strategic plan (known as GPE 2020). These goals are reflected in GPE's implementation grants at country level as well as a



global initiative known as Assessment for Learning (A4L). A4L aims to enhance learning assessment systems across countries and to promote a holistic measurement of learning, and ANLAS is a core component of this effort.

ANLAS is a diagnostic tool that helps to evaluate learning assessment systems. The recommendations support improvements through the development of effective policies, structures and practices. After all, the aim of strengthening assessment systems is to gain relevant data to further improve education quality.

The key features of ANLAS are its diagnostic function, cross-sectional consideration of 21st century skills and the integration of the analysis and findings into the education sector planning process. The development of the ANLAS toolkit commenced in June 2018. Following a pilot implementation in three GPE partner countries, Ethiopia, Vietnam and Mauritania, the toolkit will

be refined, with planned completion in August 2019.

ANLAS is conceived as a country-led, participative process. The analysis is undertaken in collaboration with key education stakeholders – representing the Ministry of Education at national and provincial levels, external assessment agencies, development partners, civil society or private organisations and teacher organisations.

ANLAS pilots

The ANLAS pilots are designed to validate the content of the toolkit, examine the process of using these resources to analyse the national learning assessment system and provide recommendations to inform improvement strategies. In collaboration with partners, the GPE Secretariat selected three countries for piloting ANLAS: Ethiopia, Mauritania and Vietnam.

The country selection was based on country interest and demand, planned

period of the next Education Sector Plan, the existence of different modalities of assessment and policy interest in assessment of 21st century skills.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia was the first country to undertake the piloting of ANLAS. A national team led by the National Educational Assessment and Examinations Agency (NEAEA) was established, with representation from relevant directorates of the Federal Ministry of Education. ACER trained and worked with the national team to plan the pilot implementation. The GPE Secretariat then undertook a mission to Addis Ababa in January 2019 to engage with the national team and stakeholders about ANLAS and Ethiopia's participation in the initiative.

The stakeholder briefing was attended by several NEAEA officials, relevant directorates of the Ministry and representatives of development partners. ACER worked with the

Ethiopia national team to support the data collection, analysis and reporting process, providing in-country support in Addis Ababa and ongoing remote support. The team undertook stakeholder consultations including with development partners, representatives from relevant government directorates and teachers, and parents and school leaders from primary and secondary schools. The team used the information gathered from the stakeholder consultations in combination with their document analysis to identify the strengths and areas for improvement in Ethiopia's assessment system.

Ethiopia faces a number of systemic challenges in the reinforcement of its learning assessment system, such as a federal education system that makes administering public examinations and the national learning assessment challenging. While Ethiopia currently implements a variety of assessment programs, there are no regional or international programs undertaken. Ethiopia envisages joining a regional and/or international program in the future and fortifying the capacity of the NEAEA. Another future priority includes strengthening the current assessment programs, for example through incorporating the assessment of 21st century skills, ensuring that relevant contextual data is collected and ascertaining that data from these assessments is disseminated and used effectively by relevant stakeholders.

The Ethiopia team's final ANLAS country report will detail challenges such as these and provide recommendations for improvement. The national team plans to use the ANLAS findings to inform their next Education Sector Development Plan.

Vietnam

Vietnam was the second country to launch the ANLAS pilot. The national team was established with representatives from the Vietnam Education Quality Management Agency-Centre of Educational Quality

Evaluation, relevant departments of the Education Ministry, the Vietnam National Institute of Educational Sciences and the National Academy of Education Management. A Steering Committee representing senior officials from the relevant agencies and departments was also established to provide guidance and support for the implementation of ANLAS, enabling close collaboration between the key stakeholders at every stage, from preparation through analysis to reporting and dissemination.

In February 2019, the stakeholder briefing was held in Hanoi, in collaboration between the national team, the Steering Committee and the GPE Secretariat. ACER then trained the national team and provided support during the data collection and analysis phase. In March 2019 ACER visited Hanoi to participate in some of the piloting activities. Important insights were gained about the active engagement of the national team, the Steering Committee and key stakeholders in the consultative analysis process. School visits were also undertaken to collect information about classroom assessment practices at the school level.

The national team and Steering Group's country report for Vietnam will describe the findings of ANLAS and recommendations for improvement. In recent years, Vietnam has been actively participating in cross-national learning assessment programs both at regional and international levels. The findings from ANLAS can help to identify further aspects to improve the learning assessment system in Vietnam.

Mauritania

The third country to roll out the ANLAS pilot is Mauritania. To facilitate the piloting support for ANLAS in Mauritania in French language, ACER is collaborating with the technical team from PASEC (Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems) of CONFEMEN (Conference of Ministers

of Education in French-Speaking Countries).

The national team in Mauritania was established with representatives from the relevant departments of the Ministry of Education. The stakeholder briefing undertaken by the GPE Secretariat showed high engagement from various key stakeholders including from different Ministry departments, development partners, and representatives from civil society organisations including a teacher union and the national parents' association.

The national team received on-the-ground support from CONFEMEN/PASEC during the training and planning stage, and initial data collection phase. Since the national team consists of relevant key stakeholders in the learning assessment system, the analysis has been highly consultative from the beginning. In addition to focus group discussions, interviews and document analysis, the Mauritania team will undertake a number of school visits to investigate classroom assessment practices. The national team will analyse and evaluate the findings of ANLAS and present important aspects and recommendations for improvement in the country report for Mauritania.

The three piloting countries, various organisations and individuals involved are contributing significantly to the consultative development process of ANLAS. The learnings from the pilot will substantively inform the refinement of the tools and ultimately support countries in building effective learning assessment systems. ■

LINKS

<https://rd.acer.org/article/supporting-national-learning-assessment-systems>

<https://rd.acer.org/article/piloting-a-new-learning-assessment-approach>

<https://www.globalpartnership.org/>

<https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/gpe-2020-strategic-plan>