



Nepal shifts to the testing of higher order skills

An overhaul of the examination system in Nepal focuses on standardisation of exams and assessing higher order thinking skills at the end of basic education.

Nepal has undergone a long and complex transition towards establishing federalism in recent years. The new structure of governance offers opportunities and challenges for the education sector.

The amendment of the Education Act in 2016 introduced two key changes to school education: examinations at the completion of basic education in Grade 8 that allows entry to secondary education; and the formation of the National Examination Board (NEB) to oversee standardisation of the Grade 8 and secondary school examinations.

Under the new decentralised structure, 753 local governments in Nepal have conducted the Grade 8 examinations since March 2018. There were some impediments to smooth implementation of the exam, including a lack of coordination between NEB, Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), and local governments, weak monitoring mechanisms, and absence of comprehensive documentation of examinations at the federal level.

The Asian Development Bank, under the School Sector Development Plan, partnered with ACER in India to provide technical assistance to improve the Grade 8 school examinations to ensure that it effectively measures student learning outcomes.

The project is divided into three phases:

- a scoping review and situational analysis that offer recommendations for the next stages of the project
- development of an assessment framework that provides clear guidelines for valid, reliable, and consistent assessments in English, mathematics, and science
- capacity building of key stakeholders in examinations and assessment.

The scoping review and situational analysis involved a visit to Nepal and consultations with key stakeholders to understand the educational challenges and learning assessment needs. The analysis found that:

- key agencies and related bodies had diverse views on subjects that should be included in the Grade 8 examinations

- technical capacity varied across key government educational agencies, so the standardisation of examinations had to be achieved by tapping resources of more than one department
- there was a lack of understanding of modern item analysis and its techniques
- local governments were not fully equipped to implement the examination process, including item writing, test building, administration, monitoring, and student and school results reporting
- the specific areas for capacity development were item writing, test development, psychometric item analysis and field trialling.

The development of the assessment framework was a lengthy and detailed activity – from defining test domains to developing the principles for rubrics for each domain. The central theme of the framework was the introduction of higher order thinking skills items in the Grade 8 examinations to divert teaching and learning in Nepal away from rote learning. The other was achieving the standardisation of exam results based on the modern item analysis theory.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the first of the series of capacity building workshops on developing test items was conducted virtually. Selected staff from the Education Review Office, CDC, NEB, and secondary school assessment specialists, teachers, principals, headmasters, and heads of departments participated in the workshop. The consequent workshops,

conducted online, focused on quality assurance of test items and creation of an item bank.

The key results of the project include a robust assessment framework and draft high-quality assessment items that can be included in the final assessment. The items were reviewed for quality assurance and a pool of questions created. An important outcome of the workshops will be a team of local Nepalese experts, trained by ACER, who will become the backbone of the assessment system.

‘It has been a wonderful experience working with Nepali education experts who are open to new and innovative ideas and immensely motivated by the love for their country. We look forward to future engagements in supporting educational assessments and quality education in Nepal,’ says Dr Mee Young Han, ACER India Research Director.

Throughout the project, ACER has been working closely with local experts as well as education officers in the government, which will enable them to develop their own capacity and ultimately achieve the goal of examination standardisation by themselves. ■

Further reading

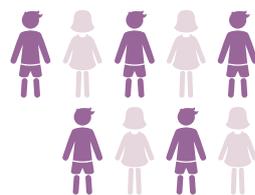
Read more on ACER Discover at: acer.org/in/discover/article/supporting-examination-reform-in-nepal

The data for the illustration was taken from uis.unesco.org/en/country/np

Nepal education statistics



103 384
children not in school



96%
of children aged 5-9 are enrolled in primary school



62%
of young people aged 10-16 are enrolled in secondary school