

Large-scale assessments in the context of developing countries

A new analysis of assessments around the world identifies how best to operate large-scale assessments in developing countries. **Ursula Schwantner** reports.



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Large-scale assessments in education such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) assist governments in monitoring the outcomes of education systems in terms of student achievement.

Administered on a regular basis and within an internationally accepted common framework, large-scale assessments like PISA enable governments, education system leaders and practitioners to better understand how students are performing on a set of common tasks compared to students in other countries. They also help governments to understand and enhance the effectiveness of their

educational systems and to learn from other countries.

While developed countries have long participated in such international large-scale assessment programs, many developing countries have also identified the need for comparative data about their education systems and student outcomes.

Providing measures of education quality

Assessments like the OECD-initiated PISA for Development (PISA-D), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS, PrePIRLS) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS and TIMSS Numeracy) by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, programs by the Laboratorio Latinoamericano de Evaluación de la Calidad de la Educación (LLECE), Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Educatifs de la CONFEMEN (PASEC), and the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) seek to meet that need. But what are the key requirements if large-scale assessments are to

provide useful comparative measures of the provision of education quality in developed as well as developing contexts?

A new report from the Centre for Global Education Monitoring at ACER reviews major international, regional and national large-scale learning assessments. The report identifies effective assessment practices as a detailed reference for agencies in developing countries that are involved or plan to participate in international comparative large-scale assessments in education.

The report, *A Review of International Large-Scale Assessments in Education*, commissioned by the OECD and the World Bank, compares:

- component skills and cognitive instruments used in large-scale assessments
- contextual frameworks and instruments applied, and
- implementation models of international and regional assessments.

The report also reviews large-scale assessment programs that collect data about the achievement of school-aged



children who do not attend school, as well as ways in which data from the different assessments are used.

Consistency and comparability

The report makes a number of recommendations that support the development and maintenance of consistency and comparability in large-scale assessments to ensure that such assessments in general, and PISA-D in particular, generate useful information about student achievement and the effectiveness of educational programs.

This includes the recommendation that large-scale learning assessments, including those for developing countries, have an agreed framework to guide item development and test design, and to follow well-established procedures for the creation of new items. An appropriately targeted test and the description of proficiency levels will provide valuable information to education ministries in the participating countries.

Frameworks and instruments for collecting context data are also discussed. Such background data are of utmost importance to describe

and compare the contexts of learning, and to investigate the relationships between these contexts and student performance. Typically, large-scale assessments collect contextual information from students, school principals, teachers and parents. Especially in developing contexts where resources are low, careful consideration is required as to what types of questionnaires are implemented, in order to collect the most essential information in the most efficient way.

The report also points to the value of assessment approaches used in citizen-led, household-based assessments like the Annual Status of Education Report in India and Uwezo in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda as a way to obtain information about children in the early years as well as school-aged children who do not attend school.

By identifying how best to operate large-scale assessments in developing countries, the report supports the efforts of governments and other agencies in monitoring efforts to provide inclusive and equitable quality education for all. ■

Further information

A Review of International Large-Scale Assessments in Education: Assessing component skills and collecting contextual data, by ACER's John Cresswell, Ursula Schwantner and Charlotte Waters, was produced with the support of the World Bank through its Russia Education Aid for Development Trust Fund program, as part of its contribution to the OECD PISA-D project and published by the OECD.

LINKS

Read more about ACER's education and development program at www.acer.edu.au/research/areas-of-research/education-and-development

Read *A Review of International Large-Scale Assessments in Education: Assessing component skills and collecting contextual data* by John Cresswell, Ursula Schwantner and Charlotte Waters at www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/a-review-of-international-large-scale-assessments_9789264248373-en