



SABER

Student Assessment

2016

National governments and international agencies recognize the key role of student assessments in building an effective education system. The assessments provide information on whether all students in an education system are learning and how well. Without good assessment information, it is impossible to know whether a system's policies and practices are working or how they might be changed. SABER-Student Assessment documents and analyzes the quality of student assessment systems to help countries generate and use better assessment data.

Why do countries invest in student assessment?

Growing evidence indicates that many of the benefits of education—cultural, economic, and social—accrue to society only when learning occurs. In response, governments, international organizations, and other stakeholders are increasingly recognizing the importance of assessment for monitoring and improving student learning, and the concomitant need to develop strong systems for student assessment. The right kinds of assessment activities, and the right uses of data generated by those activities, contribute to better learning outcomes.

What challenges exist?

Over the last two decades, many countries have started implementing assessment exercises or reforming their

existing assessment systems. In addition, more countries now participate in international comparative assessment exercises. Nongovernmental organizations have also increasingly turned to student assessment to draw public attention to poor achievement levels. Despite these efforts, too few countries have in place the policies, structures, practices, and tools that constitute an effective student assessment system. This is particularly the case in low-income countries, which would benefit most from robust, systematic efforts to measure learning outcomes. While some low-income countries have experimented with new assessments of student learning, including participation in international assessments, these efforts have often been ad hoc and standalone, and not integrated into an education strategy.

One-time assessments can have shock value, opening the door to a broader discussion of the quality of education. But sustained assessment systems are necessary for countries to monitor learning trends and better understand the relative impact of various inputs and educational practices on student learning outcomes.

What is SABER-Student Assessment?

Using new diagnostic tools and detailed policy information, the World Bank Group's Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) platform collects and analyzes comparative data and knowledge on education systems around the world and highlights the policies and institutions that matter most to promote learning for all children and youth. SABER's detailed

data-gathering and analysis are organized by “domains,” or areas of education policymaking within an education system.

These currently include levels of education (early childhood development, primary and secondary, workforce development, and tertiary), types of quality resources and supports (school finance, school health and school feeding, and teachers), areas of governance (engaging the private sector and school autonomy and accountability), information sources (education management information systems and student assessment), and complementary inputs and cross-cutting themes (equity and inclusion, information and communication technologies, and resilience). SABER aims to give all parties with a stake in educational results—from students, administrators, teachers, and parents to policymakers and business people—an accessible, detailed, objective snapshot of how well the policies of their country’s education system are oriented toward ensuring that all children and youth learn.

SABER-Student Assessment documents and analyzes student assessment systems in both developed and developing countries, helping countries to identify reform options and determine their appropriate sequencing. The goal is to promote stronger assessment systems by making information and tools based

on the latest evidence of what works available in one easily accessible location.

What drives effective student assessment?

SABER-Student Assessment helps countries understand how different assessment activities and systems can help improve education quality and learning. An assessment system is a group of policies, structures, practices, and tools for generating and using information on student learning. Effective assessment systems are those that provide information of sufficient quality and quantity to meet stakeholder information and decision-making needs in support of improved education quality and learning outcomes.

SABER-Student Assessment equips countries with diagnostic tools for three types of assessment activities:

- **Classroom assessments** for providing real-time information to support teaching and learning in individual classrooms.
- **Examinations** for making high-stakes decisions about an individual student’s progress through the education system, including the allocation of ‘scarce’ educational opportunities.
- **Large-scale, system-level assessments** for monitoring and providing policymaker- and practitioner-relevant

information on overall performance levels in the system, changes in those levels, and related or contributing factors.

SABER-Student Assessment shows countries how to strengthen the three types of assessment activities to guide policy and decision-making. To be useful, assessments need to be strong in three areas:

- **Enabling context** covers the policy or legislative framework for assessment activities, institutional and organizational structures, the availability of sufficient and stable funding, and the presence of trained staff.
- **System alignment** refers to how well the assessment is aligned with the rest of the education system.
- **Assessment quality** addresses the psychometric quality of instruments, processes, and procedures, including the technical and ethical standards for reporting and using assessment results.

How is SABER-Student Assessment helping to improve education systems?

SABER-Student Assessment is supporting governments in their efforts to improve education results by:

- Providing a comprehensive framework based on a thorough review of global evidence and related

diagnostic tools which is helping countries to identify the key quality drivers that need to be addressed in order to strengthen the quality and utility of the information produced by the various activities in their assessment system.

- Evaluating the quality of assessment systems and helping countries identify and enact reforms to strengthen them.
- Enabling cross-country learning and fostering informed dialogue and decision-making using a structured framework and methodology.
- Enhancing the global knowledge base on effective student assessment policies.

How are countries and partner organizations using SABER-Student Assessment to improve system effectiveness?

Russia Education Aid for Development (READ) Trust Fund program. The READ Trust Fund is a collaboration of the Government of the Russian Federation and the World Bank Group that focuses on helping low-income countries improve their learning outcomes through the design, implementation, and use of robust systems for student assessment. Between 2009 and 2015, READ provided targeted support to eight countries: Angola, Armenia, Ethiopia, the Kyrgyz Republic, Mozambique, Tajikistan,

Vietnam, and Zambia. At the start of the READ program, SABER-Student Assessment tools were used to benchmark each country's assessment system and to highlight those areas most in need of improvement and financial and technical support. The tools were also used to measure progress in the strengthening of each country's assessment system over time. For example:

- **Ethiopia.** The main challenges identified by the initial SABER-Student Assessment benchmarking exercise were the lack of clear assessment policies, uncertain lines of responsibility for assessment, irregular funding, and low technical capacity. With READ support, a national policy framework for assessments and examinations was developed, a new National Educational Assessment and Examinations Agency responsible for national examinations and national large-scale assessment was created, and a dedicated line item for national large-scale assessment activities was added to the government budget. In addition, technical capacity was enhanced through study visits and specialized training courses in assessment.
- **Kyrgyz Republic.** The initial SABER-Student Assessment benchmarking exercise highlighted the need to support high-quality, formative assessment in

the classroom and create a new school-leaving examination that would be aligned with the recently introduced competency-based curriculum. Five years in, teacher training institutions have more clearly defined mandates for building teacher capacity to carry out classroom assessment and more than 6,200 primary school teachers have been trained and better equipped to incorporate formative assessment into their teaching practices. Additionally, a new school-leaving examination aligned to the curriculum changes has been developed and piloted.

- **Vietnam.** Vietnam's SABER-Student Assessment exercise highlighted the need for more training of key stakeholders in how to design and implement assessment activities and the need to transform the country's curriculum and assessments from knowledge- to competency-based. With support from READ, training programs were developed for all key stakeholders, a new competency-based assessment framework was adopted, and the groundwork was laid for a new competency-based curriculum. In addition, Vietnam's Latent rating for international large-scale assessment activity solidified the Ministry of Education's decision to take part in the

Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2012. Participation in PISA provided Vietnam's education leaders with a wealth of new information on learning outcomes that will allow them to make more evidence-based decisions about ongoing education reforms.

PISA for Development.

In 2013, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) announced a new initiative – PISA for Development. Through this initiative, OECD is piloting a modified version of the current PISA, one in which certain enhancements have been made for the

developing-country context. Seven countries have been selected to participate in the pilot: Cambodia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay, Senegal, and Zambia. Participating countries are meant to benefit from activities aimed at building their national capacity in assessment design, data analysis, and use of results for monitoring and improvement. The SABER-Student Assessment tools and PISA technical standards were used to conduct an initial capacity-needs assessment in each country and to create customized capacity-building plans.

SABER-Student Assessment Partners

Much of the work carried out under SABER-Student Assessment was supported through the READ Trust Fund program, a seven-year partnership of the World Bank Group and the Russian government that focused on improving education quality in low-income countries, with a particular focus on student assessment systems. The Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is also a strong supporter of SABER and education systems research and has done much work to support the application of SABER globally.