

Foreword

In the past two decades there has been a strong emphasis on increasing access to education for children around the globe. The Education for All goals established in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 reflected a strong commitment by countries to meeting basic learning needs for their children. The commitment to improving “Learning for All” was restated in 2000 in the Dakar Framework for Action, in which Goal 6 emphasised improving the quality of education (UNESCO, 2000). At the same time, the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2 also included a focus on all children and youth completing primary school.

While it is true that there has been a significant increase in the number of children attending school, there has also been an increasing concern about the level of learning taking place. The 2012 Education for All Global Monitoring Report estimated that at least 250 million primary school age children around the world are not able to read, write or count well enough to meet minimum learning standards, including those children who have spent at least four years in school (UNESCO, 2012).

In the wake of these concerns there has been a widening of the focus from simply access to education to access *plus* learning (LMTF, 2013). Indeed, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) adopted by the world at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015 to succeed the MDGs includes an education goal that emphasises inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all. In addition, the World Bank’s Strategy 2020 (World Bank, 2011) aims to promote country-level reforms of education systems to achieve “learning for all”. This emphasis on education quality and learning outcomes has led to increased interest in and demand for national, regional and international large-scale learning assessment.

While national assessments collect valuable data on education quality and performance development within a particular system, data from international assessments allow for a comparison across education systems, giving countries the opportunity to share techniques, organisational structures and policies that have proven efficient and successful. “Some countries achieve much higher levels of educational performance, in terms of system operation as well as outcomes, than would be expected based on their incomes. Detailed and internationally comparable information about education systems helps identify these strong performers in specific areas ... while also flagging weaknesses in other areas.” (World Bank, 2011: 32)

International educational assessments have been part of the global scene since 1964, when the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) conducted the first internationally comparative study in mathematics in which 12 countries participated. Since that time there has been a large increase in the number of international global and regional educational assessments. These are aimed at a variety of grade levels, for example, Grade 4 (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, or PIRLS, and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, or TIMSS) and

Grade 8 (TIMSS) – and include a number of different subjects to be assessed – for example, reading, mathematics and science (Programme for International Student Assessment, or PISA) and students’ knowledge of civics and citizenship (International Civic and Citizenship Study, or ICCS).

The OECD’s PISA survey has been implemented in a growing number of countries since it was first administered to 28 OECD member countries and 4 partner countries in 2000. In recent years the OECD has launched the PISA for Development project, which aims to increase developing countries’ use of PISA data to monitor progress towards national targets for improvement. It will do this using enhanced PISA survey instruments that are more relevant for the contexts found in developing countries and at the same time produce scores that are comparable to the standard PISA surveys (OECD, 2015).

This report compares and contrasts approaches regarding cognitive and contextual data collection instruments and implementation of the different international learning assessments, to identify assessment practices that are recognised as being effective. The findings will inform the PISA for Development assessment and, at the same time, act as a detailed reference for those involved in educational assessments – national, regional and international.

References

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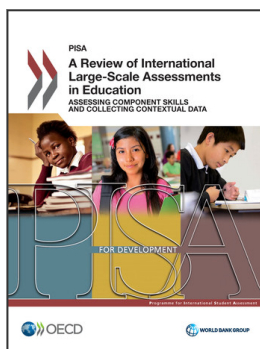
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