Sustainable Development Goals
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
Learning assessment at UNESCO
Ensuring effective and relevant learning for all

A selection of publications on learning assessment

UNESCO Education Sector
Education is UNESCO’s top priority because it is a basic human right and the foundation on which to build peace and drive sustainable development. UNESCO is the United Nations’ specialized agency for education and the Education Sector provides global and regional leadership in education, strengthens national education systems and responds to contemporary global challenges through education with a special focus on gender equality and Africa.

The Global Education 2030 Agenda
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For more information:
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en.unesco.org/themes/learning-assessment
@Education2030UN

This brochure was prepared collaboratively by colleagues from the UNESCO Education Sector, including from the Regional bureaux (Bangkok, Beirut, Dakar and Santiago) and the following institutes: UNESCO International Bureau of Education, UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, and UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

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Learning in a rapidly changing world

The fast changing and increasingly interconnected and interdependent world in which we live poses new challenges and offers new opportunities for ensuring sustainable, human and social development. At the heart of these processes is learning.

Learning is both the process of acquiring or developing knowledge, skills and attitudes all underpinned by values, as well as the result of that process. While learning can be deliberate, intentional, purposeful and organized, it is also often much less institutionalized and may take place in various activities of daily life, in the workplace or non-formal education programmes, in the local community, on a self-, family- or socially-directed basis. 1

An integrated approach to learning

As part of its humanistic tradition, UNESCO supports an integrated approach to learning throughout life - one which is relevant to the various dimensions of personal and collective human development. It is a holistic approach which attempts to balance and integrate the social, economic, cultural, ethical, environmental, spiritual, political and other purposes of education. This integrated approach is well captured in the four pillars of learning - learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together - and is arguably even more relevant for sustainable human and social development in today’s rapidly changing world. This is reflected through the growing interest in areas such as intercultural learning, digital media literacy and global citizenship education.

Renewed focus on equitable learning quality for all by 2030

Education 2030 has refocused attention on learning, as echoed in Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” The goal implies effective acquisition of foundational skills and an understanding of the social, economic, cultural, ethical, environmental, spiritual, political and other purposes of education. This integrated approach is well captured in the four pillars of learning - learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together - and is arguably even more relevant for sustainable human and social development in today’s rapidly changing world.

Learning assessment to enable learning

Learning assessment is part of evaluating and monitoring education more broadly. It refers to a wide range of methods and tools used to evaluate, measure and document learning outcomes and learning progress. It is about gathering information from multiple sources on what learners know and what they can do with what they have learnt. It also provides information on the process and context that enable learning, as well as those that may be hindering the learning process.

Learning assessment can address the needs of a range of actors – including learners and their families, teachers and school administration, policy and decision makers, donors and society. It generally serves at least one of the following purposes:

- Certifying and validating learning: at the system-level, summative assessment for assessment of learning is used to certify or select learners for a given grade or age, for further education, training or for work.
- Providing an evidence base for policy development: it provides evidence for monitoring, policy-making, planning and programme design.
- Ensuring accountability for results: it enhances accountability, transparency and better governance among a range of stakeholders (families, communities, teachers, ministries, employers, civil society groups and donors).
- Informing teaching and learning practice: from a pedagogical perspective, it serves to inform teaching and learning practices. Often referred to as assessment for learning, it generally focuses on the use of formative assessment strategies. It also helps learners identify their strengths and areas that need improvement, and motivates them to learn in sustainable ways, including through self-assessment or assessment as learning.
- Learning assessment is therefore not an end in itself. Regardless of its purpose, scope, object or nature, it is conducted with the ultimate goal of improving equity and learning for individuals, communities and society.

UNESCO network for learning assessment

A network comprised of UNESCO sectors, specialized institutes, as well as regional and country offices supports Member States in areas that are critical to improving learning processes and outcomes such as curriculum, pedagogy, teacher training, and assessment systems. The activities address a range of assessment issues, for learners of all ages, in a broad range of domains, in both formal and non-formal settings.

The types of support and activities undertaken on learning assessment reflect the UNESCO’s core functions in standard setting, capacity development, knowledge sharing and cooperation. These include:

- Supporting direct assessment of learning outcomes
- Knowledge sharing and building networks for planning, design and use of learning assessments
- Providing a space where issues can be openly discussed and debated to identify and address country needs for improving the quality of their education systems

Global initiatives

- In-Progress Reflections on Current and Critical Issues in Curriculum, Learning and Assessment
- Learning Portal
- Global Observatory for the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of Non-formal and Informal Learning
- Global Alliance to Monitor Learning
- Measuring Global Citizenship Education & Education for Sustainable Development

Regional networks

- Network on Education Quality Monitoring in Asia-Pacific
- Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education
- Africa’s Teaching and Learning Educators’ Network for Transformation
- Strengthening individual and institutional capacity through training and tailored technical assistance
- Consolidating and standardizing existing data for monitoring progress at national, regional and global levels
- Producing research to inform policies and strategies for improving learning and equity

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Learning in a rapidly changing world

UNESCO Education Sector

Consolidating and standardizing existing data for monitoring progress at national, regional and global levels

Strengthening individual and institutional capacity through training and tailored technical assistance

Producing research to inform policies and strategies for improving learning and equity

Through coordinated efforts, the network strengthens coherence and cooperation at national, regional and international levels and supports Member States in translating the Education 2030 commitments into strategies for improved equity and learning outcomes for all.

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Renewed focus on equitable learning quality for all by 2030

Education 2030 has refocused attention on learning, as echoed in Sustainable Development Goals 4, which aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." The goal implies effective acquisition of foundational and transferable skills as the basis for learning throughout life, as well as a focus on to the relevance of learning - both for the world of work, and for personal, civic and social life. This focus has implications in areas that are critical to improving learning processes and outcomes, such as curriculum, pedagogy, teacher training, and assessment processes and outcomes such as curriculum, pedagogy, teacher training, and assessment.

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- Global Media and Information Literacy Assessment Framework
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- Ten notes on learning assessment systems
- Smaller, Quicker, Cheaper: Improving learning assessments for developing countries
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