

SABER in Action: Student Assessment

Laying the groundwork for quality learning

National governments and international agencies recognize the key role of student assessment 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. The goal: to expand the scope and quality of learning for all.

Helping countries review their student assessment systems

SABER-Student Assessment helps countries understand how different assessment activities can improve education quality and learning. It equips countries with diagnostic tools for three types of assessments:

- *Classroom assessments*—to provide real-time information to support teaching and learning in individual classrooms.
- *Examinations*—to select or certify students as they move from one level of the education system to the next.
- *Large-scale, system-level assessments*—to provide feedback on the performance of the education system at particular grades or ages.

SABER-Student Assessment shows countries how to strengthen the three types of assessments to guide policy and decisionmaking. 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 sources of funding, and the presence of trained assessment 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.



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Helping countries focus on priorities for change

More than 30 countries at different levels of development have applied SABER-Student Assessment to evaluate the quality of their assessment systems and enact reforms to strengthen them. The evidence-based tools allow countries to rate the quality of their policies and system-level supports. Few countries have received the highest rating (Advanced) for any assessment area. Several have received an Established rating (minimum desirable standard) for one or more assessment areas. Most have received Latent or Emerging ratings, so there is considerable room for improvement. Many are weakest in large-scale, system-level assessment, which reduces their ability to use assessment data to monitor and guide national policymaking.

SABER-Student Assessment also helps countries identify reform options and determine their sequencing. For example, when *Vietnam* did its SABER- Student Assessment in 2009, it received a Latent rating for international large-scale assessment, signaling the country's lack of data for benchmarking learning outcomes. That solidified the Ministry of Education's decision to take part in PISA 2012. The country's impressive performance on PISA 2012 suggests that this assessment program will be a useful source of information to help benchmark and monitor policies and reforms for improved quality and learning.

Angola's SABER-Student Assessment helped government officials set priorities for activities to strengthen the country's assessment system. It also underlined the need for trained staff and stable funding to underpin future assessment reforms. The government established and trained a technical group in the Ministry of Education and put in place a new budget line for assessments. It then implemented Angola's first-ever assessment of early-grade reading. These efforts provided the foundation for a much larger set of assessment reforms and activities.

Tajikistan used SABER-Student Assessment to guide a national reform of the university entrance examination, which was viewed as a serious source of inequity in the ability of different groups to enter higher education. Corruption and poor test quality had undermined efforts to base entrance decisions on merit alone. The SABER exercise highlighted these and other issues and indicated how they might be dealt with. The government then designed and piloted a new entrance examination that addressed many of the issues of the old system.

Laying the groundwork for quality learning for all

Many low- and middle-income countries have a strong commitment to improving their assessment activities, but they will need sustained support and commitment from the international community to ensure that the changes take hold. Evidence-based tools such as SABER-Student Assessment can help countries generate and use better assessment data to expand the scope of learning for all students.

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