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Arab Regional Learning Assessment Framework (ARB-LAF)

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Table of Contents

Introduction

A new impetus for learning assessment

Learning assessment is a central component of all education systems, with an important role in informing education policy makers/shapers, practitioners, beneficiaries, theoricians/researchers and stakeholders about the quality of learning outcomes against set education goals and expected results.

Envisaged as a continuous process, not just as a collection of disconnected events, learning assessment is based on gathering valid, reliable and relevant data with regard to how well learners learn: i.e. whether they have achieved the set targets; their accomplishments and challenges in learning; and whether learning progression was possible, and how.

Learning assessment data can be collected from different sources pending on the assessment purposes and types. Usually, education systems tend to take stock of both internal and external assessment results; and of both continuous formative (classroom- and teacher-based) assessment (assessment *for* learning) and of different types of summative assessment (assessment *of* learning), be those tests, national examinations and/or large-scale international learning assessment studies.

In the context of implementing *Education Agenda 2030* and reaching *SDG4 targets*, learning assessments is expected to provide essential information with regard to the achievement of basic skills, such as numeracy, literacy and ICT-related skills. In addition, learning assessment is called upon to shed light on learner competencies related to subject areas/subjects; and on the development of competencies for life and work (transversal or key competencies), including competencies related to Global Citizenship Education (GCED) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). This is to say that learning assessment needs to approach learning in a holistic and comprehensive way, targeting all learning dimensions, including cognition and cognitive development, social and emotional skills, as well as practical and motor skills. A "whole-learner" focus of learning assessment has become noticeable over recent years in both large-scale international assessment studies and in assessments carried out at national and local/school levels.

The current Covid-19 crisis, in spite of the many shortcomings it caused in education systems the world over, has nevertheless constituted also a chance of looking at learning assessment by using fresh lenses, including through reconsidering learning assessment strategies in the context of remote/online and hybrid/blended learning. The current crisis has set also to the fore the need of aligning curriculum, teaching practices and learning assessment with a view of providing learners with cohesive and consistent learning objectives, contents, practices (including learning resources) and tasks (including assessment and evaluation tasks).

As in the case of other components (such as curriculum and teaching and learning policies and practices), lessons learned from the current Covid-19 pandemic will have a long-lasting effect on reimagining education and learning so as to enhance the quality of learning for all learners, including the most vulnerable. In the case of learning assessment, a new impetus for it entails:

a) enhancing our conceptual understanding of how to tailor fit for purpose assessments;
b) engaging teachers, learners, parents and other stakeholders in an inclusive way, by paying attention to the different learner needs and contexts (such as gender, ethnic, language and cultural/religious differences);

c) emphasizing ethical aspects, such as applying learning assessment in line with the principles of fairness, honesty, participation, transparency, accountability and positivity;

d) Establishing/improving national systems of assessment that rely on sustainable institutions and professional capacities to apply a variety of assessment strategies and tools that are mutually complementing and reinforcing one another; and

e) using assessment results constructively so that learning assessment can fulfill its potential of becoming indeed an opportunity to learn (assessment *as* learning).

Why *a Learning Assessment Framework* for the Arab Region?

The initiative of developing a *Learning Assessment Framework* for the Arab region and launching public consultations on the document aims at pulling together key ideas, messages and tools in support of the efforts Arab States currently make to improve their assessment systems in the service of quality learning for all.

A *Learning Assessment Framework* constitutes a supportive reference and orientation document that emphasizes in a consistent and cohesive way important elements that contribute to the establishment of functional national assessment systems, such as:

- o Current/state of the art understandings of learning assessment;
- o Important principles and ethical aspects of learning assessment underpinning assessment policies and practices;
- o How to use different types of assessment strategies and tools in a complementary manner by considering the "whole-learner";
- o Institutional and professional capacities needed to enhance learning assessment policies and practices in the context of implementing Education Agenda 2030 based on system-wide education alignment;
- o How to make productive usage of learning assessment results to inform forward-looking education and learning policies and practices;
- o How to rely on promising learning assessment policies and practices in the Region and internationally in order replicate them and build upon; and
- o What important initiatives and resources can be considered to enhance exchanges, research and learning from research outcomes and from one another.

While not an imposition, the *Learning Assessment Framework for the Arab Region* is meant to inspire and support the Arab countries' efforts in establishing and/or improving their national learning assessments. It aims at providing a comprehensive overview on learning assessment by emphasizing the contributions different education agents and stakeholders can have in putting in place sound learning assessment systems by overcoming working in silos and the lack of alignment with other education component, such as curriculum and teaching.

While some Arab countries developed their own separate Learning Assessment Frameworks, in some others Assessment frameworks are included in Curriculum Framework and/Teacher Standards; and in some there is still work to be done in aligning learning assessment with the country's education vision and SDG4 national strategies.

As in the case of political constitutions, Education Frameworks can be written/official documents – or they can occur as a set of established principles, rules, and mechanism that govern the country's policies and practices in particular education areas, such as curriculum, teaching and assessment. In both cases, it is important that Education Frameworks (in this particular case, Learning Assessment Frameworks) are translated constructively into forward-looking and positive mindsets, attitudes and behaviours.

Users and possible usages

A number of potential users may be interested in using the *Learning Assessment Framework* for the Arab Region, among which are:

- o As primary users, policy makers and learning assessment specialists responsible for the establishment and improvement of national learning assessment systems;
- o Also as primary users, teachers and teacher trainers, as well as curriculum developers that may find inspiration with regard to teachers' role in applying meaningful learning assessment and building on assessment results to enhance the quality of learning and support learners overcome their learning difficulties;
- o As secondary users, parents and other stakeholders, who could understand more about the role learning assessment plays for quality learning, as well as about their roles in supporting schools and learners perform better;
- o Also as secondary users, researchers that may find inspiration to inquire different aspects of learning assessment in the Arab countries with a view of identifying important trends and challenges, as well as promising policies, practices and resources.

Consultation process

The draft *Learning Assessment Framework for the Arab countries* is an open, work in progress document to be enriched and fine-tuned based on consultations with its potential beneficiaries and relevant education stakeholders.

A consultation mechanism will be put in place to engage education policy makers, specialists and stakeholders of the Arab region through in-person and virtual exchanges. This way a learning assessment network will start functioning in the Region, similar to the ones already existing in other UNESCO Regions that will be supported through a dedicated online platform.

It is hoped that the consultation process on the draft *Learning Assessment* Framework, as well as the network's engagement will set the grounds for reviving a forward-looking assessment culture in the Arab Region that will support enhancing learning outcomes and the overall quality of learning in the Region.

1.1 The SDG4 Framework for Action and The Need to enhance The Quality of Learning Outcomes

UNESCO's 2030 Agenda focuses on sustainable human and social development. It is inspired by a humanistic vision of education that transforms lives leaving no one behind and is grounded in the realities of the today's ever-changing world.

At the heart of these processes of transformation is learning as echoed in *Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4*, which aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." SDG 4 has a clear focus on quality of education, and quality implies *effective* acquisition of foundational and transferrable/transversal (or cross-cutting) 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 (UNESCO, 2017). This focus has implications in areas that are critical to improving learning processes and outcomes. These include teacher education, training and professional development, curriculum development and implementation, the design of teaching and learning materials, the establishment of learning-enabling environments, as well as learning assessment.

The changes taking place at the economic, social, educational[1] and technology levels have implications for education. Despite the advances in terms of access during the *EFA movement* (2000-2015) and the ambitious goals with regard to enhancing access, quality and outcomes of the current *Education 2030 Agenda*, a series of studies deem that we deal today with a 'global education crisis'. A significant share of children and youths are not acquiring basic competencies, not only because of incomplete access to educational opportunities, but also because of the poor quality of education provided (UNESCO Dakar, 2017). This has raised concern and led to a shift in discourse from education[2] to learning and has also signaled the emergence of a new **global context for** education, and new perspectives from which to understand the nature of **learning, how students learn,** and the role of knowledge and education in human development.

In line with this new conceptualization of learning, UNESCO supports an integrated approach to learning throughout life. This integrated approach is well captured in the four pillars of learning – learning to know, to do, to be and to live and work together that the UNESCO Delors Report (1996) has defined. Such an approach is even more relevant for the sustainable human and social development in today's rapidly changing world (UNESCO, 2017). These can also be thought of as: learning for personal development, learning to learn, learning for employment, and learning for active citizenship, respectively.

UNESCO also calls for an integrated development and for the interconnectedness of SDG 4 with other SDGs on human rights, gender equality, sustainability, and ICT. Such an integration calls for a transformation and paradigm shift to re-envision the role of education and learning as a societal project to produce creative critical thinkers and lifelong learners, as well as citizens with the freedom to access information and knowledge, build connections, and produce and disseminate knowledge in a constructive ways. Accordingly, to prepare learners for the 21st century, there is a need for an

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[1] Such as new approaches to cognition via cognitive sciences and brain research; and the current prevalence of social constructivist models of learning that underpin curriculum choices, as well as teaching and learning strategies.

[2] Education is understood as the totality of institutions, norms/rules, mechanisms and resources that are put in place to support learning processes. Learning constitutes the actual process of acquiring, developing and making proof of the competencies learners need (i.e., knowledge, skills, and attitudes – all underpinned by values).

interdisciplinary approach and for new and emerging areas in education that are considered critical for the future of children and youth such as citizenship education and ESD, youth and adult ICT skills.

Learning assessment (LA) is an important part of evaluating and monitoring education with the goal of improving equity and learning for individuals, communities, and the society at large. The ultimate objective of learning assessment is to enhance student outcomes through the improvement of practices at the different levels of the education system, including curriculum arrangements and teaching methods, school leadership processes, ways to organize learning in the context of enabling learning environments, and directions of education policy.

1.2 UNESCO's and Other Agencies Work on Learning Assessment

As lead Agency of *Education Agenda 2030* (*SDG4 – Education*), UNESCO is placing an emphasis on the role learning assessment plays in reaching SDG 4 targets, especially with regard to the quality of learning outcomes. Such outcomes include basic competencies – literacy, numeracy, and ICTs mastery - and multifaceted, complex competencies, such as subject-bound competencies, and competencies for life and work, for example those related to Global Citizenship Education (GCED) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), as parts of SDG4 – 4.7 target.

Over recent years, UNESCO has intensified its partnership with international organizations focusing on learning assessment, such as OECD and IEA. During the pandemic period and under the umbrella of the Global Education Coalition UNESCO is spearheading, several global and regional events and publications have been devoted to the changes occurring in the learning assessment field. [3]

As part of its knowledge production and management function, UNESCO has issued global overviews with regard to learning assessment initiatives and trends, among which the UNESCO *Learning Assessment Brochure* (2017) and UNESCO UIS' *Catalogue of Learning Assessment* (2.0 version).[4]

In addition, also during the pandemic crisis, UNESCO established an internal *Learning Assessment Community of Practice* (CoP) with a view of facilitating productive exchanges among UNESCO regions and enhancing UNESCO staff's capacity in providing timely and effective support to its Member States.

Through its specialized institutes, such as IIEP[5] and UIS[6], UNESCO delivers capacity development courses including on learning assessment issues – and how learning assessment indicators can help achieve SDG4 targets.

At Regional level, UNESCO Office in Beirut, the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States (ABEGS) and UNESCO's Category II Institutes (i.e. The Regional Center for Education Planning – RCEP and the Regional Center for Quality Education – RCQE) have carried out a series of webinars devoted to learning assessment in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

UNESCO launched also several activities and initiatives on learning assessment at both global and regional levels in support of its integrated approach to lifelong learning and its assessment. These projects reflected UNESCO's core functions in standard setting, capacity development, knowledge sharing and cooperation, and they address the learning needs of children, youth, and adults in a breadth of domains in both formal and non-

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[3] Details can be found on the link: https://en.unesco.org/themes/learning-assessments.
[4] https://en.unesco.org/system/files/private_documents/learning_assessments_brochure-eng-web.pdf
[5] UNESCO Institute for Education Planning.
[6] UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

formal education, with an increased focus on the recognition of learning achievements in non-formal and informal learning situations. Examples include support direct assessment of learning outcomes (many are not assessed like in arts, music and citizenship); conducting research to inform policies, and providing training and tailored technical assistance (UNESCO Dakar, 2017).

A network of UNESCO sectors, institutes, as well as regional and country offices support Member States in areas that are critical to improving their learning processes and outcomes. This network strengthens coherence and cooperation at national, regional and international levels. (UNESCO, 2017). The following figure presents some of the global and regional networks UNESCO is engaged with.

Fig. 1: UNESCO-supported initiatives and networks on learning assessment

UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank recently embarked on a joint initiative to support states in implementing large-scale assessments. This new initiative, called *Learning Data Compact*, aims at supporting countries, especially low-income countries, implement at least one quality measure of learning by 2025. A key vision under the initiative is for all countries to measure learning in *at least* **two subjects** (for example, math and reading), in at least **two grades** (for example, early primary, end of primary, end of lower secondary), and with at least **two planned rounds** over five years (i.e. the so-called 2x2x2 framework) - See **https://www.unicef.org/partnerships/learning-data-compact**.

1.3 The Role of Learning Assessment in National and Regional Contexts, and the Added Value of National Assessment Systems

A well-designed learning assessment system can provide valuable information to help improve educational outcomes for students, inform education policy and resourcing decisions, and monitor their impact. A learning assessment system integrates a variety of assessment types in all education stages, from classroom- and teacher-based assessment

to formalized tests, national examinations and international assessment studies. The results of such periodic and systematic assessments are used to provide reliable diagnoses of the education system and its different components, with a view of informing education policies to improve learning processes and outcomes.

Within learning assessment systems, the results of different types of assessment are used in a complementary way in order to reach sound conclusions and policy recommendations. Putting in place learning assessment systems (instead of random and isolated assessment events) contributes to more accurate, valid and reliable information gathering on learners' achievements and challenges, as a basis for adjusting/reformulating education policies and practices.

Data resulting from learning assessment can document the extent to which an education system is teaching its students what is expected, differences in achievement levels by subgroups (such as gender or region) and, if background data are collected, factors that contribute to reaching different levels of achievement. Information and data generated can also inform related educational research.

As evidence in policy-making, learning assessments can serve following usages (Best et al, 2013):

- As a measure of quality level, to diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of a system. This type of use will most likely be present during the agenda-setting and policy-formulation stages of the policy cycle, and in impacting policy types such as standard-setting, relative weight of different components of the education sector and decisions on system-wide curriculum content.

- To measure and ensure equity within the system. This relies on analysis that provides comparisons between groups (schools, regions, socioeconomic groups) in the system. This use will most likely be present during the policy formulation and implementation stages. Examples of this use include using information from assessments to design and target interventions to disadvantaged or vulnerable groups.

- As an accountability tool, or as evidence to practice control over the system covering both internal and external accountability. This use will most likely take place during the monitoring and evaluation stage of the policy process.

The following paragraphs will elaborate on the concept of learning assessment highlighting its principles, recent trends, and the main components/elements to be considered in designing a learning assessment framework.

2. Evolving Understanding(s) and Roles of Learning Assessment

Learning assessment is the ongoing process of **collecting, documenting, reflecting on, and using** information on what students know, understand, and can do in order to make an informed decision on the attainment of learning outcomes and learning progress.

It entails the usage of a wide range of tools, methods, and sources at different times, and the decisions based on the results may vary from how to design system wide programs to improve teaching and learning in schools, to identifying next steps in classroom instruction, and to determining which applicants should be admitted to university.

In order to take advantage of the complementarity of different learning assessment types and sources, countries rely increasingly on establishing *national learning assessment systems*.

Textbox 1: Importance of learning assessment systems

> **Learning assessment systems are important because:**
>
> - They allow for comprehensive approaches to assessing learning, from different sources, and in systematic and periodical manner;
>
> - They are based on sustainable institutions and professional capacities that support obtaining valid and reliable information with regard to the quality of learning processes and outcomes;
>
> - They provide transparent information to education policy makers and stakeholders in the spirit of accountability and professionalism based on which policy and decision makers, education practitioners and stakeholders can embark on innovative and forward-looking education change;
>
> - They emphasize assessment as a process, not just an event – and support alignment efforts of learning assessment with curriculum/learning and teaching practices.

2.1 Current Conceptualization of Learning Assessment

Recent years has witnessed a shift from psychometrics to educational/learning assessment, and from a testing culture to an assessment culture. A deep transformation, a paradigm shift, occurred with the underlying conceptions of what is learning, what is evaluation, and of what counts as achievement.

Significant recent changes in our ways to understand cognition led to the realization that what is taken into the mind is to a great extent socially and culturally determined and these led to a set of principles for curriculum reform. A commitment to equal opportunity for diverse learners and that 'all students can learn' emerged and with it the view of assessment, its role, and how it is conducted and used in the classroom changed.

Textbox 2: Main features of current learning assessment

> **Main features of current learning assessment include:**
>
> - Assessment is as an ongoing process integrated with instruction (i.e. teaching and learning) and aligned with it - and not a one-shot activity at end of instruction.
> - Usage of multiple approaches of assessment by taking into consideration their specific purposes, and the advantages and disadvantages of each approach. This enhances fairness and will reduce subjectivity associated with single assessments.
> - Follows the fitness for purpose principle in that same assessment cannot be used for a range of purposes. The goal of a learning assessment is to generate data that are appropriate for their desired purposes of reporting on learning outcomes.
> - It provides challenging authentic tasks to elicit higher order thinking and other skills, such as social and emotional skills.
> - It addresses learning processes as well as learning outcomes.
> - It is used formatively in support of assessing students' regular/continuous work.
> - Expectations are made clear to students in terms of clear goals, objectives and scoring criteria.
> - Students are engaged in their learning and in evaluating their work and that of their peers. Encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning and for self- and peer-assessment.
> - It is used to evaluate teaching as well as student learning.

2.2 Recent Trends in Leaning Assessment

In line with re-conceptualizing the role of learning assessment and its positive impact on teaching and learning, other important trends emerged as follows:

- *Technological advances, Computer Adaptive Testing (CAT),* etc. The prevalence of technology has significant implications for learning assessment. It enhanced the usage of item banking, and computer-adaptive tests that accommodate different levels of student ability. Technology has also enabled use of new item types, including simulations, and automated scoring, and enabled teachers to access data about students online and to record grades electronically.

- *Authentic or complex performance-based assessments requiring active construction of meaning are becoming increasingly used*. They engage students in learning and require thinking skills and thus are more in line with the integrated and holistic approach to learning as well as societal needs to prepare students for an increasingly complex workplace.

- *Educational accountability and high-stakes tests*. Last decade has witnessed increased use of national and cross-national learning assessments around the world. They usually describe the knowledge and skills of a target population, highlight disparities in learners' cognitive abilities by important socio-economic dimensions, attempt to understand the factors that influence learning achievement, and identify the general trends in achieving targets. These assessments had profound effect on learning assessment in the classroom, as for most teachers what they do in the classroom is influenced by the content and format of these tests. There is increased pressure on schools to show positive test results, as well as to evaluate teachers based on their students test scores. Evidence shows that they can lead to a) narrowing of the curriculum, b) teaching to the test, and c) the neglect of a broad range of competencies related to personal development (UNESCO Dar Es Salam, 2018).

- *Assessment of special needs students*. New regulatory decrees both nationally and internationally have significantly impacted the assessment and instruction of children with disabilities. Current laws require that students with special needs, with few exceptions, to be included in regular education classes and participate in all assessments with appropriate accommodation(s) provided. So regular classroom teachers will have more students receiving special education services in their classrooms in terms of instruction and assessment and they will need to be involved in preparing individualized educational programs (IEPs) for these students and assess their progress towards goals and objectives specified in the IEPs.

- *Assessment as a tool to enhance inclusion and cater for the different learner needs*. In addition to supporting special needs learners, learning assessment is increasingly considered in identifying learner needs and challenges so that all learners benefit from equal opportunities to make progress, regardless of their gender, social background and economic background, ethnicity, language, religion and culture.

- *Learning assessment of the whole learner*. While some decades ago the focus in learning assessment was merely on knowledge and cognitive skills, today there is an increased impetus towards assessing learning comprehensively, including the so-called soft competencies (or 21st Century skills), such as social and emotional skills (SEL).

- *Use of formative assessment for learning purposes* (Assessment *as* learning) The frequent, interactive assessment of student progress to identify learning needs

and shape teaching has taken on an increasingly important role in education policy. It aims at fully engaging students and supporting the learning process through providing constructive feedback and identifying the next steps in instruction.

- *Establishing national assessment systems*. Increasingly more countries nowadays rely on a combination of learning assessment types at different levels, to achieve both relevant data with regard to the overall quality of their education systems; and allow for student learning progress that is based on identifying timely and accurately students' strengths, interests and challenges in learning. National learning systems integrate assessment *of* learning (i.e. summative assessment), assessment *for* learning (i.e. formative assessment) and assessment *as* learning by considering processes and outcomes of school-, classroom- and teacher-based assessment, as well as of national and international assessment.

2.3 Learning Assessments during Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges to educational systems around the world, from unplanned school closures and home confinement to the abrupt transition to remote/online learning. Education systems have been forced to rethink education provisions because of the measures adopted to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. This necessitated also the development of alternative approaches to assess the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process as to whether students are learning under such circumstances and to identify and measure learning losses that must be recovered. Most concerning is that the learning losses will not affect students equally but will further amplify and accelerate social inequality in learning opportunities (OECD, 2020; WB, UNICEF and UNESCO, 2021).

The pandemic complicated the administration of national examinations and assessments. To a varying extent, education systems changed the calendar, content and mode of examinations and assessments. Many countries cancelled planned administrations and, in the case of upper secondary examinations, replaced them by other criteria for graduation. Where graduation criteria included both standardized examinations and school marks, only the latter component was retained. Countries that maintained the examinations (possibly at a different date than originally planned) also made other changes to the content and/or mode of examination. They introduced alternative ways of assessing and validating students' learning (OECD, 2020). A variety of strategies have been adopted in this regard including cancellation, postponement, derogation, on-line assessment/onscreen test, exams with special arrangements (e.g. paper-based examinations with physical distancing, remote assessment with parents supervision), using alternative approaches for validation and certification (e.g. review of past assessments/validation of learning – see UNESCO, 2020 April).

Setting traditional exams online posed greater challenges around academic integrity and the potential for cheating. Alternatives included online tests, setting additional assignments, open-book assessments, and oral examination. Countries that were able to maintain national assessments in 2020 used their results to provide teachers with student diagnostic information and to provide feedback to parents (OECD, 2020).

Of critical importance during school closures was ensuring equity and fairness in exams and assessments. A combination of options was considered, including:

- o Additional support to teachers,
- o Consideration of earlier assessments,
- o Reduction in the number of subjects tested,

- Automatic recognition and validation of student learning, and conditional admission to university, complemented by remedial courses upon school reopening.

For high-stakes exams, continuous assessments and appropriate remedial programmes were considered to ensure equal opportunities. There was no one-size-fit-for-all solution, as some countries were more prepared for online testing, and many were not (UNESCO, 2020 April).

Education systems have been forced to rethink the whole range of education provisions, including how learning assessment is applied. It was necessary to reconsider formative assessment in the context of remote/online delivery because it offered information on students' learning according to the specific mode of delivery used (UNICEF, 2021). Additionally, formative assessment is central in providing information on learning process and progress and these are critical components of the learning experience and provide evidence to inform any adjustments required to learning assessment practices and methods.

The need for formative assessment during pandemic was particularly critical because learning took place outside of the physical classroom, and teachers and parents-turned-teachers needed to understand whether students are absorbing the content that is delivered to them in formats that differ from business-as-usual (Liberman, Levin, & Bazaldua, 2020). Moreover, formative assessment involved students in the process of assessment, promoted peer and self-assessment and helped students understand their own learning.

Digital formative assessments were devised that can help capture diverse forms of learning by encouraging a combination of self-assessment, progress tracking, and teachers' feedback (Le Thu Huong and Yee Ki Au, 2020).
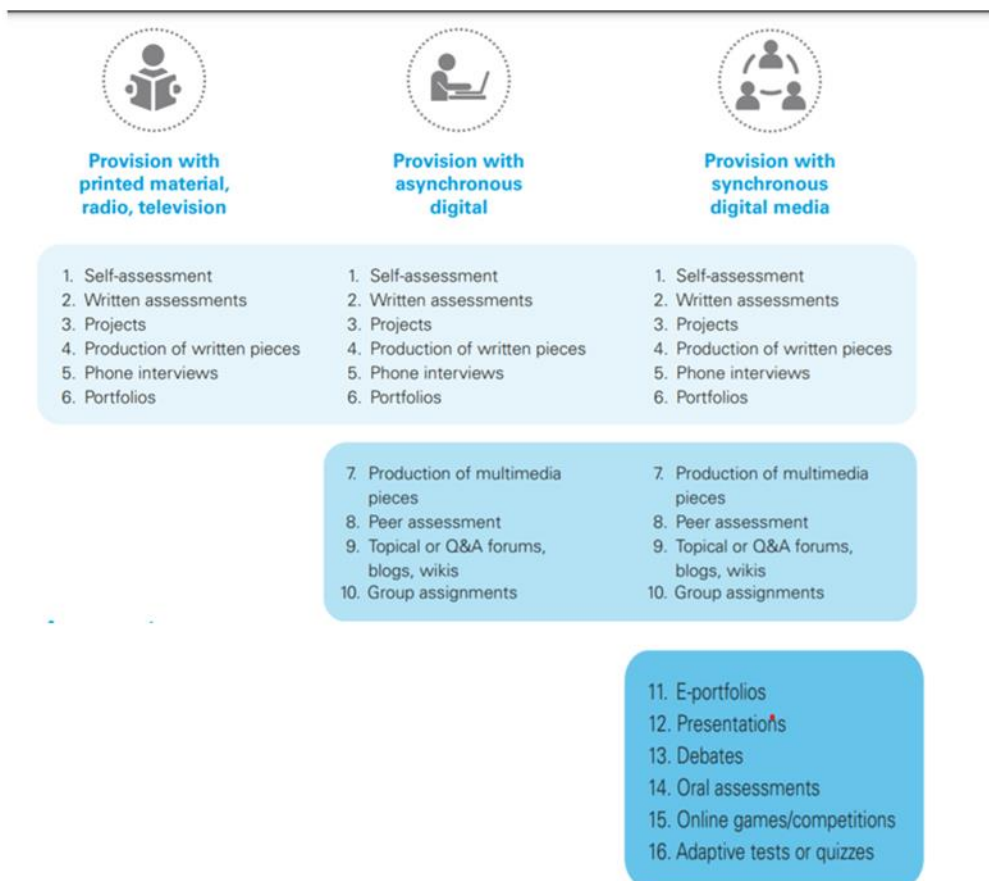
Formative assessment can be administered in synchronous and asynchronous forms. In the synchronous form, where the teacher and the student are working together at the same time (via online platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams), as well as directly by phone, teachers can provide feedback to students in real time. In the asynchronous form, where students and teachers are separated by both space and time, online tools such as Google Classrooms and Moodle can help teachers to provide feedback to students through questions, tasks, activities, and quizzes. Various online applications such as Recap: Video Response and Reflection for Education, WURRLYedu, and Screencastify can be used to record performance tasks created by students and shared with teachers (Liberman, Levin, & Bazaldua, 2020). A full list of digital tools for formative assessment can be using following link https://www.unicef.org/lac/en/reports/formative-learning-assessment-contexts-remote-provision-educational-services-lac.

Printed or digitally based assessments self-assessments were used and these included brief, regularly spaced tests requiring each student to complete some tasks and then use an answer key to review her/his answers. The answer keys were supplemented with an explanation of common mistakes to make this sort of assessment more useful (UNICEF, 2021).

In the context of implementing remote/online education, serious threats to data quality were identified in remote assessments warranting ethical considerations (INEE, 2020). To ensure that remote/online education programs are fulfilling the needs of the learners, practitioners conducted regular formative learning and evaluation assessments and used the findings to adjust or adapt programs accordingly. Focus of assessments was on following aspects:

- **Reach**, (equity of access, overcome barriers to access) access to technology and remote/online learning programming and content;
- **Engagement**, the extent to which users participate as intended in the programming and perceive content to be relevant and of high quality; and
- **Outcomes,** changes in learning of content knowledge, as well as social and emotional learning (SEL).

Textbox 3: Types of Formative Assessments under Different Modalities of Teaching (UNICEF, 2021)

Provision with printed material, radio, television	Provision with asynchronous digital	Provision with synchronous digital media
1. Self-assessment 2. Written assessments 3. Projects 4. Production of written pieces 5. Phone interviews 6. Portfolios	1. Self-assessment 2. Written assessments 3. Projects 4. Production of written pieces 5. Phone interviews 6. Portfolios	1. Self-assessment 2. Written assessments 3. Projects 4. Production of written pieces 5. Phone interviews 6. Portfolios
	7. Production of multimedia pieces 8. Peer assessment 9. Topical or Q&A forums, blogs, wikis 10. Group assignments	7. Production of multimedia pieces 8. Peer assessment 9. Topical or Q&A forums, blogs, wikis 10. Group assignments
		11. E-portfolios 12. Presentations 13. Debates 14. Oral assessments 15. Online games/competitions 16. Adaptive tests or quizzes

3. Components to be Considered in a Learning Assessment Framework (LAF)

3.1 Introduction: Why Developing a Learning Assessment Framework?

Developing a framework for learning assessment is essential for having a comprehensive, cohesive and effective system of assessment. The following sections will clarify the concept of LAF, identify its main suggested components and functions, and describe its importance.

At Regional level:

The proposed Learning Assessment Framework (LAF) for the Arab Region constitutes a reference document to inspire efforts at national levels with a view of establishing national assessment and evaluation systems, as well as foundations and guiding documents, such as national learning assessment policies and frameworks.

An assessment framework is a document that uses consistent conceptual approaches terminology to communicate the purpose and characteristics of the learning assessment to individuals/groups who are working on it and to the broader audience. Provides a common understanding of what the assessment is about and aims to achieve (ACER, 2016).

It translates the education vision of a country/education system with regard to assessment issues, in order to answer questions such as why to assess learning; when; based on which strategies; and how to use the learning assessment results to improve both the overall quality of education system; and the achievements and progresses made by individual learners.

At national level:

At national level, a LAF is part of the overall education system and is designed in alignment with its goals within the established education policies and existing traditions, cultures, and values in education.

It consists of coordinated arrangements for assessment which seek to improve student outcomes within an education system. LAF deals with the systematic governance of the whole range of evaluation and assessment activities in a school system such as student assessment, teacher appraisal, school evaluation, school leader appraisal and education system evaluation, including strategies for the various components to complement each other and articulate coherently to achieve given purposes (OECD, 2013).

3.2 Main Components of Learning Assessment Frameworks

Learning assessment frameworks may be sometimes part of curriculum frameworks and/or teacher standards. However, regardless if stand-alone documents or integrated with curriculum frameworks and teaching standards, learning assessment frameworks need to envisage the necessary alignment among curriculum/learning, teaching practices, and the assessment of learning outcomes.

Textbox 4: Main Components and Functions of a Learning Assessment Framework

> **Main Components and Functions of a Learning Assessment Framework**
>
> 1. Learning assessment and the national education vision: the role of learning assessment in reaching SDG4 targets and accomplishing national education and societal development goals
> 2. Setting up national assessment systems and their governance structure including learning assessment principles, purposes, functions, objectives, and institutional responsibilities/task distribution.
> 3. Designing and operationalizing LAF including its main components (assessments), assuring their technical quality and their coherence and alignment with the curriculum, teaching and learning.
> 4. Capacity building plan to develop needed competencies and skills for evaluation and assessment across the education system, including guidelines and tools for evaluation and assessment; and how to enhance the capacities of those responsible based on meaningful learning opportunities.
> 5. Development of a plan for the use of results from the overall evaluation and assessment processes that also includes a knowledge management and evidence-based policy.
> 6. Implementation strategies and factors, including Monitoring and Evaluation (M+E).

1. *Learning assessment and national education vision*. In alignment with curriculum and teaching practices, learning assessment should be geared towards supporting the countries' efforts to achieve SDG4 goals and make strive towards the social, economic, education and cultural progresses envisaged. Learning assessment should be used as both a diagnostic tool, as well as a tool to plan and implement forward-looking education policies in support of developing the knowledge, skills and attitudes (all underpinned by values) learners need to integrate today's life and work in an effective way.

2. *Setting up national learning assessment systems and their governance structure.*

    a. This implies defining the **context and learning assessment landscape** including all assessment types in the system and those that learners will experience throughout their course of education (Johnson, 2017). For an effective LAF, it is necessary to fully understand the complex relations and interactions at national and institutional levels. Because of the varied assessments intended to answer different questions/purposes and at different levels, it is important to have a balanced, integrated, and coherent system of assessment, and to have a strategy to ensure that the different components of the framework mutually reinforce each other. They need to be interrelated in order to generate complementarities, avoid duplication, and prevent inconsistency of objectives and outcomes.

    b. Governance of national assessment systems equally implies defining the **principles guiding learning assessment**, such as:

- o Assessment to be fit for purpose;
- o Assessment to integrate and reflect a whole-learner approach;
- o Inclusiveness and Fairness (i.e. taking into account the different learner characteristics, contexts and conditions);
- o Relevance, Validity and Reliability;
- o Transparency and Accountability;
- o Engaging learners, parents and a wider range of stakeholders;
- o Using assessment results in a constructive way to improve learning for individual students and overall national systems of education.

    c. **Clarity of purposes**:

Textbox 5: Different learning assessment purposes

> **Purposes**. Identifying the intended purposes of each assessment. Assessment serves multiple purposes and latest research has identified the following three major purposes of assessment:
>
> i. ***Assessment of learning*** is the means by which an institution determines the degree to which a person has acquired a pre-determined body or knowledge and or skills.
>
> ii. ***Assessment for learning,*** contributing constructively to the learning process, both providing feedback for teachers and students alike.
>
> iii. ***Assessment as learning***, serving as an additional instructional tool with self and peer assessment.

Assessment purposes can also be grouped in terms of serving either pedagogic or accountability purposes or functions.

Textbox 6: Pedagogical purposes of learning assessment

> Assessments serving ***pedagogic purposes*** include:
>
> i. ***Summative assessment***. A process to determine what students have learned of a specific set of knowledge and skills at the end of an instructional period. It can serve mainly to generate a score, certify, especially at the system level where it is used to

> certify and validate learning for further education, training or work. Also, it can provide evidence for monitoring policy-making, planning and programme design.
>
> ii. *Diagnostic assessment*. This type of assessment is mainly used to diagnose student difficulties and identify strengths and weaknesses.
>
> iii. *Formative assessment*. Includes methods to perceive which aspects of a specific body of learning content and associated competencies a student or group of students is and is not mastering with the aim of taking deliberate action to remedy any gaps. These 'checks' might occur in the course of instruction, posing questions, checking exercises, answering questions and the like. They might also occur at planned pauses in the learning process created specifically to identify what students are and or not comprehending, such as quizzes, homework assignments or other activities designed to indicate to a teacher and her/his students what aspects require further effort, whether for the whole class or select students from the class. Timely and relevant "feedback," by teachers (or peers) is essential in using the results of assessment to help students perceive precisely the gaps in their understanding and/or performance in order to clarify misperceptions or to take concrete steps towards remediation. Formative assessment contributes to building on learners' strengths, as well as supporting them overcome their learning difficulties and challenges.

Assessments serving **accountability purposes** aims broadly to determine whether the investments a system, or society makes in education yield the anticipated and required outcomes in terms of learning and hold different actors across the system responsible for results. They enhance accountability, transparency and better governance among a range of stakeholders (families, teachers, ministries, employers, schools, civil society groups, etc.). They are mostly under the group of national and cross-national large-scale assessments.

3. Designing and operationalizing LAF

This stage involves defining institutional responsibilities for learning assessment. It equally comprises the design of the assessments in view by specifying the competencies assessed (i.er. knowledge, skills and attitudes); and the instruments and/or approaches used to assess and measure learning outcomes. It covers equally the manners in which learners are asked to demonstrate what they have learned. In designing LAF, it is important to draw on principles that reflect up-=to-date learning assessment like using student-centered designs, responding to diverse student needs, commitment to transparency, etc.

Textbox 7: Different learning assessment types

> Most frequently used assessments in terms of levels are the following:
>
> a. **Classroom (and teacher-based) assessments**. They reach across full curriculum covering all topics, formative and summative at the class and school levels, especially in pre-primary and basic education stages (i.e. primary and lower secondary). .
>
> b. **Tests and Examinations**.
> > i. Tests reaching across the curriculum to assess all academic subjects and those that can be measured using paper and pencil (and/or ICTs-based) methods.
> >
> > ii. Provide a basis for selecting or certifying students as they move from one level of the education system to the next (or into the workforce). These are at national educational system level.
>
> c. **Large-scale assessments**, both systemic and extra-systemic.

To assure high quality and relevance of learning assessments, and for them to inform real improvements to the overall education system and its outcomes, the assessments must be in full alignment and harmony with a system's curriculum, teacher training and support, textbooks and other learning resources, etc.

Alignment is broadly defined as the degree to which components of an education system work together in synergy (coherently) to achieve desired goals. A system is regarded as 'coherent' or 'aligned' when the national curriculum content, textbooks, teaching content, pedagogy, assessment and drivers and incentives all are harmonized in terms of their foundations and approaches, and reinforce one another.

Textbox 8: Learning assessment and alignment for learning

Alignment indicates the degree to which interpretations of assessment results can be considered accurate and due to the importance of this quality, it is important to build it in the system as follows (El Hassan, 2018):

a.   Assessment and instructional procedures need to align with the main principles embedded in educational goals and student learning objectives.
b.   Education goals need to be clearly understood. Clear-cut goals and clear learning expectations need to be developed, that consider the whole range of student acquisitions in all areas (i.e. cognitive, social and emotional, practical and motor). This way teachers will know what to teach, why and how; and both teachers and students will know what is expected of students to learn.
c.   Alignment also implies that assessment criteria and procedures are clearly defined in line with learning objectives, teaching practices and expected learning outcomes.

Misalignment can result in several serious consequences like:

a.   The results will have little value and meaning in
    i.   judging how well students are learning.
    ii.   diagnosing system, school or student needs.
    iii.   policy reform and curriculum development.
    iv.   enhancing student motivation and learning.
    v.   adapting teaching to better meet identified needs.

b.   It can have serious consequences on instruction and learning (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010).
    i.   "Teaching to the test", where teachers may emphasize assessment takingskills and low-level content, rather than important learning goals.
    ii.   Focus on tests, thus narrowing the focus of teaching and the curriculum.

4. Capacity Building Plan

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[7] More recently, global citizenship/citizenship education has been also added as a reference domain to assess the social and emotional skills of learners and their engagement with emerging topics, such as peace, intercultural understanding, sustainable development, gender equality and climate change.

The development and implementation of an effective LAF requires considerable investment in developing competencies and skills for assessment at all levels and these could include developing teacher capacity in assessment of learning outcomes and using formative assessment, build principals' capacity in teacher and school appraisal, and the enhancement of knowledge base through the development of supportive tools and guidelines.

Additionally, it implies the development of institutional and personal specialist capacities of those responsible for national testing and examinations, as well as of national task forces involved in the application of international assessment studies, such as TIMSs, PIRLS and PISA.

Specialized assessment institutions and specialists need to work cooperatively with curriculum institutions and specialists, teachers, principals, teacher trainers, decision makers and the broader public (i.e. parents and other stakeholders) in order to make sure the different components of the education system do not work in silos and/or by sending out conflicting messages.

5. Making good usage of Results

To make best use of results and evidence generated by LA, it is important to develop coherent information management systems. Such systems would involve the establishment of protocols to standardize, harmonize and share the data among stakeholders. Portals presenting key education monitoring information on learning outcomes, learning environments, and resources could be set up and/or sophisticated data information systems with information on students, teachers, schools and their performance could be developed.

These need to be supported with a commitment to use the results and to use evidence for decision making and policy development. For instance, the results of different types of assessment could be shared in the context of national conferences and workshops and or via publications, based on which policy recommendations can be drawn to improve different components and aspects of the education system at all levels.

6. Implementation of the LAF, including M+E

The implementation of LAF requires the recognition of a range of important aspects. First, reaching agreements on the design of assessment activities requires time for discussions and consultations with all stakeholders, who need to be engaged for successful implementation. Second, developing expertise in the system, including training evaluators is expensive and requires time and resources. Third, conducting evaluation processes induces additional workload for school agents and they need to be motivated to implement them. Finally, it is important to pilot the LAF before full implementation to assess the effectiveness of policy innovations before generalizing them. Education practitioners should also be given the opportunity to provide feedback to allow adjustments to be made, if needed in the context of sound monitoring and evaluation (M+E) approaches.

4. The role of LAF in Developing and Implementing Sound Learning Assessment Policies

4.1 Learning Assessment Policy

Educational policies are guidelines/main orientations underpinning education practices, rules and laws that are formulated and implemented by the government in partnership with relevant education stakeholders. Their role is to provide the backdrop against

which education systems are managed effectively and specific procedures/operations put in practice in accordance to education policy principles, orientations and priorities.

A learning assessment policy consists of the principles and rules in the educational sphere that relate to the whole range of assessment activities within the national learning assessment system in terms of their governance, structure, tools, processes and practices, outcomes, and finally usage of results.

A learning assessment policy stems from the regulatory context and based on the system's vision of education describes the role of assessment in realizing the vision and attaining the learning outcomes and achieving quality of education. The LA policy identifies areas that assessment needs to focus on, importance of alignment of assessment with instruction, challenges that need to be overcome in implementing the policy and provides suggestions for overcoming them.

A Learning Assessment Framework that pulls together all the important issues and elements to be addressed within a national learning assessment system in a consistent and coherent way is instrumental for both:

> (a) Integrating and reflecting national education vision and policies through learning assessment lenses; and
> (b) Capturing in a holistic manner all the important elements and issues related to learning assessment that education policies need to consider.

4.2 Use of Results to Inform Learning Assessment Policies

Existing evidence shows that information on student learning outcomes is not always used to inform the formulation or selection of education policy options in developing countries (UNESCO Bangkok, 2017).

However, in the available literature, there are multiple examples of learning data informing and influencing education policy-making (UNESCO, 2019). These examples demonstrate that certain policy cycle phases tend to be more frequently influenced than others.

Learning data inform agenda-setting, policy implementation, and policy monitoring and evaluation, whereas they are less frequently used in policy formulation. In other words, there are fewer existing examples that illustrate the use of learning data in formulating specific policies. Learning assessment data most frequently influence policies linked to curriculum, teacher professional development, and teaching methods (Tobin, Nugroho, & Lietz, 2016). Participation in international and regional learning assessments has also been found to contribute to the development of national assessment systems as well as to building the capacity of national assessment teams.

Although there are examples of how learning data inform polices and some will briefly be described below, in many cases the use of data is limited due to several existing barriers or to a lack of preconditions for the use of data (IIEP-UNESCO, 2019). These can be grouped as follows:

- reliability and relevance of the information provided,
- financial and technical capacities to analyze results,
- ineffective coordination and dissemination channels,
- unfavorable political and institutional factors.

To fully understand the use of assessment data, one needs to go beyond factors related to assessment. Policy making process is complex and not a linear one in which problems are identified, solutions considered, and the most appropriate strategies are selected. In fact, it was described by some as 'random and messy' (Nutley & Webb, 2000) as it is greatly

affected by the general planning and evidence culture, as well as   by the inner dynamics of policy-making decisions. In contexts where there is a stronger planning culture, and where evidence is part of the 'business as usual', there is a greater chance of learning data being effectively used in policy-making.

Countries have been engaging in both national and international assessments and a good number of them have made use of information to improve the quality of their education system.

- In a study by OECD, countries were asked how influential results and analyses from the PISA assessment had been in informing the policymaking and reform processes at their national level. Of the 37 respondent countries, 17 rated PISA as 'very' influential, and a further 11 rated it as 'moderately' influential.

- Assessment data can be used
    - to motivate improvement by comparing with international rankings,
    - disseminate information widely,
    - initiate within country analyses and debates, and
    - to examine factors that influence achievement to improve policy like home background, school characteristics, teacher characteristics, teaching conditions and practices, and student motivation.

Textbox 9: Examples of countries making use of assessment results

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Examples of countries making use of assessment results (El Hassan, 2019).

- **Norway.** TIMSS results have been extensively used by MOE on three fronts
    - Revising upper secondary curricula
    - Gender differences in achievement were greater than expected and so new curriculum guidelines were adopted to close the gender gap
    - Primary teachers backgrounds in science and math needed to be strengthened and so a revision of teacher education curriculum was done.

- **Chile.** Impact: Results are widely publicized in the media and used extensively in policy discussions. Data from the assessment were used to guide decentralization of the management of the education system

- **SRI Lanka** Impact: A variety of effects has been attributed to the findings of national assessments, including impact on curriculum reform and on teacher training programme.

- **Uganda** Impact: National assessment has had a strong focus on using findings to improve classroom teaching. Findings are reviewed in local workshops and approaches, including the improvement of classroom-based assessment, to address weaknesses in student achievement identified in the assessment. Findings have also been used to inform curriculum reform and teacher training.

- **Jordan.** Direct impact of learning assessments on curriculum and teacher training.
    - Curriculum.
        - Revision of math, science, and Arabic curricula.
        - New textbooks for math and science using PISA TIMSS results.
    - Teacher training
        - Remedial instruction on providing real life problems
        - Teachers guides with questions like PISA and TIMSS items.

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5. Regional Assessment Landscape

5.1 Outcomes of the UNESCO Meetings (AR-MED III and Ed-Align; and AR-MED IV- Regional SDG4 benchmarking)

UNESCO was entrusted to coordinate the monitoring and implementation of SDG4, i.e. the education component of the international 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In coordination with Regional partners, UNESCO Office in Beirut (henceforth referred to as UBO led the articulation of regional educational issues and challenges, as well as priorities for post-EFA agenda. In this context, over recent years UBO organized several national and regional meetings to enhance policy dialogue on key issues related to SDG4 targets and provide technical support to Arab States to implement and monitor SDG4 indicators in a coherent and effective manner.

The first such meeting was **AR-MED I - Cairo, Egypt (15-16 December 2015).** The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the operationalization of the Education 2030 Agenda at the regional level and the process of developing national action plans. It concluded with the adoption of the Cairo Roadmap.

A year following ARMED I, **AR-MED II - Dubai, U.A.E (6-7 March 2017)** was held. Member States from the region met to review and take stock of the progress in the implementation of the Cairo Roadmap in the region, to examine the SDG4 targets that are of critical importance to the region and to plan for concrete actions for 2017/28. It concluded with the adoption of the Dubai Roadmap.

A third Arab Regional Meeting on Education 2030 **(AR-MED III)** was held in Dead Sea, Jordan, (6-7 November 2018) on the issue of alignment among curriculum, teaching practices and learning assessment, as key dimensions in reaching quality SDG4 outcomes. It encompassed two different, yet related, activities:

- Technical workshop on aligning curriculum, teachers and assessment (4-6 November 2018);
- Meeting of SDG4 national coordinators.

With a view of mainstreaming SDG4 Agenda through sound policy shaping/making and capacity development, the AR-MED III meeting aimed at advocating the issue of aligning curriculum, teaching practices and learning assessment as a means of supporting the implementation and monitoring of SDG4 targets in the Arab countries in a coherent and consistent manner (UNESCO 2018, Beirut).

Textbox 10: AR-MED III Topics

> **AR-MED III** addressed the following topics:
>
> - Relevance of SDG4 targets for the Arab States;
> - International and Regional trends regarding aligning curriculum, teaching practices and learning assessment: what can we learn from such trends regarding addressing/reaching SDG4 targets?
> - Importance of aligning curriculum, teaching practices and assessment for developing and monitoring competencies for life and work;
> - Importance of aligning curriculum, teaching practices and learning assessment for enhancing overall educational quality, equity and accountability;
> - Enhancing alignment through institutional development;
> - Enhancing alignment at school/classroom level through developing reflective practitioner capacities and implementing whole-school approaches;
> - Alignment issues in the context of Education in Crisis;
> - Arab States achievements, challenges/gaps and needs for support regarding aligning curriculum, teaching practices and learning assessment with a view of enhancing education quality; Arab States needs with regard to capacity development for monitoring and evaluation of, and reporting on SDG4 targets and indicators.

As a direct follow-up to **AR-MED III, an inter-regional Arab-African ED-ALIGN initiative was operationalized[8] through a** workshop held in Beirut, June 17-19, 2019 in cooperation with Arab Regional Focal Points of the International Teacher Task Force (TTF). The focus of the workshop was primarily on:

- Unpacking the educational alignment concept through handbooks/guides/concept and orientation papers; and
- Exploring the needs for joint capacity development for curriculum, teacher and assessment specialists in countries based on appropriate self-explanatory and guiding documents on educational alignment to be produced.

The three-day workshop aimed at reinforcing interregional cooperation and coordination. It brought together education specialists from the Arab Region, as well as from some selected African countries (i.e. Tanzania, Uganda, Senegal and Burkina Faso). Teacher Task Force for Education 2030 (TTF) focal points also contributed to the workshop. The first part of the workshop consisted of two days of technical deliberations on the tools and strategies needed for clarifying the alignment concept, as well as for enhancing the capacities of national stakeholders in approaching the alignment of curricula, teacher practices, and learning assessment in a comprehensive and coherent way. A meeting of the Regional TTF focal points was conducted on the third day.

Subsequent to the AR-MED III workshop deliberations and the issuing of the Dead Sea Joint Statement on educational alignment, and the inter-regional follow up workshop conducted in Beirut on 17-19 June 2019, and building on shared understanding of educational alignment, participants drafted roadmaps for enhancing educational alignment in their respective contexts. An outcome of this work was recognition of the need for Arab and African countries to be supported by UNESCO through the development of an Ed-Align Toolkit comprising different components. Components of the toolkit include:

- A conceptual framework explaining the concept of educational alignment and its added value in implementing Education Agenda 2030;
- A methodological framework on relevant avenues leading to enhanced educational alignment among curriculum/learning, teacher policies and practices and assessment;
- Case studies and other practical examples about promising policies and practices in different countries; and
- Resources, including Glossary; theoretical underpinnings/literature and links; and relevant data bases.

Currently, an Alignment for Learning Guide is being produced to be launched in 2022.

Outcomes of the AR-MED IV meeting

The AR-MED 3-day workshop was held remotely in July 2021 and addressed the following topics:

1. Updated status of Arab regional progress of SDG4 and identified key issues and monitoring challenges in achieving Education 2030 Agenda.
2. Shared best practices on advancing the SDG4 agenda at national, regional and global levels.
3. Shared understanding of progress made and of remaining identified challenges, gaps and priorities for action.

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[8] Ed-Align: Educational Alignment of Curriculum/Learning, Teaching Practices and Assessment. Since 2020 the initiative had been called "Alignment for Learning".

4. Agreed on follow up action plan at regional level to leverage assistance to the Arab States with a view of accelerating progress towards achieving Education 2030 Agenda in the light of the AR-MED IV deliberations and outcomes/commitments.

5.2 Progress Made by Arab Countries in Developing National LAFs.

Within the context of the above activities by UNESCO and Arab countries' efforts towards attaining the SDGs, several Arab states made progress in developing their national LAFs. Jordan and Egypt presented in AR-MED III quite comprehensive assessment frameworks aligned with their instruction as part of their curriculum reform efforts. Tunisia's and Palestine's work is in progress, while Qatar, Iraq, and UNRWA has also detailed LAFs but these were not presented extensively in the meeting. Details of these LAFs are to be found in Appendix (El Hassan, 2019).

5.3 Summary of international studies/observatories on learning assessment in the Arab Region

Over the last 10 years, several studies have been conducted in the Arab region reporting results of learning assessments at both national and regional levels. Many were done by UNESCO as part of their reporting on monitoring progress made on EFA, others by the World Bank, like the SABER Study on the Quality of Education Policies in Arab countries, and others. Below is a listing of some of these international studies on LA that can be used to inform the development of national LAFs:

1. Education for All Regional Synthesis Report of The 2015 National Reviews in The Arab States Region, UNESCO 2015.
http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/Doha/pdf/UNESCOEFAReviewArabStatesENG.pdf

2. SABER Reports. The Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) is an initiative to produce comparative data and knowledge on education policies and institutions, with the aim of helping countries systematically strengthen their education systems and the ultimate goal of promoting Learning for All. SABER has been administered in 130 countries and Arab countries reports can be accessed using below link
http://saber.worldbank.org/index.cfm?indx=3

3. The State of Education in the Arab World (2018). Arab Center Washington.
http://arabcenterdc.org/policy_analyses/the-state-of-education-in-the-arab-world/

4. Regional Mapping Report on Assessment in the Arab States (2014). ALECSO/UNESCO. A survey of student assessment systems in the Arab States.

   https://unesdoc.unesco.org/in/rest/annotationSVC/DownloadWatermarkedAttachment/attach_import_2ad20cfc-36cb-4293-883a-1a91b5d5af2d?_=247602eng.pdf.

5. PISA and TIMSS Reports
   https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/pisa-2015-results-volume-v_5jfm5mgm255d.pdf?itemId=%2Fcontent%2Fpublication%2F9789264285521-en&mimeType=pdf

   http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/timss2015/international-results/wp-content/uploads/filebase/full%20pdfs/T15-International-Results-in-Mathematics.pdf

6. The SDG4 Regional progress report for the Arab countries released in 2021. https://en.unesco.org/fieldoffice/beirut/coordinating-SGD4

6. Instead of Conclusions

Given its important potential to enhance the quality of learning and learning outcomes, learning assessment deserves the special attention of policy makers/shapers, decision makers, practitioners, beneficiaries and stakeholders.

Learning assessment has to be nevertheless considered from the perspective of system-wide alignment for learning, with a special emphasis on its connections and harmonization with the curriculum and teaching practices.

While learning assessment is in all cases a complex undertaking, the pandemic has generated additional challenges in terms of the extent to which the changed context and environment have affected learning, student well-being, as well as aspects such as equity and inclusion, and the overall quality of learning processes. At the same time, the pandemic context triggered the development of innovative and alternative ways of conducting assessments that rely to a greater extent on the added value of traditional[9]and new technologies[10], and on technology-enabled learning modalities.

Taking all the above into consideration, developing and implementing a learning assessment framework becomes essential for improving educational outcomes for students, informing education policy, and monitoring the impact of these policies.

The *Learning Assessment Framework* for the Arab region advocates the development of a comprehensive assessment system, which implies a transformation of existing assessment mechanisms and practices towards addressing the whole-learner and reaching SDG4 targets in a holistic manner.

It is hoped that once developed and implemented, a *Learning Assessment Framework* will contribute significantly to the establishment of a forward-looking and cohesive learning assessment culture at both national and Regional levels.

At the same time, implementing a *Learning Assessment Framework* and establishing/improving national assessment systems will contribute to enriching the much needed learning assessment data. Such data needs to be validated, well managed, shared, and reported so that it can be used efficiently for a range of purposes:

- Learning assessment data can assist in assessing the effectiveness of an education system at all its levels - classroom, school, and system levels. Data should provide useful and reliable results, and be timely and equitable regardless the different possible scenarios under which learning assessment has been applied (i.e. school/in-person, home-based, remote/online, hybrid/blended learning).

- It enhances accountability for results, both internally and externally, among a broad range of stakeholders.

- It can be used to certify and validate learning for a given age or grade level.

- It will inform teaching and learning practices to identify learners' areas of strengths and weaknesses, and areas they need improvement. Measures taken should be closest to classroom instruction; and they should inform how to respond to the different students' learning needs and guide instruction tailored to students' specificities to make sure learning progression is possible.

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[9] Such as Radio and TV.
[10] Such as computers, Internet learning platforms, learning software, smart phones, and social media.

- It will provide valuable information on attaining education goals and expected outcomes especially those related to basic competencies, students' achievements in other key areas (such as scientific literacy, languages and communications, social studies, artistic literacy, motor skills), digital skills, students' well-being and engagement, and 21st century skills.

- It will also identify the support learners need, especially those experiencing difficulties and special circumstances (such as special needs learners, refugee and displaced learners, and learners in vulnerable communities without access to regular schooling and /or access to technology, as well as all learners who are at risk of dropping out and/or have been lagging behind for different reasons).

- It can also provide information that will identify targeted professional and skills development needs of various agents and stakeholders in the education system (teachers, principals, ministry staff, parents, etc.) especially with regard to new approaches in, and the shifting role of learning assessments.

- The generated data and information can equally inform related research especially on learner characteristics and backgrounds, such as enabling/hindering factors in their families and broader communities, school climate, and teacher related practices.

As mentioned in the Introduction, it is important that countries develop and implement *Learning Assessment Frameworks* that underpin unified, cohesive and comprehensive approaches to assessing learning and learning outcomes in a systematic and transparent way.

However, more important than only developing such documents, is the process of turning such frameworks into forward-looking mindsets and daily practices where assessment, in all its forms, contributes to effective learning and to learners' continuous progression throughout life.

Qatar

LAF is a section in the Qatari framework document and includes following principles and strategies:

- The range of assessment procedures should consider the holistic aspect of learning. This involves subject knowledge, but also the skills and attitudes that make up the competencies.
- Teachers therefore need a repertoire of strategies that enable them to ascertain how well students are learning to be critical and creative thinkers, communicators, cooperative workers, researchers and problem solvers.
- Use a range of assessment strategies such as peer and group, activity-based, oral questioning, performance analysis and assessment in authentic settings.
- Emphasis on *Assessment of learning* and *Assessment for learning*
- There is a need for assessment to consider students' learning in terms of higher order thinking skills (HOTS) and the learner competencies for life and work;
- Formal tests and examinations need to be aligned to the aims, values, principles and competencies of the QNCF and take account of student needs and potentials;
- Assessment needs to be built into the structure of the school and the work of the teacher; and
- Assessment methods need to be flexible enough to take account of students with special educational needs, as well as other differences.

Iraq
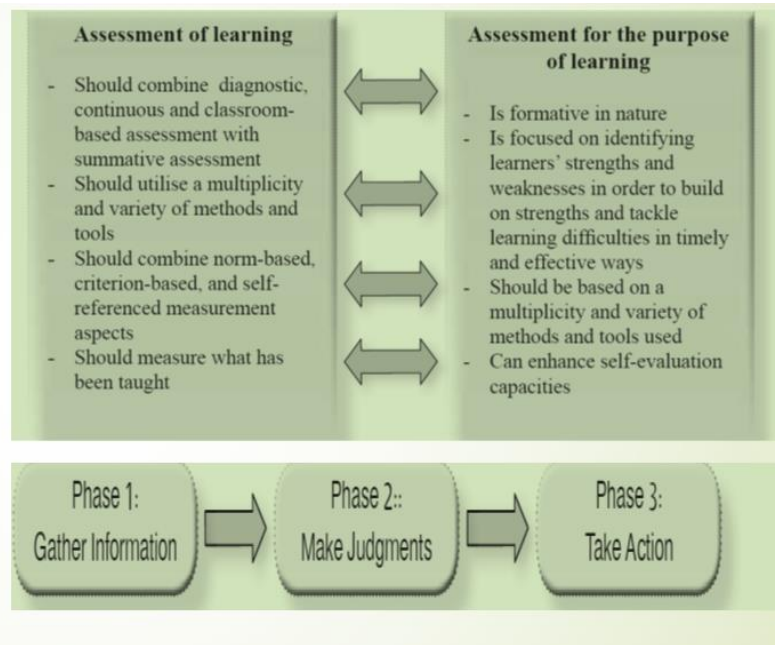
3. Range of Assessment tasks.
    a. Tasks should reflect the learning outcomes being assessed and purpose of assessment.
    b. A listing of following tasks and their description is provided. They include tests, debates, student portfolios, observations, essays, projects and practical work, homework, quizzes, and questionnaires.
4. Examinations
    a. In setting examinations need to keep in mind aims value and principles of the framework and to move away from memorization of content.
    b. Examinations need to reflect the syllabi of the two regions: Baghdad and Kurdistan.

UNRWA

1. Implications of Framework Principles on assessment. If students develop deeper understanding and can apply their subject knowledge, competencies and values to their learning, then assessment practices must take account of these wider aspirations.
2. Assessment is most effective when:
   - It is understood as a "process" which reflects the multifaceted nature of the curriculum and learning and is not simply an "event".
   - The purposes are clearly defined (i.e. are they formative, summative, or diagnostic?)
   - Appropriate instruments and procedures are used for information gathering, judgment, and follow-up action.
   - Continuous, classroom- and teacher-based assessment is well balanced with assessment events, such as testing and/or national examinations.
   - Assessment of learning (i.e. of what is required by the curriculum) is well balanced with assessment for learning, (i.e. formative assessment to motivate and support learners in making progresses and overcoming difficulties/problems)
   - A culture of meaningful, relevant and reliable assessment is developed based on a shared understanding of the need of aligning curriculum, teaching and learning and assessment practices.

3. Flexible and Individual Assessment Methods adapted to students with special needs. These flexible arrangements may include more time, oral examinations, allowing the use of a keyboard, Braille or large print.

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