

Transforming Assessment in Africa towards Quality Learning and Informed Decision Making

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Educational Assessment and Examinations Service

Outline

- **Education in the African Context**
- **Assessment Practices in Africa**
- **Assessment and Decision Making**
- **Main Interventions/Initiatives for Transforming Assessment**
- **Ethiopia's Case**
- **Assessment Directions to Improve Learning Crisis and Respond to Educational Developments**



Education in the African Context: Some Positive Developments



- Gross enrollment ratio and completion rates slowing growing at primary and secondary levels (UNESCO, UNICEF, and AU, 2025).
- Gender disparities narrowing down, wealth and location remain critical
- Increasing number of countries introducing national learning assessment
- National assessment policies or guides developed or being developed in most countries

Education in the African Context: Rationales

- Africa must transform its education system to secure its future (UNESCO, UNICEF, and AU, 2025).
- Six Driving Factors for Transformation of Assessment in Africa.

1) Schooling Deprivation: Close to 100 million children are out of school in 2024

- Nearly seven-fold increment from 2015, 13 million
- 20% of children of primary school age are out of school.
- Reenrollment of these children has considerably slowed down

2) Learning Poverty: “An estimated four out of every five 10-year-olds in Africa cannot read and comprehend a simple text, with significant variations across Africa (UNESCO, UNICEF, and AU, 2025, p.82”

- Ranging from 31% to 99%. NLAS and EGRAs show similar results.





Education in the African Context: Rationales

“The foundational learning crisis in Africa is significantly compounded by a lack of systematic and frequent assessments to effectively measure foundational learning outcomes.”



Education in the African Context: Rationales

3) Preparing students for the 21st learning

Some shift in education policy and curriculum about 21st skills, not complemented by assessment shifts.



Source: The P21 Framework for 21st Century Learning. 2019, Battelle for Kids.

<https://www.battelleforkids.org>



Education in the African Context: Rationales

4) Responding to evolving initiatives and learning platforms

- The African Union Moves to Harmonize Learning Assessments through a New Continental Framework (UNESCO, 2025)
- AEAA has also developed a Common Continental Assessment Framework in Africa, yet to be officially launched
- There is a paradigm shift in how assessments are designed and implemented (digital, Socio-emotional, Well-being, etc).

5) Digitalization of education

- Landscape of assessment is changing in the Digital Age
- Rethinking Assessment and Feedback/Feedforward in eLearning is timely
- AI and Educational Assessment are seeking a paradigm shift in learning evaluation (Riazi, 2025)





Education in the African Context: Rationales

6) Inclusiveness

- Misconception that Assessment is viewed as an obstacle to achieving inclusive education (UNESCO & GPE, 2020).
- Discussions on inclusive education increasingly shape current contributions and debates in educational assessment (Kleinlein, 2025)
- Comprehensive and distinctively inclusive forms of assessment are necessary to identify appropriate teaching and learning opportunities for all students and to avoid stigmatization and special educational needs (Kleinlein, 2025)



Assessment Practices in Africa: Reviews from the literature

- Misalignment between curriculum competencies and assessment
- Considerably focuses on examination
- Continuous assessment is largely misused
 - Inflation of student achievement scores
 - Poor relationship with exams
 - Poorly informs students' achievement of learning outcomes



Assessment Practices in Africa: Reviews from the literature

- Classroom assessment is not a main reform discourse
 - Limited effective utilization of classroom-based assessment
- Learning assessment
 - Limited use of available data for decisions and the design of interventions
 - Until recently, learning poverty was taken as the norm.



Assessment Practices in Africa: Reviews from the literature

- **Social promotion or automatic promotion practices**
 - Students can learn the basic literacy and numeracy skills with proper support and avoid repetition in class.
 - Compromise on learning outcomes or competence, mass promotion when learning outcomes are not achieved.
 - Resulting in schooling without learning, which in turn contributed to the decline in the value of education among parents.
- **Limited competence of teachers in utilizing assessment properly**
- **Linking teacher evaluation with student assessment results: caused intentional inflation of students' scores**
- **Lack of accountability for poor learning**



Assessment and Decision Making

- Effective decisions depend on the quality of data gathered
- Data based decision making (DBDM) mostly related to school effectiveness
- African countries have adopted competence-based curriculum (CBC) reforms to equip students with skills for the 21st-century economy. However challenges in pedagogical and assessment practices persist (Wawire et al. 2025), which influence decisions.
- Assessment data in Africa are mainly used descriptively or for monitoring rather than for informed decision-making (UNESCO, 2022).
- School systems and teachers are poorly prepared for using evidence/data

“The teacher who assesses his students by providing feedback is like the optician who gives people suitable glasses to see better and clearer.”

“Assessment and examinations may cripple a curriculum, or they may drive and steer it.”



Main interventions for transforming assessment

- Continental Education Strategy for Africa: CESA 2026-2035





Main interventions for transforming assessment

- **Continental Assessment Framework (CAF) for Africa**
 - Develop a Continental Assessment Framework.
 - Commitment to CAF implementation.
 - Good practices and technical recommendations to guide Member States in rollout.
- **Continuous assessment**
- **Technology-assisted assessment**
- **Standards-based assessment**
- **Large-scale assessment: Regional assessments, Learning Assessment, Literacy & Numeracy Assessments (such as EGRA, EGMA), etc.**

What are the gains and lessons from such practices in responding to the African education context?



Ethiopia's Case

- Efforts to improve assessment policy and practices
 - NLA and EGRA every two years for many years
 - Assessment and examination standards
 - Improved exam integrity and administration practices
 - 50% cut-off point set for pass
 - Administration of exit exams for all would-be graduates
 - Technology-supported exam administration growing
 - Continuous training on continuous assessment, with little impact on teachers' practices
- Consistently poor student performance in National Learning Assessments, EGRA
- Tightening of assessment and examination standards improving academic emphasis in schools (anecdotal evidence)



Ethiopia's Case

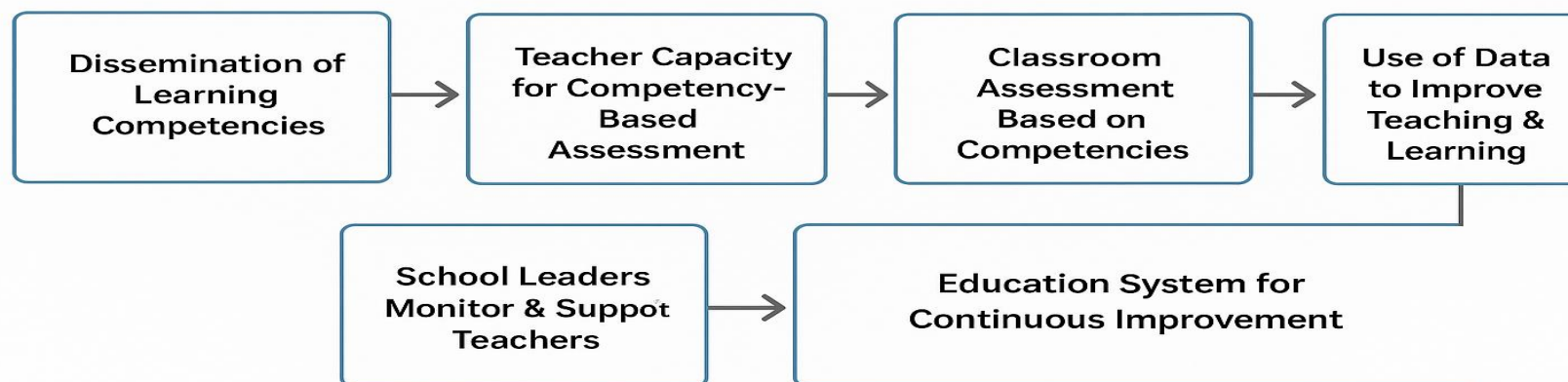
- Cheating in regional and national exams considerably alleviated
- Changes focus on the *how* to assess, rather than *what* is being assessed.
- Little change in terms of classroom assessment
 - Weak alignment of assessment and exams with competencies
 - Very weak relationship between schools' teacher-made assessment results and performance in national exams
 - Inflation of student scores
 - Misuse of continuous assessment still widely prevalent



Way forward for Transforming Assessment in Africa

- Constructive alignment and improving classroom assessment system should be a priority in the assessment transformation
 - What do we assess in our schools? Do we use assessment data?

Competency-Based Assessment Reform Framework





Way forward for Transforming Assessment in Africa

- Adapting assessment guidelines and practices to AI and other EdTech
 - Homework? Projects? What would be the role of teachers? How should the system act?
 - EdTech is the future. So, how should technology and assessment be integrated?
 - Ensuring technology integration does not compromise assessment of higher level learning outcomes
- Adapting assessment guidelines and practices to 21st century
 - Table of specification? Objective-type items for digital assessment? Large-scale assessments? How do these give space for assessing 21st-century skills? How to measure competencies? Relevance to job market demands?



Way forward for Transforming Assessment in Africa

- Devolution of macro-level policies to classroom practices and the place of classroom assessment in these policies needs to be strengthened
- Balancing the catch-up on international assessment and expansion of regional assessments with efforts to bridge the huge assessment practice gaps: Using the available evidence
 - Joining an international assessment
 - Digital assessment versus gaps in digital access, safety, & security in our schools
 - Adequate evidence on learning crises in NLA and EGRAs versus additional investment in regional, international, and large-scale assessments





Way forward for Transforming Assessment in Africa

- Develop flexible and assessment mechanisms to deal with flexible and alternative learning programs
- Revisit school and district level education offices to use assessment data for school improvement
- Install a system of accountability

THANK YOU

By Transforming Assessment,
let's drive and steer education
to improve learning outcomes
and equitable access to
education

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