

Helpdesk Report: Independent curriculum and assessment bodies

Date: 13th July 2016

Query: Produce a report focused on the pros and cons of having an independent (external) curriculum and assessment body? Is it more efficient or effective outside a Ministry of Education?

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1. Overview

Limited evidence was identified which directly addresses the benefits and disadvantages of having an independent curriculum and assessment body at national level. Suggestive evidence from Latin America indicated that external assessment institutes have some advantages due to their higher level of autonomy including improved staff capacity; ability to sustain long-term plans and reduced impact of political pressures.

Other assessment bodies which are external to individual Ministries of Education, although often closely linked, are those which develop large-scale, system level assessments implemented across multiple countries. These include international student assessments, regional collaborations for assessment, donor-led and citizen-led assessments. These provide high quality data on system performance and contributing factors and can have a powerful impact on policy and practice.

Studies from Cyprus and South Africa highlight the potential for powerful political influence of governments on curriculum development. This could be an argument for the development of independent curriculum bodies.

Much of the debate around the structure and governance of curriculum development and assessment is focused, not on whether there should be an independent body at national level, but on the related question of the balance of decision-making power at national and local level. Evidence on decentralisation and school autonomy in curriculum development and assessment is therefore also included in this report.

Independent assessment bodies: advantages and disadvantages

An OECD review of evaluation and assessment in education (2013) describes the development of specialised assessment agencies and the tension between their autonomy and the education authorities' vested interest in evaluation of the education system.

Ravela et al (2008) argue that assessment units must be independent in reporting the results of their work and should not be dependent on the time frames and interests of political parties. An argument for locating assessment units outside of education ministries is this need for independence and transparency. However, in Latin America, it is reported that there have been examples of countries with stable and independent units within education ministries, and other cases where units have been unstable and unable to consolidate their work even though they were part of an external institution. Ravela et al (2008) argue that the institutional location is not as important as the culture of continuity and transparency created around assessment. This is achieved when assessment has a clear mandate and a solid structure, and the assessment system be underpinned by some kind of legal statute. They highlight the importance of the assessment unit's independence not causing it to become dissociated from education policy. It must be closely linked to other key areas such as teacher training, curricular development, planning and project design, programme evaluation, and research.

Ferrer and Fiszbein (2015) provide a critical review of the development of learning assessment systems in five countries between 2005-2015: Brazil, Columbia, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru. This is based on indepth review of official materials and interviews with experts. Two types of institutions are examined: national institutes and assessment units based in Ministries of Education. They report that there is some suggestive evidence that institutes have some advantages arising from their higher level of autonomy. Autonomy can help create better conditions to build capacity, in terms of hiring and retaining highly qualified technical staff. Autonomy can provide a higher level of protection from political pressures than units reporting directly to political authorities in the Ministry of Education. However, legal autonomy does not guarantee political autonomy: seemingly autonomous bodies can still be subject to political pressures. Ferrer and Fiszbein report that institutes are more able to design and implement mid to long-term evaluation plans. Ministry of Education units find it more difficult to maintain long term assessment plans due to changing demands by political authorities, particularly when changes in government occur.

Independent assessment units need to ensure their work is closely aligned with related government educational policies, including curriculum implementation and teacher professional development. The assessment units based within Ministries of Education also sometimes struggle to manage an adequate internal flow of data to improve decision making based on student assessment results. Neither type of configuration can guarantee efficient use of data for informed policy making and educational improvement.

Ferrer and Fiszbein (2015) recommend that in establishing an autonomous evaluation institute, a strong legal framework is developed, including the establishment of governance arrangements that ensure the proper technical oversight, dedicated funding, and the ability to make the necessary human resource decisions independently.

Kanje and Acana (2013) report on the work of the Uganda National Examination Board (UNEB) which is classed as an autonomous institution. They argue that elements of an enabling context that have allowed the UNEB to develop effectively include: clear policies mandating the assessment programmes; one institution providing leadership for all assessment activities and having a stable, well-qualified team of staff.

Large scale, system level assessments

Other assessment bodies which are not situated within individual ministries of education, but do have input from them, are those which develop large-scale, system-level assessments that are implemented across multiple countries. These are designed to provide information on system performance levels and related or contributing factors, typically in relation to an agreed-upon set of standards or learning goals, in order to inform education policy and practice (Clarke, 2012). Examples include international student assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), developed by the OECD, which focuses on reading, maths and science, and has been implemented across more than 70 countries. The ministries of education of countries that implement PISA are represented on its Board, but Subject Experts Groups and a consortium of assessment agencies design and implement the surveys. PISA for Development is currently being developed to increase the use and relevance of PISA assessments in developing countries. The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in International reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) are other examples of international student assessments. These enable governments to measure the effectiveness of their educational systems in a global context.

Regional collaborations for assessment include The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) which carries out assessments in 15 countries. SACMEQ is an international non-governmental organisation. Ministries of member countries have input into developing its policies and programmes and appoint National Research Coordinators to implement the assessments. Across the countries taking part in SACMEQ, there are examples of this assessment influencing policy (ACER, 2015). The efficiencies of scale achieved by these collaborations make it more cost effective to develop higher-quality tests and to incorporate technological advances into the testing process (Clarke, 2012).

The Laboratorio Latinoamericano de Evaluación de la Calidad de la Educación (Latin-American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education or LLECE) is the network of national systems for the assessment of education quality in Latin America, coordinated by UNESCO's Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (OREALC). There is a lack of evidence on whether LLECE recommendations have led to changes in policy and practice. A study on this topic is part of the LLECE strategy for 2015 to 2019.

The Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and the Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA) are examples of assessments that are widely used by donors. Countries in which the EGRA assessments have led quickly towards successful use of donor funding to implement early reading interventions include Kenya, Liberia and South Africa. Cross-national citizen-led assessments include those managed by UWEZO across Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. Their media dissemination activities have widened the knowledge base about the low levels of learning. However, a recent review has shown that there is no systematic evidence of UWEZO making a direct impact on improving outcomes (Results for Development Institute, 2015).

Political influence on curriculum

Levin (2008) provides a useful discussion of the multiple stakeholders involved in curriculum development; the potential for political influence on the curriculum and the impact of governance structure on these influences. The risk of undue political influence on curriculum development could be one argument for the establishment of curriculum bodies that are independent of, and external to, ministries of education. Studies which critique the powerful political influence of governments on curriculum include Koutselini-loannidou's (1997) examination of the influence of political events on curriculum in Cyprus. Cross et al (2002) offer a critique of political influence on the curriculum in South Africa, both during and after the apartheid era. The curriculum during apartheid included racial and ethnic stereotypes and

a racially-based prescribed set of learning objectives. A criticism of the development of the post-apartheid curriculum, Curriculum 2005, is that it was a bureaucratic-driven process of curriculum reform with too much alignment to socio-economic concerns at the expense of knowledge and pedagogical concerns.

Decentralisation and school autonomy

Much of the literature on the structure and governance of systems of curriculum development and assessment, focuses on the balance between national and local decision-making.

Deng (2010) describes curriculum planning at three levels: institutional, programmatic and classroom. It is argued that top down, centrally driven approaches to curriculum development are often not implemented effectively at school or classroom level. Approaches need to combine all three subsystems, acknowledging, on the one hand, the key role of classroom teachers as curricular change agents and, on the other hand, the need for institutional and programmatic curriculum planning in guiding, supporting, and enabling curricular change at the classroom level.

Stabback (2014) discusses the risks and benefits of decentralised curriculum development. Arguments for decentralised curriculum development include managerial efficiency, the relevance of curriculum content to local cultural and economic realities and the increased legitimacy of curricula through greater stakeholder participation in policy design. Risks include the degree to which the quality of curriculum can be guaranteed; the risk of fragmentation can be reduced and national goals and priorities can be pursued in a consistent way.

An OECD review of evaluation and assessment in education (2013) discusses the risks and benefits of devolution of assessment responsibilities to local level. Potential benefits include a diversity of approaches to evaluation and assessment at local level which allows for innovation. Autonomy at local level can generate trust, commitment and professionalism. However, there may be concerns about inconsistency of practices, lack of systematic application of national directions and lack of capacity or commitment to developing quality frameworks at local level. The instruments used for quality assurance may be very diverse and not documented at national level. There may be few mechanisms for sharing good practice across the system.

PISA (2009) reported on how much autonomy schools have in deciding student assessment policies and curriculum content. Initial findings reported were that, at country level, the greater the number of schools with responsibility for defining curricula and assessment, the better the performance of the school system as a whole. Further analysis revealed that at low levels of economic development, increased school autonomy regarding academic content decision-making had a negative impact on student outcomes. Whereas in high-income countries, increased autonomy over academic content produced positive effects on student achievement (Hanushek et al, 2011).

2. Independent assessment bodies: advantages and disadvantages

Synergies for Better Learning: An international perspective on evaluation and assessment. OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education. 2013.
http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/education/synergies-for-better-learning-an-international-perspective-on-evaluation-and-assessment_9789264190658-en#page70

The greater emphasis on evaluation and assessment has led to the creation of specialised intermediate agencies which assume a central role in the governance of the evaluation and

assessment framework. These agencies are typically involved in the design and operation of evaluation activities (e.g. national standardised student assessments, external school evaluation), technical leadership (e.g. design of guidelines and instruments for evaluation), capacity building for evaluation and assessment and the monitoring of the education system. Some of these agencies were developed to monitor national education standards. For example, in the Slovak Republic, the National Institute of Certified Measurement measures and evaluates the quality of education. In Italy, the National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education System has functional responsibility for system evaluation. Some agencies have a wide remit. For example, in the Flemish Community of Belgium, the Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training has jurisdiction over all services related to quality improvement in education including determining and adjusting attainment targets and objectives; certification processes; ensuring quality of educational institutions; organising the National Assessment Programme, input into teacher training and organising the Examination Board.

An important issue for policy is the division of labour between education authorities and intermediate agencies, for instance in making a judgement on the state of education in countries and developing a vision for evaluation and assessment. It is often ambiguous how far the intermediate agencies can take their autonomy in leading educational evaluation activities. Education authorities inevitably have a vested interest in the evaluation of the education system which gives great importance to the issue of the independence of intermediate evaluation agencies.

The Educational Assessments that Latin America needs. Ravela et al, 2008. PREAL Working paper Series No. 40.

<http://archive.thedialogue.org/PublicationFiles/PREAL%2040-English.pdf>

Assessment units must be independent in reporting the results of their work. Those responsible for educational assessment and for disseminating test results cannot be dependent on the time frames and interests of political parties. There has been much discussion of whether assessment units should be located within or outside of education ministries. The main argument for the latter approach is this need for independence and transparency. However, there have been examples in the region of countries with stable and independent units within education ministries, and other cases where the units have been unstable and unable to consolidate their work even though they were part of an external institution. The institutional location is not as important as the culture of continuity and transparency created around assessment. Such a culture is achieved when assessment has a clear mandate and a solid structure, which necessitates that the assessment system be underpinned by some kind of legal statute. One of the approaches to be considered is to establish this by law, since it calls for broad agreement that allows a long-term educational assessment plan to be put in place. There must be a certain level of stability: if assessment policies change constantly, distrust grows and credibility is lost.

A solid institutional structure requires independence and pluralism among government bodies and technical assistance agencies, an appropriate budget, and human resources that guarantee the unit can function to the necessary degree of technical quality. The assessment unit's independence should not cause it to become dissociated from education policy. On the contrary, assessment must respond to a political-educational project with widespread support and should remain closely linked to other key areas of education policy such as teacher training, curricular development, planning and project design, programme evaluation, and research.

What has happened with learning assessment systems in Latin America? Lessons from the last decade of experience. Ferrer, G., Fiszbein A. 2015. Commission for quality education for all: background paper.

<http://www.thedialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/English-EDU-Learning-Assessment-Systems-v6.pdf>

This report provides a critical review of progress and lessons learned in developing learning assessment systems from 2005-2015 in five countries: Brazil, Columbia, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru. It is based on in-depth review of official materials and semi structured interviews with experts. In the five countries leadership and administrative responsibility for standardised assessment programmes rests with two major types of institutions: national institutes and assessment units in Ministries of Education.

A number of changes have occurred in national institutes, mainly in terms of new legal arrangements which give institutes more administrative autonomy. In all three cases, though, the head of these institutes is selected by the MOE and appointed by the national President (Colombia and Brazil) or by the Senate (Mexico). Units in Peru and Guatemala have continued to operate within the organisational structure of the ministries. There is still some debate as to whether these units should be turned into autonomous agencies outside the MOEs. However, the technical capacity and transparency they have demonstrated over the years have made the question of institutional change an issue of lesser priority than could have been expected a few years ago.

Even though institutes' autonomy is not questioned, there is a demand that their assessment work become more closely aligned with government educational policies, in particular those related to curriculum implementation and teacher professional development. However, despite having their own assessment units, MOEs also often struggle to manage an adequate internal flow of data to improve decision-making based on student learning results. Neither type of institutional configuration can guarantee *per se* an efficient use of the data for informed policymaking and educational improvement.

Independent institutes are able to make long-term decisions about assessment programmes (including population and content coverage, test administration cycles, etc.). MOEs' units find it much more difficult to maintain long term assessment plans and cycles due to frequent demands by political authorities, particularly when government changes occur.

In relation to these organisations' "sensitivity" to political interference in handling public data, namely assessment results, there has been no difference between countries with different institutional frameworks. Results are made public. From 2005 to the present, there have been no reports on attempts to censor data dissemination in any of these countries and therefore the autonomy or government-subordination factors have not been put to the test in this regard.

The choice between putting autonomous institutes in charge of evaluation or keeping those functions in specialised units within the MOE is less obvious than many people would have thought ten years ago. However, there is some suggestive evidence that institutes have some advantages vis-à-vis units arising from their higher level of autonomy. First, in places where bureaucratic bottlenecks (e.g. hiring rules) make it difficult to sustain the presence of highly qualified technical people within the Ministry, autonomy can help create better conditions to build capacity. Second, if sustained, autonomy can provide a higher level of protection from political pressures than those faced by units that report directly to political authorities in the MOE. However, legal autonomy does not guarantee political autonomy: political pressures can weaken the resolve of seemingly autonomous bodies. The lesson for countries that are considering the establishment of autonomous evaluation institutes is that they demand a strong legal framework—including the establishment of governance arrangements that ensure the proper technical oversight, dedicated funding, and the ability to make the necessary human resource decisions independently.

Curricular Reforms in Latin America with Special Emphasis on the Argentine Case. Gvirtz, S. 2012. *Comparative Education*, 38:4, 453-469.

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/0305006022000030711>

According to Gvirtz, in Argentina, policies concerning the use of information obtained and the definition of instruments used for system assessment are constantly questioned by various sectors of society. Implementation of the evaluations has always been in the hands of the Ministry of Education of the Nation, disregarding the independence and competence with which evaluations are carried out. This has led to the persistence of vices inherent to a bureaucratic state administration: among others, not much guarantee of transparency and federal participation in the design.

Kanje A. and Acana S (2013) Developing the Enabling Context for Student Assessment in Uganda. SABER Student Assessment Working Paper No. 8. World Bank
[http://www-](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2013/04/17/000445729_20130417143123/Rendered/PDF/767330WP0WP80READ00Box374386B00PUBLIC0.pdf)

[wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2013/04/17/000445729_20130417143123/Rendered/PDF/767330WP0WP80READ00Box374386B00PUBLIC0.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2013/04/17/000445729_20130417143123/Rendered/PDF/767330WP0WP80READ00Box374386B00PUBLIC0.pdf)

Uganda has been working to create a stronger, more sustainable student assessment system, that includes examinations for selection and certification; large-scale country level assessments and classroom assessments. This paper focuses on the enabling context-policies, institutions, human and fiscal resources- that have enabled Uganda to build its assessment system. The Uganda National Examination Board (UNEB) is classed as an autonomous institution. It has clear governance. The UNEB executive secretary is appointed by the president of Uganda. A governing board has members from the Ministry of Education's three technical directorates.

Elements that have helped Uganda to succeed include: clear policies mandating the assessment programmes; one institution providing leadership for all assessment activities and having a stable, well-qualified team of staff.

Lessons that can be learned from the case of UNEB include:

- Political stability and a strong commitment to education are key drivers for building a strong assessment system.
- Having a single institution to conduct all assessment activities can allow for clearer institutional structures and efficient coordination, development and implementation of assessment programmes.
- Competitive salaries are needed to attract and retain personnel and training needs to be provided for capacity building.

3. Large scale, system level assessments

What matters most for student assessment systems: a framework paper. Clarke, M. 2012, SABER working paper series. Number 1.

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/17471/682350WP00PUBLOWP10READ0web04019012.pdf?sequence=1>

Large-scale, system-level assessments are designed to provide information on system performance levels and related or contributing factors, typically in relation to an agreed-upon set of standards or learning goals, in order to inform education policy and practice. Examples include international assessments of student achievement levels, such as TIMSS, PIRLS, and PISA; regional assessments, such as PASEC in Francophone Africa, SACMEQ in Anglophone Africa, and LLECE in South America.

Regional assessment exercises, such as SACMEQ, PASEC, and LLECE, represent another form of collaboration toward creating an enabling context. The efficiencies of scale achieved by these collaborations make it more cost effective to develop higher-quality tests and to incorporate technological advances into the testing process.

International assessments

Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

<https://www.oecd.org/pisa/aboutpisa/>

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) was developed by the OECD and is an international survey which aims to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students, focusing on reading, maths and science. Students representing more than 70 economies have participated in the assessment. PISA enables international comparisons of student performance; policies and practice.

PISA is developed and implemented under the responsibility of the Ministries of Education through PISA's decision-making body, the PISA Governing Board. The Board has representatives from all member countries. The Board determines the policy priorities for PISA and oversees adherence to these priorities during implementation. PISA has Subject Matter Expert Groups for its three key areas of testing – reading, mathematics and science—who design the theoretical framework for each survey. For each PISA survey, a consortium of international contractors (usually made up of testing and assessment agencies), chosen by the Board, are responsible for the design and implementation of the surveys.

PISA for Development

<https://www.oecd.org/pisa/aboutpisa/pisafordevelopment.htm>

PISA for Development aims to increase developing countries' use of PISA assessments for monitoring progress towards nationally-set targets for improvement, for the analysis of factors associated with student learning outcomes, particularly for poor and marginalised populations, for institutional capacity-building and for tracking international educational targets. It will do this using enhanced PISA survey instruments that are more relevant for the contexts found in developing countries but which produce scores that are on the same scales as the main PISA assessment. The pilot project will also develop an approach and methodology for including out of school children in the surveys.

Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)

<http://timss.bc.edu/about.html>

TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center conducts regular international comparative assessments of student achievement in mathematics and science (TIMSS) and in reading (PIRLS) in more than 60 countries. TIMSS and PIRLS are projects of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), an independent, international cooperative of national educational research institutions and governmental research agencies. TIMSS and PIRLS enable participating countries to make evidence-based decisions for improving educational policy. Some of the ways governments and ministries use TIMSS and PIRLS results include:

- Measuring the effectiveness of their educational systems in a global context
- Identifying gaps in learning resources and opportunities
- Pinpointing any areas of weakness and stimulating curriculum reform
- Measuring the impact of new educational initiatives
- Training researchers and teachers in assessment and evaluation

TIMSS and PIRLS also collect extensive data about the contextual factors that affect learning, including school resources, student attitudes, instructional practices, and support at home. This information can be examined in relation to achievement to explore factors that contribute to academic success.

Regional assessments

The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality. 2015. Assessment GEMs no.8. ACER.

<http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=assessgems>

The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) carries out large-scale cross-national research studies in the Southern and Eastern Africa region. It aims to assess the conditions of schooling and performance levels of learners and teachers in the areas of literacy and numeracy. SACMEQ is an international non-governmental organisation. The consortium is made up of 15 ministries of education who set SACMEQ's policies and programs with related operational activities being coordinated by the SACMEQ Coordinating Centre based within the IIEP, UNESCO. Within member countries, SACMEQ projects are implemented by National Research Coordinators, appointed by the ministers of education. Across the countries taking part in SACMEQ, there are examples of this assessment influencing policy. In Kenya, Zanzibar and Zambia, lower than expected results led to the formation of national policy reviews or presidential commissions. The findings of SACMEQ influenced the Kenyan Education Sector Support Programme, introduced in 2003. In particular, this programme allocated significant funding to the building of classrooms, providing instructional materials, and to developing non-formal education programmes for those dropping out of school. In Namibia, as a result of SACMEQ findings, a policy was developed to share good practice and resources between clusters of schools.

The Latin-American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education: Measuring and comparing educational quality in Latin America. 2014. Assessment GEMs no.3. ACER.

<http://research.acer.edu.au/assessgems/3/>

The Laboratorio Latinoamericano de Evaluación de la Calidad de la Educación (Latin-American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education or LLECE) is the network of national systems for the assessment of education quality in Latin America, created in 1994, and coordinated by UNESCO's Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (OREALC).

LLECE assessments aim to provide information about the quality of education in the region and guide decision-making in public education policies. The implementation of LLECE assessments is agreed between a National Coordinators Council and UNESCO's Regional Office of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean. Together these two groups define and decide all aspects of the study including instrument design, administration and analysis. The UNESCO regional office is responsible for deciding on the more technical aspects of the implementation and analysis. Due to its regional nature, it is difficult to evaluate the impact that LLECE assessments have had in each participant country. LLECE reports always conclude with a chapter on recommendations for education policy development, however, no information is available about whether these recommendations have triggered changes in policy or practice. A study on this topic is envisaged in the LLECE Strategic Plan for 2015 to 2019.

Donor-led assessments

The Early Grade Reading Assessment: Assessing children's acquisition of basic literacy skills in developing countries. 2014. Assessment GEMs no.2. ACER

<http://research.acer.edu.au/assessgems/2/>

The EGRA was developed to provide a battery of assessments of basic reading skills for developing countries to monitor the status of early reading in primary schools. The assessment tool was first implemented in The Gambia and Senegal in 2007. Since then, the reading assessment methodology has been adapted for use in more than 60 countries, in 100 languages.

The impact of assessment results on education policy and practice in East Africa. Eiks, P. 2016. HEART.

<http://www.heart-resources.org/assignment/impact-assessment-results-education-policy-practice-east-africa/>

The Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and the Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA) are examples of assessments that are widely used by donors. EGRA is the assessment most used by donors in Uganda, particularly in relation to tracking the USAID School Health and Reading Programme (SHRP), the Global Partnership for Education's School and Teacher Effectiveness Project, and DFID's Girls' Education Challenge, which also uses EGMA to track progress. Officials at the Ugandan Ministry of Education particularly cite EGRA data as having an impact in changing policy and early reading programmes are being scaled up rapidly. Other countries in which the EGRA assessments have led quickly towards successful use of donor funding to implement early reading interventions include Kenya, Liberia and South Africa.

Citizen-led assessments

The impact of assessment results on education policy and practice in East Africa. Elks, P. 2016. HEART.

<http://www.heart-resources.org/assignment/impact-assessment-results-education-policy-practice-east-africa/>

UWEZO manages citizen-led assessments across Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. UWEZO is a programme managed by the organisation Twaweza. The purpose of UWEZO is to measure actual levels of literacy and numeracy across Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. UWEZO conducts an annual household assessment investigating whether children of different ages have secured the foundations of literacy and numeracy. UWEZO's effective dissemination activities through the media have widened the knowledge base about the low levels of learning. However, a recent review has shown that there is no systematic evidence of UWEZO making a direct impact on improving outcomes (Results for Development Institute, 2015).

4. Political influence on curriculum

Curriculum Policy and the Politics of what should be learnt in schools. Levin, B. In: The Sage Handbook of Curriculum and Instruction. 2008. Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA.

http://scholar.google.co.uk/scholar?q=related:f1v4DIsGBx4J:scholar.google.com/&hl=en&as_sdt=0,5

Curriculum politics involve a wide range of participants. An important first question is where the authority over curriculum rests. Education governance typically involves some combination of national, local, and school participation; and in federal systems, education governance will have a fourth (and often primary) level at the state or province. The division of powers and responsibilities across these levels is quite variable from one country to another. In most jurisdictions, final authority over curriculum rests with national or subnational governments. In many federal systems it is provinces or states that control curriculum. In a few situations curriculum authority is largely located within individual schools.

The central role of governments inevitably brings into play a range of both political and bureaucratic elements. Although a cabinet usually has a single person charged with responsibility for education, many other political leaders may also have views; and if curriculum decisions go through a political vetting process, they may be subject to all sorts of political influences including preferences of individuals. An individual in a key position can either shape or hold up decisions if determined enough. For example, a powerful cabinet member or political advisor may be able to insist that a particular element be added to or dropped from a proposed curriculum.

A second important element of governance structure is the institutional role of elected lay persons as against civil servants or experts. Countries vary significantly in how much authority lay people have in shaping education policy—vehicles range from elected ministers to local school authorities to school councils or governing bodies involving parents and

others. Each of these forms will bring different dynamics to curriculum politics. Depending on national governance arrangements, schools or districts have varying degrees of control—from almost none to quite substantial—over the formal curriculum.

The main education stakeholder groups—teachers, principals, senior administrators, and elected local authorities where they exist—are almost always involved in curriculum reviews and decisions. Subject matter experts from schools and universities typically play a central role in the curriculum formation and review process. Since schools are widely seen as playing a central role in the socialisation of children and young people, a wide range of interest groups may be involved in curriculum politics depending on the issue. For example, business groups often have strong views about various aspects of secondary curriculum. Various industries will try to promote subjects and programmes that support their labour market needs. Within government, other departments may put pressure on the education ministry for their favourite causes—such as innovation units promoting the use of technology or culture ministries promoting the arts.

In the wider society, many groups want the curriculum to reflect particular issues and perspectives—for example, the desire to include the language, history, and literature of various minorities and indigenous peoples or the ongoing debate about the role of the arts, or views on the place of foreign languages, or education for entrepreneurship, or the pressure to embody religious views in school curricula.

Governments are moving away in many areas of policy development from reliance on experts in favour of greater involvement of average citizens. In curriculum policy this trend can be seen in the increasing degree of non-expert participation. Curriculum review parties are now more likely to include parents or students or non-educators such as business representatives.

Jurisdictions normally have well-developed formal processes for creating and revising curricula. Typically these processes involve bringing together groups of experts and sector representatives to draft the elements of a new or revised curriculum. The processes are often organized and to some degree directed by government officials from ministries of education.

Curriculum as political text: the case of Cyprus (1935-90), Koutselini-Ioannidou. M. 1997. *History of Education*, 26:4, 395-407, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0046760970260404>

This paper examines how the national problem of Cyprus, and its development during various periods of its history, affected educational policy and consequently the secondary school curricula. The view that the curriculum can be seen as a political document which reflects the struggles of opposing groups to have their interests, values, histories and politics dominate the school curriculum fully applies in the case of Cyprus. From such a perspective, changes to the secondary education curriculum from 1935-90 can be readily understood within the context of political changes in Cyprus.

Three periods of curriculum changes corresponding to major political events have been identified. During the period of colonial rule (1935-60) the opposing groups were the colonial government and the Greek Board of Education in Cyprus (which represented the interests of the Greek Orthodox Church and the Greek government). Tradition was the prime source of authority. During the period of Independence (1960-74), the debate over the secondary school curriculum was between the Ministries of Finance and Labour and the Ministry of Education. The demand for reduction of course offerings in ancient Greek was based on pragmatic, labour related demands, which advocated increased technical and vocational education offerings and generally reduced offerings of humanistic or subjects deemed 'useless'. Enosis (union with Greece) supporters regarded any reduction in ancient Greek courses as a hidden plot against the national cause. The period from 1974 to 1990 saw focus shift to an independent educational policy and the internationalisation of education. The conflicting groups were the various political parties, each of which wanted the curriculum to

reflect their political philosophy. The differentiation in the core curriculum from period to period, and the replacement or introduction of new subjects, resulted primarily from ideological and political influences. However, the almost unchanged character of the secondary education curriculum attests to the powerful dominance of one group and ideology.

From Policy to Practice: Curriculum reform in South African education. Cross M., Mungadi R. and Rouhani S. 2002. Comparative Education, 38:2, 171-187, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03050060220140566>

Since the end of the apartheid era, the South African government has placed emphasis on the introduction of policies and mechanisms aimed at redressing the legacy of a racially and ethnically fragmented, dysfunctional and unequal education system. Within the schooling system, the most significant of these developments was a radical departure from apartheid education through an outcomes-based curriculum reform, known as Curriculum 2005, 1996 saw the Department of Education issuing syllabi purged of the most gross and evident apartheid, racial and ethnic stereotypes. In 1997, Curriculum 2005 was launched, which marked a dramatic departure from the apartheid curriculum and also represented a paradigm shift from content-based teaching and learning to an outcomes based one. It also marks a departure from 'fundamental pedagogics' (a racially-based prescribed set of learning objectives) to progressive pedagogy and learner-centred teaching and learning strategies.

Curriculum 2005 tried to do the following: (i) align school work with workplace, social and political goals; (ii) emphasise experiential and cooperative learning; (iii) pursue the value of diversity in the areas of race, gender and culture; (iii) develop citizens who are imaginative and critical problem-solvers.

A critique of Curriculum 2005 is that in its development, political imperatives were given primacy over policy imperatives. There is concern with the degree of state interventionism in the curriculum process. For the critics, Curriculum 2005 represents an example of a bureaucratic-driven process of curriculum reform, which has too much alignment to socio-economic concerns at the expense of knowledge and pedagogical concerns. Very often in educational reforms political concerns are made to prevail over educational and pedagogical concerns in order to mediate conflicting interests in the political domain.

5. Decentralisation and school autonomy

Deng Z (2010), Curriculum Planning and Systems Change. In: Penelope Peterson, Eva Baker, Barry McGaw, (Editors), International Encyclopedia of Education. volume 1, pp. 384-389. Oxford: Elsevier.

Curriculum planning operates across three subsystems: institutional, programmatic and classroom. Institutional curriculum planning frames what should go on in a school or school system in terms of broad goals and general approaches to education. It serves as a means of drawing attention to educational ideals and expectations shared within a society and putting forward the forms and procedures of schooling as responses to those ideals and expectations. Such curriculum links what is taught in schools to the social and cultural systems beyond schooling, and is always under pressure for change. Institutional curriculum planning is always a national or regional political undertaking. It usually involves soliciting opinions and suggestions from various representative groups – including policy advisory bodies, employment agencies, educational specialists, heads of schools, and various civic and special interest groups.

Programmatic curriculum planning translates the expectations and ideals embedded in the institutional curriculum into operational frameworks for schools, thereby bridging the gap between the abstract institutional curriculum and the (enacted) classroom curriculum The

classroom curriculum involves transforming the institutional and programmatic curriculum embodied in curriculum documents and materials into educative experiences for students.

A top-down model of curriculum planning has been widely used in countries with a centralised education system. The central government initiates curricular change by putting forward new curricular visions and goals. These visions and goals are then translated into programmatic or curricular frameworks that specify course structure, content standards, pedagogy, and assessment. The national education body implements a series of initiatives such as textbook revision, assessment modification, teacher preparation, and professional development restructuring. Such a centrally driven model places a high emphasis on institutional and programmatic curriculum planning for change. This model, however, rarely works well at the school or classroom level. New curricular visions and frameworks often do not get implemented or are not implemented in the way they were intended due to reasons including issues with communication, interpretation or disagreement at local level.

Bottom up approaches can be over influenced by personal and local interests and creative excessive demands on teachers. Approaches need to combine all three subsystems, acknowledging, on the one hand, the key role of classroom teachers as curricular change agents and, on the other hand, the need for institutional and programmatic curriculum planning in guiding, supporting, and enabling curricular change at the classroom level.

Stabback, P. 2014. *Training Tools for Curriculum Development. Development and application of curriculum frameworks.* Geneva: UNESCO-IBE.

http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/COPs/Pages_documents/Resource_Packs/TTCD/TTCDhome.html

The decentralisation of curriculum development allows local authorities and schools to develop their own curriculum. A range of technical, educational and political rationales are often advanced to justify the need for decentralisation. These include managerial efficiency, enhanced quality and the relevance of curriculum content to local cultural and economic realities, as well as the increased legitimacy of curricula through greater stakeholder participation in policy design.

This approach also has risks, particularly with respect to the degree to which:

- The quality of curriculum can be guaranteed;
- The risk of fragmentation can be reduced; and
- National goals and priorities can be pursued in a consistent way.

In some cases, this trend has led to significant modifications in the organisational structure of ministries of education. For example, decentralisation may imply the devolution of administrative functions from central to regional, provincial or local levels. However, the nation-state retains a degree of control, fostering equity as differences implemented at the local levels can potentially result in greater inequality between regions.

A strong central government remains important, particularly for the development of national curriculum frameworks, quality assurance standards, school-effectiveness indicators, and assessment and evaluation systems to ensure quality. These overlapping frameworks provide broad parameters within which educational processes and products may be moulded to meet local needs and secure the support and participation of civil society, including parents and local communities.

In Israel, schools have significant autonomy in developing and formalising an educational approach, and formulating a school-based curriculum by adapting teaching and learning methods to local conditions. Greater school autonomy has had a positive impact on teachers' motivation and sense of commitment and on schools' achievement orientation, but only four per cent of the variance in the effectiveness between autonomous and less autonomous schools can be explained by school-based management.

The curriculum in debates and in educational reforms to 2030: For a curriculum agenda of the twenty-first century. IBE Working Papers on Curriculum Issues No.15 Amadio, M, Operti R, Tedesco J. UNESCO International Bureau of Education. 2015.

http://www.ibe.unesco.org/sites/default/files/resources/wpci-15-curragenda_21stcentury_eng.pdf

Curriculum frameworks constitute a form of preparing and reflecting political and social agreements regarding educational aims that result in a range of requirements and regulations guiding the implementation and evaluation of the curriculum at local and school levels. Curriculum framework does not mean a uniform curriculum but a consistent and sequenced range of guidelines and criteria at national level that authorise and support the design of appropriate and adapted educational provision, besides facilitating the development of the school curriculum connected with local realities. There is debate concerning how prescriptive the centrally designed curriculum should be and how much leeway should be left to teachers to adapt the curriculum for classroom use.

Synergies for Better Learning: An international perspective on evaluation and assessment. OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education. 2013.DOI:10.1787/9789264190658-en.

http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/education/synergies-for-better-learning-an-international-perspective-on-evaluation-and-assessment_9789264190658-en#page70

There is considerable variation among OECD countries in the extent to which governance and implementation of evaluation and assessment are devolved to local level. Devolution of these responsibilities to local level can result in a diversity of approaches to evaluation and assessment which allows for local innovation. Autonomy at local level can generate trust, commitment and professionalism. However, there may be concerns about inconsistency of practices, lack of systematic application of national directions and lack of capacity or commitment to developing quality frameworks at local level. The instruments used for quality assurance may be very diverse and not documented at national level. There may be few mechanisms for sharing good practice across the system.

The challenge is to develop a national strategy for each evaluation and assessment component which builds on best practice and allows flexibility of approach at local level within agreed parameters.

PISA in focus 9: School autonomy and accountability: are they related to student performance?

<http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/download/5k9h362kcx9w.pdf?expires=1467201067&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=88A99B0884F97A2316E11CF9D5CC2418>

PISA 2009 asked school principals to report whether “principals”, “teachers”, a “school governing board”, a “regional or local education authority”, or a “national education authority” has considerable responsibility for: establishing student assessment policies; choosing which textbooks are used; determining course content; and deciding which courses are offered. The ratio of the number of these four activities for which “principals” and/or “teachers” have responsibility to the number of these activities for which a “regional or local education authority” and/or a “national education authority” has responsibility was computed.

Japan, Korea, New Zealand and the partner economy Hong Kong-China grant relatively greater autonomy to schools in determining curricula and assessment practices. In these countries, over 80% of students attend schools that have considerable responsibility for establishing student assessment policies, choosing which textbooks are used, and deciding which courses are offered. At the country level, the greater the number of schools that have the responsibility to define and elaborate their curricula and assessments, the better the performance of the entire school system, even after accounting for national income. School

systems that grant schools greater discretion in deciding student-assessment policies, the courses offered, the content of those courses, and the textbooks used are also those systems that show higher reading scores overall.

Does School Autonomy make sense everywhere? Panel estimates from PISA. Hanushek, E. Link, S. Woessmann, L. 2011. NBER Working Paper 17591.

<http://www.nber.org/papers/w17591.pdf>

At low levels of economic development, increased school autonomy hurts student outcomes, in particular in decision-making areas related to academic content. By contrast, in high-income countries, increased autonomy over academic content exerts positive effects on student achievement. A country near Argentina's level of development that increased its academic-content autonomy over time would expect to see a significant and substantial drop in achievement. In such a country, going from no autonomy to full autonomy over academic content would reduce math achievement by 0.34 standard deviations according to this model. Moreover, the significant positive interaction indicates that the autonomy effect is significantly negative for all low- and middle-income countries in our sample. By contrast, the effect of academic-content autonomy turns significantly positive in most of the high-income countries. For the richest country in the sample (Luxembourg at \$46,457 GDP per capita in 2000), the positive effect of academic-content autonomy is as large as 0.79 standard deviations. This pattern holds separately for all three categories of autonomy – course offerings, course content, and textbooks.

6. Additional information

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