

EQ Review

Educational Quality in the Developing World



EQ Review is a bimonthly newsletter published by USAID's EQUIP1 to share knowledge about issues fundamental to improving educational quality and to communicate the successes, challenges, & lessons learned by USAID Missions.

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Measuring Pupil Achievement

In today's policy environment, testing has become a critical component of education reform. Policy makers and education administrators often view test scores as a measure of educational quality and use test scores to hold schools accountable for teacher performance. Continuous assessment, an alternative or supplement to high stakes testing of pupil achievement, offers a methodology for measuring pupil performance and using those findings to improve the success of pupils.

What is continuous assessment?

Continuous assessment is a classroom strategy implemented by teachers to ascertain the knowledge, understanding, and skills attained by pupils. Teachers administer assessments in a variety of ways over time to allow them to observe multiple tasks and to collect information about what pupils know, understand, and can do. These assessments are curriculum-based tasks previously taught in class. Continuous assessment occurs frequently during the school year and is part of regular teacher-pupil interactions. Pupils receive feedback from teachers based on their performance that allows them to focus on topics they have not yet mastered. Teachers learn which students need review and remediation and which pupils are ready to move on to more complex work. Thus, the results of the assessments help to ensure that all pupils make learning progress throughout the school cycle thereby increasing their academic achievement.

What are the benefits of continuous assessment?

The continuous assessment process is much more than an examination of pupil achievement. Continuous

Continuous Assessment

assessment is also a powerful diagnostic tool that enables pupils to understand the areas in which they are having difficulty and to concentrate their efforts in those areas. Continuous assessment also allows teachers to monitor the impact of their lessons on pupil understanding. Teachers can modify their pedagogical strategies to include the construction of remediation activities for pupils who are not working at the expected grade level and the creation of enrichment activities for pupils who are working at or above the expected grade level. Hence, the continuous assessment process supports a cycle of self-evaluation and pupil-specific activities by both pupils and teachers.

Frequent interactions between pupils and teachers means that teachers know the strengths and weaknesses of their learners. These exchanges foster a pupil-teacher relationship based on individual interactions. Pupils learn that the teacher values their achievements and that their assessment outcomes have an impact on the instruction that they receive. One-to-one communication between the teacher and the pupil can motivate pupils to continue attending school and to work hard to achieve higher levels of mastery.

In continuous assessment, teachers assess the curriculum as implemented in the classroom. It also allows teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching strategies relative to the curriculum, and to change those strategies as dictated by the needs of their pupils. In addition, continuous assessments provide information on achievement of particular levels of skills, understanding, and knowledge rather than achievement of certain marks or scores. Thus, continuous assessment enables pupils to monitor their achievement of grade level goals and to visualize their progress towards those goals before it is too late to achieve them.

Continued on p.3

Continuous Assessment

Malawi

Linking Continuous Assessment and Teacher Development: Evaluating A Model of Continuous Assessment for Primary Schools in Malawi

High dropout rates, overcrowded classrooms, and poorly trained or untrained teachers characterized Malawi's education system after Free Primary Education was introduced in 1994. By 1999, a USAID-funded study by the Improving Educational Quality (IEQ) project confirmed that pupils in grade 3 did not have basic literacy and numeracy skills. USAID partnered with the Malawi Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology to conduct a feasibility study of the impact on pupil achievement of the implementation of continuous assessment into the primary schools through the USAID-supported IEQ II project.

The IEQ/Malawi team developed a model of continuous assessment that took into consideration the Malawi primary school curricula for Maths, Chichewa, and English, the lack of teacher preparation, and the large class sizes. The continuous assessment model was implemented in 21 primary schools in the Ntcheu district and the achievement of 122 pupils in these schools was compared to that of 603 pupils in the districts of Mangochi and Balaka.

At the beginning of the year, pupils in Ntcheu were able to recognize about the same numbers of common English words as were pupils in the other two districts (14 in Ntcheu, 9 in Mangochi and Balaka) but by the end of the year they recognized almost twice as many (41 in Ntcheu, 22 in Mangochi and Balaka). During the same year, pupils in Ntcheu increased the percentage of math problems they answered correctly by 14 percentage points compared to a six percentage point increase by pupils in Mangochi and Balaka.

Policymakers are now considering integrating the continuous assessment model into all of Malawi's primary schools beginning with the primary school curriculum and the teacher training colleges.



For more information:

View the full article on
[Continuous Assessment Model in Malawi](#)

[View IEQ/Malawi documents](#) on the IEQ website

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Continuous Assessment

Southern Africa

Southern Africa Conference on Continuous Assessment: June 30 - July 2, 2003

The Examination Council of Zambia, assisted by USAID, hosted a sub-regional conference on assessment, “Learner Assessment for Improved Educational Quality: An Exchange of Current Ideas and Best Practices” in Livingston, Zambia. Presentations and discussions revolved around three sub-themes: continuous assessment at the primary and secondary levels; competence testing at the primary school level; and learner assessment in non-formal education environments. Among the key issues noted was the need for teacher education on the tasks of the administration, interpretation, recording, and reporting of assessments, with a suggestion to integrate continuous assessment course work into teacher training colleges. Other observations that came out of the meeting included making continuous assessment complementary to national examinations, relating continuous assessment to remedial interventions, and having a strong process of inspection to ensure and to monitor the use of continuous assessment in schools. The group plans to meet in 2004 in Zimbabwe to continue the forum on assessment.

For more information, [download Southern Africa Conference papers](#).

From p.1

Finally, teachers can share assessment results with important education stakeholders including parents, other teachers, community members, and the learners themselves. Parents especially want to know how their children are doing in school. Regular reports from the teacher based on continuous assessments allow the parents to know about their children’s progress. With this knowledge in hand, parents can assist and support children with their studies during the school year before opportunities for grade level achievement have passed.

Honduras

Continuous Assessment in Out-of-School Education Settings – Honduras

In 1999, Hurricane Mitch had destroyed many schools and USAID wanted to meet the immediate needs of middle grade learners now out of school by providing expanded learning opportunities through *Educadores*. USAID’s Improving Educational Quality (IEQ) project partnered with the *Educadores* program in Honduras to extend its already successful education program for primary level learners (grades 1-6) outside of the formal school system to the secondary level (grades 7-9).

Work in primary schools suggested that monthly progress tests in Spanish and math helped teachers to use more transparent evaluation criteria and provided more attention to children who were falling behind.

Thus, in the process of developing integrated curriculum materials, *Educadores/IEQ* established continuous assessment processes designed to enhance the quality of the non-formal education experience and to learn what students were and were not mastering in the curriculum.

For instance, volunteer class facilitators received training that allowed them to give feedback on assessment sessions to learners. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, the learning materials included self-assessment exercises that enabled learners to continuously review and strengthen their own understanding of the material and to work together to peer review each other’s understandings.

The sustained use and support of the continuous assessment methodology and the incorporation of it into the revised grade 1-6 program illustrate its importance to the quality of the learning experience provided by the *Educadores* alternative mode of education delivery.

For more information about *Educadores* and IEQ, please contact Ned Van Steenwyk at USAID/Honduras, nsteenwyk@usaid.gov, or [search for IEQ publications on Honduras](#).

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