K4D | Knowledge, evidence and learning for development

Evidence on formative classroom assessment for learning

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Question

A literature review on research, evidence and programmatic approaches on formative classroom assessment for learning

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1. Overview

Formative assessments, also known as classroom assessment, continuous assessment or assessment for learning, are those carried out by teachers and students as part of day-to-day activity (Clarke, 2012a). There are multiple interpretations of formative assessment, but most literature takes the broad definition offered by Black and Wiliam (1998, cited in Pryor, 2015: 208): "encompassing all those activities undertaken by teachers, and/or by students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged". Examples are oral questioning, homework, student presentations, and quizzes (Clarke, 2012a), and any and all other activities which provide the teacher with information on the students' learning.

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Formative assessment contrasts with summative assessment. Formative assessments aim at improving education, while summative assessments aim at measuring education (Pryor, 2015). Summative assessments are examinations and formal tests which determine whether a student has passed or failed. Summative assessments provide systematic evidence to teachers about their students' learning and achievements (Kanjee & Sayed, 2013). The difference is sometimes phrased as 'assessment of learning' (summative) and 'assessment for learning' (formative) (Pryor, 2015).

The purpose of formative assessment is to inform and improve classroom practice and policy, and to identify areas for improvement (Perry, 2013). The evidence shows that formative classroom assessments are linked to better student learning outcomes (Clarke, 2012a). Administering assessment does not improve educational quality unless changes occur according to the data collected (Perry, 2013). Thus, it is crucial to support teacher understanding of the purpose of formative assessment (Perry, 2013). Insufficient teacher training is frequently identified as a barrier to implementation and change (Perry, 2013).

This light-touch review of literature on classroom assessments in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and South Asia finds that they are rarely implemented effectively. It is extremely common to find references to CA in policy documents but find that teachers do not use CA in the classroom. Sometimes this is because there is little institutional support for CA, few example materials, and no training, and sometimes this is because teachers do not understand or see the purpose of CA and continue to teach in a top-down manner. Most schooling systems in developing countries have a crippling emphasis on summative exams, and teachers often end up 'teaching to the test' whether they want to or not. Parental pressure plays some part in teaching styles, as teachers are under pressure to show parents that they are preparing their children to pass important exams which open the door to the next level of education. Teacher training chronically underprepares teachers for CA; in some cases not giving any training and in others only explaining how to fill in the government-mandated forms. On the other hand, there are examples in the literature of teachers intuitively using CA methods such as questioning, observation and homework, but not naming it as CA.

The only rigorous experimental study on CA in these regions (Duflo et al., 2015) shows clearly that CA as implemented in India does not improve literacy and numeracy scores. The authors suggest that CA needs a thorough review and revision, as it has not produced the expected results.

The broader literature is mostly focused on SSA. The structures and resources for classrooms are similar in South Asia and the issues highlighted in the literature are broadly similar. The literature makes little distinction between assessments used in primary and secondary education, but there is a slight suggestion that formative assessment is used more at younger ages, and summative assessment used increasingly as students progress.

Policy evaporation

Learner-centred education is a dominant model of education in contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa (Mtika & Gates, 2010). Many African schools are making the shift from teacher-centred education towards learner-centred education, guided by recent national policy changes (e.g. Namibia, South Africa, Malawi). Part of this general shift includes a move away from high-stakes exams towards continuous or school-based assessment, and a focus on achievements rather than passing and failing. Continuous assessment in this model is part of discovery-based learning, rather than recall of facts (Mtika & Gates, 2010).

In many places, this is a top-down change, where policy clearly states the need for continuous assessment as part of the changes, but is not supported by accompanying teacher training or new resource materials. Teachers' individual understanding and translation of what learner-centred education means can lose some of its pedagogical meaning when it is put into practice in classrooms (Iipinge & Kasanda, 2013). Although many SSA countries have shown favourable attitudes towards classroom assessment and learner-centred pedagogy, these have rarely made the move from policy and aspirations into actual classroom practice (Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008).

It is extremely common in the literature to see teachers expressing only a basic understanding of CA, and/or failing to implement it in the classroom even if they do understand. This situation of policy evaporation is commonly noted across the literature on Sub-Saharan Africa. In some cases, newly trained teachers are able and willing to perform continuous assessment, but find it difficult in practice due to resource constraints. In other cases, teachers lack confidence in CA methods and are undertrained. In most SSA countries, assessment remains examination-led (Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008).

Teaching practices

One of the strongest analyses of African schooling is the model of an active teacher and passive students. This situation is often described in the literature. It is described as teacher-centred, with the teacher standing in front of the class and transmitting information to the students, who may answer questions individually or collectively, but who do not actively participate in the lesson (Kellaghan & Greaney, 2003). This is sometimes described as 'chalk and talk' teaching (Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008). The focus is on rote learning of factual information. It is also the norm to have large class sizes. This model is seen across all levels of education.

Most teachers in African schools use oral questioning in the classroom. This is by far the most common form of classroom assessment, although teachers may not even identify it as such. Questions posed by teachers to students are used at all levels of schooling and across all contexts. However, the usual form of questioning may not be effective for CA. Kellaghan and Greaney (2003: 46) state that classroom assessment is deficient, "as it include[s] the use of poorly focused questions, a predominance of questions that require short answers involving factual knowledge, the evocation of responses that involve repetition rather than reflection, and a lack of procedures designed to develop students' higher-order cognitive skills".

Several studies below show the use of CA bureaucratic procedures. Forms are provided to teachers, who must fill in students' marks throughout the term, drawing on the variety of classroom assessments that they carry out. In most cases, this becomes a mechanical application of the practices of CA, without the substance. Teachers describe CA as a box-ticking exercise, and occasionally add marks if students were absent or the teachers did not include enough activities. Some of the literature cautions that the reductive application of assessment for learning makes no improvement to educational outcomes (Pryor, 2015). This occurs when teachers see formative assessment as a 'technique' to be applied, and use it to identify and reinforce desired behaviours (Pryor, 2015). This could be called 'assessment as learning', where the assessment procedures dominate learning and the focus is on meeting the assessment criteria (Pryor, 2015). This is seen in much of the empirical literature, where teachers complete the assessment procedures but do not use the results to improve learning or teaching.

Despite the overall negative evidence on CA, there are some teaching practices which are commonly used which could be classified as CA. Almost all teachers use oral questioning, written tests and take-home assignments. A comprehensive recent literature review on formative assessments in Africa (Perry, 2013) finds that teachers use informal strategies of questioning and observing students while they complete independent work, combined with formal strategies of tests and homework. They use these strategies to gauge student understanding and improve instruction (Perry, 2013). These are promising practices which could be built on.

Administrative burden

In many cases, regularly noted in the literature on Sub-Saharan Africa, large class sizes cause teachers to see CA only as an extra administrative burden. Providing individualised attention is difficult in a large class, and marking or grading each student several times a term for CA can be seen as impossible. There are several examples in the literature of teachers not being able to grade all students' homework assignments, even though these are an integral part of most teaching. Although teachers are poorly trained on CA and thus might be individually unable to implement it effectively, it is important to remember the structural constraints that they are working under.

As noted above, CA appears to have been reduced to a bureaucratic procedure in many places. Teachers are asked to conform to policies on CA and are bureaucratically monitored to ensure that they do so. CA involves extra work for teachers; they will only willingly make the effort if they perceive it to be beneficial to themselves or their pupils. Policy as practised represents a very narrow conceptualisation of formative continuous assessment. Furthermore, it is likely to undermine teachers' own capacity for using assessment to promote learning, as the summative drives out the formative function. In many cases, the form-filling of CA becomes its raison d'etre; inspectors only check that the forms are filled, not their quality or whether they offer any improvement in teaching.

Teacher capacity-building

Poorly qualified and poorly trained teachers are a central reason given in the literature as a reason why classroom assessment is not performed effectively in African schools (Kellaghan & Greaney, 2003). Teacher training may contain only passing references to CA and little explanation of how to use it beyond the mechanics required to fill in the forms. As CA is relatively new, there are some teachers who never studied it in their initial training. In some African countries, a large proportion of teachers are not trained at all. In-service training is thus perhaps the best way to encourage use of CA. Some interventions to train teachers have had good results in terms of teachers' understanding and conceptualisation of CA, but find that the structural constraints listed above mean that they still find it difficult to implement in practice.

In several examples, despite training and provision of CA resources, teachers still do not successfully implement classroom assessment. They appear to find it difficult to change their traditional practices. Lack of experience and confidence in using CA mean that many teachers fall back on their traditional lecture methods of teaching. In other cases, the new techniques are just not used, or used wrongly, with teachers finding it difficult to change their old behaviours and those of students. The national curriculums often remain focused on high-stakes exams, and teachers therefore end up 'teaching to the test' due to pressure to get students through the exams. In general, school cultures are not particularly supportive of CA and tend to focus on summative results, producing a culture which encourages teachers to teach this way, despite their training or knowledge of CA's beneficial attributes.

2. World Bank

The World Bank has been a strong advocate for CA and has widely promoted it for at least the last decade. The World Bank directly links high-quality, formative assessment to better outcomes on standardised tests, and links better learning outcomes to increased national prosperity (Clarke, 2012a). This is in line with its general approach to education as building human capital and increasing economic growth. It directly links improvements in reading and mathematics to increased GDP (Clarke, 2012a).

Its recent focus has been on building assessment systems. The World Bank suggests that these should be comprised of classroom assessments to inform teaching and learning; examinations; and large-scale survey assessment to monitor national and international trends. To create an effective system, there must be (Clarke, 2012b):

- the enabling context – the broader context in which assessment activity takes place and the extent to which that context is supportive of assessment;
- system alignment – the extent to which assessment activities are aligned with the rest of the education system; and
- assessment quality – the technical quality of the instruments, processes, and procedures used for assessment activity.

Their broad recommendations for classroom assessment are (Clarke, 2012a:26):

- **Purpose**: To provide immediate feedback to inform classroom instruction
- **Frequency**: Daily

- **Who is tested:** All students
- **Format**: Varies from observation to questioning to paper-and-pencil tests to student performances
- **Coverage of curriculum**: All subject areas
- **Additional information collected from students?** Yes, as part of the teaching process
- **Scoring:** Usually informal and simple

The World Bank's SABER initiative (Systems Approach for Better Education Results) is a large programme helping countries examine and strengthen the performance of their education systems. The student assessment element analyses and benchmarks policies and systems. A report on the overall assessment trends from 1998 to 2009 shows that in Africa, classroom assessment was given the least attention and funding, compared to large-scale survey assessment and examinations (Liberman & Clarke, 2011). Most projects were aimed at the primary level, and most focused on the enabling conditions for an assessment system. In South Asia, most projects supported primary-level large-scale assessment activities, followed by classroom assessments.

In its 2003 report, Kellaghan and Greaney make suggestions which demonstrate the World Bank's view on classroom assessment:

- Assessment should be an integral and frequent aspect of teaching, in which questions that focus on meaningful aspects of learning are used.
- Teachers should develop reasonable, but challenging, expectations for all pupils, using a variety of methods (e.g., essays, homework, and projects).
- In assessments the focus should be on diagnostic and formative aspects, rather than normative aspects (i.e., assessments that rank students on the basis of results).
- Teachers should ask questions that allow students display higher-order thinking skills (not just recall) and that require inferential and deductive reasoning.
- Pupils' understanding of the general principles of a subject should be assessed, as well as their ability to use appropriate methods and strategies in solving problems.
- Readily understood and prompt feedback should be provided to students.
- Students' processes (how they approach/analyse issues), not just products, should be assessed.
- Assessment should help students reflect on their own learning.
- Questions should require students to explore/expand on issues, not just repeat information.
- The results of assessments, when appropriate, should be communicated to parents and other interested parties (e.g., other teachers).
- The use of criterion-referenced tests can enrich teachers' classroom assessment practice. Periodic administration (every few weeks) of the tests will provide information on what students have learned, when there is a need for further teaching, and identify students in need of additional help.

The sections below include the SABER report for that country. Further SABER reports on DFID priority countries are found in section 10 of this report.

3. Sub-Saharan Africa

South Africa

South Africa features heavily in the literature on assessment in African countries, largely due to Anil Kanjee's work. Kanjee and Sayed (2013) review the history of assessment policy in post-apartheid South Africa. In general, the country tried to move away from summative assessments, particularly the emphasis on the Grade 12 matriculation exam, towards continuous assessment. However, this has been very weakly implemented and student achievements remain extremely low, continuing to be bifurcated along ethnicity lines. The seminal policy in 1998 advocated continuous assessment (CASS), as the best model to improve learning and the learning system. It specifically highlights that CASS should be used to feed back into teaching and learning. CASS should be both formal (projects,

oral presentations, demonstrations, tests and examinations) and informal (daily assessments conducted through observations, discussions, learner–teacher conferences and informal discussion). Other policies in the following years continued to reinforce CASS as the model of choice for assessment. In recent years, the focus has moved to assessment mainly through annual national assessment.

The policy documentation is considered to be confusing, complex, and overly onerous in its administrative burden on teachers (Kanjee & Sayed, 2013). In practice, while ostensibly promoting CASS, the guidelines signal that formal assessment should be privileged over informal. The classroom practice which is inherent in these policies is one which is measurement-driven, with formal testing and recording featuring prominently, and little focus on improving teaching and learning. The discourse is dominated by recording and reporting scores, rather than using this information to address learners' needs.

Pryor and Lubisi (2002) argue that the difficulties of implementing CA are centred around tacit values in tension with those underpinning the new curriculum. In South Africa, this takes the form of:

- teachers' restricted understandings of assessment;
- teachers' emphasis on criteria that demonstrate concern with social control;
- practical and theoretical problems attached to peer assessment.

These factors, together with the complexity of curriculum design, create serious problems of manageability and interpretation. Far from empowering teachers and learners, the new requirements may have a tendency to make them feel even more isolated from control of their situation.

Pryor and Lubisi (2002) use data from workshops on assessment for primary teacher educators, unstructured observation in Intermediate Phase (Grades 4–6) classrooms and interviews with teachers. A vignette from the classroom shows that successful teachers may already be using formative assessment (observation, checking, questioning), but without labelling it as such. However, if they do not recognise that what they are doing is informal assessment and is at least as important as formal methods, then there is a danger that these helpful practices may be vulnerable to the new policy. It therefore becomes crucially important that when teachers receive information about CA that it differentiates between the formal and the informal and does not overemphasise the former. The danger is that if conceptualisations of assessment as concerned primarily with the formal collection of evidence are reinforced, far from CA working to increase formative assessment, it will actually get in the way of it. CA will thus become a bureaucratic rather than an educational process. What is important is that the summative function of assessment does not swamp the function of more informal assessment to act as constant steer towards more productive teaching and learning. Unless teachers can reconceptualise educational assessment in this way then CA will only contribute to their continued distancing from the right to a good education.

Zambia

The SABER report on Zambia (World Bank, 2009) provides the following summary. In Zambia, a formal and publically-available, system-level document provides guidelines for classroom assessment activities. An official curriculum or standards document specifies what students are expected to learn, although the level of performance required of students is not clear. Few system-wide resources are available to teachers for conducting classroom assessment activities. Currently, there are no system-level mechanisms in place to ensure that teachers develop skills and expertise in classroom assessment.

Classroom assessment practices in Zambia are known to be generally weak. For example, classroom assessment activities tend to focus only on information recall. Additionally, teachers tend not to use explicit or a priori criteria for scoring or grading students' work, and uneven application of standards for grading is a serious problem. Although teachers are required to report on student performance to individual students and their parents, parents tend to be poorly informed about their child's grades. Classroom assessment is mainly used as an administrative or control tool rather than as a pedagogical resource. Classroom assessment activities also are not aligned with the pedagogical or

curricular framework. At the same time, there are adequate required uses of classroom assessment to support student learning, including diagnosing student learning issues, providing feedback to students on their learning, informing parents about their child's learning, and planning next steps in instruction. In practice, however, not all of the teachers have the skills to use classroom assessment information to improve student learning.

In Zambia, continuous assessment (CA) is defined as an on-going, diagnostic, classroom-based process that uses a variety of assessment tools to measure learner performance (Kapambwe, 2010). The Ministry of Education introduced School Based Continuous Assessment in 2004 in primary schools for two reasons:

- To improve the quality of learning and teaching
- To establish a regular system of managing cumulative pupils' performance marks for purposes of using them in combination with final examination marks for selection and certification

The various stages in implementation began with the development of materials such as teacher's guides, manuals, assessment schemes and exemplar tasks. This was followed by orientation and training of both teachers and education administrators on how to implement and monitor continuous assessment. A phased rollout commenced from 2006. The CA Teacher's Guides and CA Assessment Tasks Booklets were produced with input from teachers and other stakeholders. The teachers were trained in the use of these materials and the overall concept of CA.

The CA scheme has a formative classroom-based assessment whose primary objective is not to rely on formal marking of pupils' work, but to concentrate more on providing useful feedback and opportunities for discussion between pupils and teachers on progress and understanding of the overall aims of teaching. The focus of the implementation process has been based on making teachers understand the difference between continuous assessment and continuous testing.

Kapambwe's (2010) findings from termly monitoring visits to pilot schools revealed that the teachers encountered various challenges in implementing formative school-based assessment.

- **Large class sizes**: Teachers indicated that the workload became higher as they were required to mark and keep records of the progress of all learners. Despite the intensive in-service training and the availability of the guidelines encouraging teachers to practise continuous assessment, a good number of teachers in the pilot schools continued to practice continuous testing by administering summative assessment or tests at the end of the first month of term and the end of the second month. A good number of teachers failed to appreciate the need to administer assessments on an on-going basis such as weekly, fortnightly or after a topic.
- **Staffing**: The high pupil to teacher ratio was another challenge. Due to lack of adequate staffing levels, some teachers were found to handle more than one class
- **Remediation and enrichment**: A good number of the teachers still felt that the CA took a lot of time for teachers. As a result, teachers got concerned that the time spent on remediation and enrichment was excessive and many teachers did not believe that they would finish the syllabus with CA.
- **Pupil absenteeism**: Absenteeism also posed an obstacle to the management of pupil performance CA records as some pupils' attendance was irregular. This was worse in the rural areas where some pupils stayed away from schools due to the fear of very challenging work.
- **Teaching and learning resources**: The majority of teachers complained that they had inadequate teaching and learning materials.
- **Teacher networking**: It was difficult to implement the collaboration of groups of schools in the districts to work together so as to develop common end of term tests.
- **Monitoring and feedback:** there was inadequate monitoring conducted by the district officials who had been tasked to monitor and support the teachers in implementing CA. There was need for the district offices to closely monitor the teachers' implementation so that they could be given the necessary support.

The results from a quantitative evaluation study on the comparison in performance between the pupils in the CA pilot schools and control schools showed that the CA pupils' performance on the post-test were higher compared to their results on the baseline tests (Kapambwe, 2010). The difference between the baseline mean scores and the post mean scores were significant and this was attributed to the CA interventions.

The experiences from the implementation of the CA pilot programme clearly show that due to the past influences of traditional objectives-based assessment, teachers find it difficult to suddenly change to the outcomes-based assessment which is dominated by the use of CA. The experiences, however, reveal that continuous assessment has an important role to play in the development of successful learning contexts

Malawi

Mchazime (2003) gives the history of increased implementation of continuous assessment in primary schools in Malawi. Since the 1990s, the country has been increasingly aware of the links between continuous assessment and learning. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology in collaboration with the Malawi Institute of Education implemented a curriculum reform, called Primary Curriculum and Assessment Reform. In a national conference, teachers identified that they regularly gave tests to pupils, which they called continuous assessment, but these were intended more to show the teacher where each pupil stood in relation to the others. This is more accurately called continuous testing, since there was little element of feedback and improving learning. Teachers' understanding of continuous assessment as a way to find out what pupils had learned led to a reform and development of a new model. A feasibility study identified four success factors of the new model:

- **Incremental professional training** that the teachers received at regular intervals.
- **Regular field support**: helped correct their mistakes before they took roots and gave them confidence in what they were doing well.
- **Team spirit**: All Standard 3 teachers together with their head teachers worked together as a team. The class teachers prepared their lessons and assessment materials together.
- **Community involvement**: parents began to support the teachers with locally available teaching materials, provision of safe storage for instructional materials and checking their children's notebooks. The community started to appreciate what the teachers were doing. As a result, teachers felt that they were being valued.

A series of reforms since 2011 aimed at building institutional and human capacity in the education sector, including developing an assessment system (Chulu, 2013). The government's capacity building programme includes:

- Formulating **assessment policies** for schools; developing new assessment materials; requiring schools to commence continuous assessment and record two entries of learners' achievement information per month for official records; regular checks on teachers' implementation.
- Training in **continuous assessment** projects; residential workshops; development of new CA tests.
- **Postgraduate training** of leaders for sustainability of reforms; degree programmes in educational assessment.
- **Undergraduate courses in assessment** during pre-service and school-based teacher training.

Despite this promising policy and institutional support, recent literature shows that Malawi has not successfully implemented CA. The enthusiastic policy changes have not had any lasting impact on pedagogical practices. Chulu (2013) notes that teachers in Malawi have poor knowledge of classroom test construction, reliability and validity, although they have positive attitudes towards using classroom assessments. Hare (2013) shows that there is no record of CA actually being implemented in Malawian schools since 2003. Mtika & Gates (2010) report that learner-centred education, while strongly emphasised in Malawi's education policy, has not taken root in classrooms. Teaching

continues to be teacher-dominated. In fieldwork in a teaching training college, they observe that teachers are taught to be learner-centred and assessed on it. Their research suggests that teachers are, however, unable to implement learner-centred education because of:

- **Teacher education system**: teachers were themselves trained using only a passive listening, lecture method, with no space to see learner-centred methods in practice.
- **Student teacher's personal stance**: no full understanding of learner-centred education and only superficial application of the principles.
- **School culture**: schools retain a culture of teacher-centred education. The inherent practices are different from those officially advocated. Pupils find it difficult to take part in activities and resist doing so. Class sizes also made participation difficult.
- **The National Curriculum**: this is focused on examinations and has a lot of content, which promotes rote-learning.

These barriers prevent the effective implementation of learner-centred education.

Uganda

The SABER report on Uganda (World Bank, 2012a) provides the following summary. In Uganda, several formal, system-level documents provide guidelines for classroom assessment at the primary and secondary level. Additionally, there are some system-wide resources available for teachers to engage in classroom assessment activities. For example, textbooks provide self-testing exercises at the end of each topic.

There are some system-level mechanisms to ensure that teachers develop skills and expertise in classroom assessment. For example, pre-service teacher training includes a topic on the development of skills and expertise in classroom assessment. Opportunities are also available every year for some teachers and Uganda National Examinations Board examiners to participate in workshops and conferences, as well as in item development for, and in scoring of, examinations. School inspection and teacher supervision also includes a component focused on classroom assessment. Informal and ad-hoc activities to build teachers' skills and expertise in classroom assessment are made available, including refresher courses on classroom assessment, as well as conferences and workshops organised for practicing teachers.

Varied and systematic mechanisms are in place to monitor the quality of classroom assessment practices. Specifically, classroom assessment is a required component of a teacher's performance evaluation and of school inspection. There are also system-wide reviews of the quality of education, which include a focus on classroom assessment.

At the same time, classroom assessment practices are generally considered to be weak. For example, teachers tend to construct their own assessments in a haphazard fashion, creating questions and essay prompts similar to the ones that their teachers used. It is very common for classroom assessment activities to be mainly about recalling information. The supply open ended format is more common at the primary school level, while the multiple choice format is common at the secondary school level. On the positive side, classroom assessment is typically aligned with the pedagogical or curricular framework, parents are generally informed of their child's grades, and classroom assessment activities tend to provide useful feedback to students.

Classroom assessment information is required to be disseminated to all key stakeholders. Specifically, teachers are required to report classroom assessment information to the school, parents, students, School Management Committees and the Board of Governors. Classroom assessment information is also required to be used to support student learning, including diagnosing student learning issues, providing feedback to students on their learning, and as an input to an external examination programme. Although teachers use classroom assessment to inform their students' learning, informing their own teaching is not a main reason why teachers typically carry out classroom assessment activities.

Allen et al. (2016) conducted a review of assessments in Uganda, to provide a roadmap to creating a resilient and robust assessment system. Annex D contains data on classroom assessments from eight schools in two regions of the country. The results of both informal and formal assessments do not tend to impact sufficiently on teaching and learning in classrooms.

Across the range of schools visited it appeared that all schools implemented extensive and intensive testing. Typically, this involves homework exercises after each lesson or a weekly written test; and a more formal exam-like test at the beginning, middle and end of term. Regular tests and exercises are often written by the teachers. All schools in the sample use scarce resources to buy commercial tests to some extent.

Formative assessment tasks were mostly based on lower order skills, such as repeating information from the lesson undertaken. In some schools the assessment task simply required copying from the board. Teachers are aware of the importance of good questioning in class, but do not implement this well, mostly using only closed questions. In many cases the whole class responded in unison, preventing the teacher from identifying which children had understood the lesson. Almost all teachers interviewed said that they felt comfortable with all aspects of assessment. Teachers described themselves as assessing knowledge, understanding and the application of knowledge and skills. However, in practice the majority of the assessments observed focus on surface knowledge, requiring pupils to recall or copy information from the board. This may suggest that teachers' confidence in their own assessment skills is misplaced, since there is a general lack of knowledge about how to set assessments that go beyond recall and copying tasks. It was unclear if teachers are encouraged to assess higher order skills but do not know how to do so in practice, or if teachers are purposefully teaching to a specific type of assessment item. Teacher responses indicate that teachers have often grasped aspects of the theory of assessment, but continuous professional development in practical assessment skills is both desired and needed.

The data indicate that the majority of teachers in the case study schools do plan, record and report on student achievement, although this reporting and recording may take a very limited form. Lesson plans tended to include a description of an assessment task, around half of the teachers could produce a log of assessment achievement and exercise books were often marked in order to show parents the results achieved by their children. However, these practices were found to focus essentially on tasks that assess recall or copying skills, and there was little evidence that assessment logs were used to inform teaching and learning activities. Corrections in exercise books were predominantly ticks and crosses, and assignment to a remedial class was the most common teacher response to low marks. In most schools there was little evidence that lesson subject matter, the teacher's pedagogical approach or the targeting of content for specific students was adapted as a result of assessment results.

The data suggest that parental pressure on teachers to show good assessment results is strong. It was often a perception amongst parents that assessments and tests are important aspects of good teaching. Some parents therefore felt that a good school provides more assessments or tests than a weak school. In all but one of the case study schools parents used the results of tests to make judgements about the quality of the school and the teaching. Some participants stated that the schools responded by teaching to those assessments. There does appear to be a relationship between parental pressure to undertake regular assessment, the need for students to achieve high examination marks, and the high prevalence and weight given to narrowly focused commercial assessments.

Ghana

The SABER report on Ghana (World Bank, 2013) provides the following summary. There are scarce system-wide resources available to teachers for conducting classroom assessment activities. While the national syllabi outline what students are expected to learn in different subject areas at different grade and age levels, they do not contain information on tools or approaches that teachers can use to monitor or accommodate differences in student learning levels. Other useful resources for classroom assessment activities, such as scoring criteria or rubrics for evaluating students' work, and item banks

or pools with examples of multiple-choice or open-ended test questions, also are not available to teachers.

There are some system-level mechanisms in place to ensure that teachers develop skills and expertise in classroom assessment, including pre- and in-service teacher training, and opportunities to participate in conferences and workshops. All teacher training programmes include a required course on classroom assessment, and teacher supervision includes a component focused on classroom assessment.

Classroom assessment activities are known to be weak. They commonly rely on multiple-choice, selection-type questions, and are mainly about recalling information. Teachers typically do not use explicit or a priori criteria for scoring or grading students' work. Uneven application of standards for grading students' work is also a serious problem as is grade inflation. Classroom assessment activities are commonly used as administrative or control tools rather than as a pedagogical resource. At the same time, assessment practices tend to be aligned with the curricular framework and provide some useful feedback to students in this regard. There are adequate required uses (at least on paper) of classroom assessment to support student learning, including its use as an input for external examination results, diagnosing student learning issues, providing feedback to students on their learning, informing parents about their child's learning, planning next steps in instruction, and grading students for internal classroom uses.

Apart from classroom assessment being a required component of a teacher's performance evaluation, and of school inspection, there are limited systematic mechanisms in place to monitor the quality of classroom assessment practices. Classroom assessment information is required to be disseminated to all key stakeholders. Schools are required to report on an individual student's performance to district education offices and Ministry of Education officials, parents, students, and School Management Committees (SMC). (Despite this, parents in particular are often poorly informed about students' grades). SMCs, along with school heads, are expected to hold School Performance Appraisal Meetings to discuss, among other topics, a school's reports on assessment activities.

A review of Ghanaian teaching practices shows that the simplistic assessment of them as authoritarian instructors belies their intuitive understanding of learner-centred education, which may or may not be practiced in actuality (Akyeampong et al., 2006). About 50 teachers and head teachers from eight public (state-run) primary schools in the Cape Coast district took part in a workshop collecting their views on teaching.

The attitude of the teachers to official CA was not very positive. The current system requires primary teachers to record 198 numerical scores per child per year on a standard sheet (11 CA columns for six subjects in three school terms), which are then totalled and scaled down. There was some dispute amongst the workshop groups as to what the different columns actually meant. More significantly, none had a clear idea of the rationale behind the policy. They saw CA as time-consuming and bureaucratic. Some said the marks derived were no better a reflection of children's abilities than their own knowledge based on informal, impressionistic assessment. When circuit supervisors visit schools, 'they only look at registers, lessons notes, marked work and continuous assessment records'. Thus, the expectations are onerous but merely formal. Some Ghanaian teachers cope with the bureaucratic assessment practices by 'computing' marks. All 10 columns on the CA sheet must be filled. If the exercises or tests are not enough, teachers guess the rest of the marks for each pupil. This is not quite the same as making up marks, since it is based on marks that have been collected in an ostensibly valid manner. Rather, when faced with the thankless task of filling the sheets with figures, 'computing' becomes a neat, time-saving device. When discussing whether non-written work could be used for CA, a minority, but a significant number, of teachers were quite shocked at the idea of not using written work for CA. One stated that, much as she would like to, she dared not, as it was not allowed in her school. Moreover, it was the younger teachers who were less sure about non-written performance assessments. This may be due to less confidence in making a 'subjective' judgement, but it may also derive from their training, or the lack of it. Any systematic formative assessment during teaching and learning in the classroom is neither monitored nor encouraged, so the official requirements, far from aiding more formative approaches, actually get in the way.

What seemed to matter was the use made of informal assessment information to appraise pupils' progress and understand learning needs. For the majority of teachers, how one found out about children's learning hinged upon the notion of 'supervision', either observation or observation plus intervention and problem solving. By incorporating active observation into their practice, these teachers were using formative assessment and were actually engaging in 'child-centred' instructional practice. Not all teachers said they were used to working in this way. Teachers said they often relied on children's facial expressions to determine how well the lesson was going and followed up with questions to confirm any suspicion of lack of understanding. This kind of informal assessment seemed to determine the way some of them managed or visualised effective classroom learning.

Continuous assessment in Ghana does not appear to be working. Far from helping teachers focus on children's learning, it acts as a distraction from this aim. Teachers are asked to conform to the letter of the law and are bureaucratically monitored to ensure that they do so. CA involves extra work for teachers; they will only willingly make the effort if they perceive it to be beneficial to themselves or their pupils. Most teachers stated that CA was simply derived from conventional exercises and tests. Their completed sheets were then used to judge how well they were using assessment to promote learning. This seems quite unfair given some teachers' accounts of their informal assessment practices. The policy as practised represents a very narrow conceptualisation of formative continuous assessment and one that does not fit well either with theoretical or empirical accounts. Furthermore, it is likely to undermine teachers' own capacity for using assessment to promote learning, as the summative drives out the formative function.

Nigeria

There is quite a long history of continuous assessment in Nigerian education (Wilmut & Yakasai, 2006). There is a considerable amount of general guidance offered to teachers in state and national publications and workshop materials but these tend to be rather academic and theoretical, identifying general methods that teachers may use but not relating these directly to the curriculum. In particular, connections to specific teaching topics seem generally not to be available and the methods have not usually been orientated towards the conditions under which many Nigerian teachers have to operate (Wilmut & Yakasai, 2006). Wilmut and Yakasai (2006) identify some essential conditions for the validity of continuous assessment results, which do not exist in Nigeria:

- the linkage of continuous assessment to the curriculum is poor and does not support weaker teachers with ideas and examples that are explicit and that they can use in order to gain experience and confidence.
- there is no high quality support offered to teachers either within their schools nor by inspectors; the latter appear to be largely concerned with whether the records have been completed properly rather than with the quality of information contained in them.

Moreover, the large number of items of continuous assessment recommended in policy not only restricts curriculum delivery but aggregates scores across such a wide range of activities that the validity of the whole is very uncertain. It also has the incidental effect of placing a huge and unnecessary clerical burden on teachers in transcribing marks for submission to the state examinations departments. The authors suggest that this situation, in 2006, is almost as damaging to learning as is the excessive use of examinations.

In Kano state, continuous assessment is conducted largely without the benefit of training (Wilmut & Yakasai, 2006). Local government has attempted to tighten up CA by appointing a committee in each school, chaired by the member of the SMT responsible for curriculum and with the school counsellor and two nominated teachers. This committee is required to monitor the operation of CA in the school, verify that it is properly operated and records properly kept. Unfortunately, the process requires a very large amount of clerical work by each teacher and it has been difficult to maintain the records when teachers have very large classes and full teaching workloads.

In Kwara state, local government provides support through annual workshops for principals, counsellors and examination officers. Records of continuous assessment must be kept in accordance with federal requirements and teachers must total and scale the marks. They also have to transcribe

the school records onto a departmental form from which data is entered. These are large clerical tasks that are obviously liable to error and are a poor use of teacher time.

4. South Asia

India

Although India has achieved well over 95 per cent enrolment rates for primary school, national-level educational surveys have consistently shown that the vast majority of Indian students fail to attain grade-level competencies at the end of five years of primary schooling (Duflo et al., 2015). In 2009, the Right to Education Act eliminated end of year exams and introduced Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) instead. This is based on the idea that better tracking of children allows teachers to customise their classes according to students' needs (Duflo et al., 2015). As of 2015, Indian states are still in the process of rolling out CCE.

Duflo et al. (2015) conducted a randomised evaluation to see whether CCE works. They contrasted CCE against the Learning Enhancement Program (LEP), a Hindi literacy programme developed by Pratham, an NGO. Four hundred primary schools were randomly assigned to one of four groups that received (1) CCE alone, (2) LEP alone, (3) CCE and LEP together, or (4) no treatment. An additional 100 upper primary schools were randomly assigned to receive either (1) CCE alone or (2) no treatment.

The CCE provided here consisted of training teachers in the use of new tools such as unit tests, projects, homework assignments, and assessment of class participation. The tools used varied across the grades, with only observation-based evaluation (as opposed to written work) being used for grades 1 and 2. The critical innovation of this CCE programme was the introduction of "evaluation sheets" for recording evaluations of students. Evaluation sheets were to be completed every month (or quarterly for grades 6–8), while report cards would be created twice a year. In a significant break from the norm, descriptive remarks and alphabetical grades were to be provided instead of numerical marks. In addition to teacher training, CCE schools were also provided with materials such as manuals, evaluation sheets, and report cards in order to implement the programme.

Under LEP, students' literacy and numeracy levels are identified at the beginning of the year through a rapid oral test. Following this test, classes are restructured according to those levels—rather than grade—for a segment of the day, during which each skill group is taught using a curriculum designed to address its particular skill deficit(s).

The authors analyse the theory of change of CCE as that teachers, children, and parents lack feedback on students' learning levels and progress in school, and this in turn contributes to poor learning outcomes. With only end-of-year exams to draw on, information about learning levels is lacking. Without this information, teachers do not teach to the appropriate level of the students. If teachers lecture based only on the scheduled curriculum and not students' actual abilities, those who are behind may lose interest and fall further behind. The theory suggests that teaching to the levels of children in the class may improve learning outcomes. Moreover, continuous assessment may be more accurate than "one-shot" evaluations, since students may underperform on individual assessments if they are under large amounts of pressure or if they are simply having a bad day.

The results show that students in CCE schools did not perform significantly better at endline than students in control schools on either oral or written tests, whether in primary schools or in upper primary schools. On the other hand, the LEP programme had a large, positive and statistically significant effect on students' basic reading abilities: students in primary schools where LEP was implemented scored 0.152 standard deviations higher on oral tests of basic Hindi reading ability, and 0.135 standard deviations higher on written tests of basic Hindi than corresponding students in control schools at endline. LEP did not, however, have a significant effect on math scores. Finally, combining CCE and LEP had no significant effect on student test scores relative to the LEP programme alone.

The findings suggest that CCE as implemented here does not improve literacy and numeracy scores. The authors suggest that CCE needs a thorough review and revision. They note that the evaluation tools were possibly too complex and that focusing on basic skills may have produced better results.

A review of teacher training in India identifies that teachers are not properly trained in CCE policy and other policies such as the Right to Education act (Kidwai et al., 2013). The training therefore does not reflect what is actually expected on the job. Although most teachers in India set homework, a Young Lives study found that only 15 per cent of primary government-school pupils had had their books checked by the teacher (Singh & Sarkar, 2012). More than half the private school pupils had had every piece of homework checked, and this resulted in higher scores. Perhaps unexpectedly, private school teachers are paid less than government teachers, and government teachers have better teaching qualifications than private school teachers (Singh & Sarkar, 2012). Thus teacher qualifications and higher salaries do not automatically translate into better teaching, and learning outcomes.

Nepal

The SABER report on Nepal (World Bank, 2012b) provides the following summary. The 2005 National Curriculum Framework for School Education provides guidelines for classroom assessment. This document is widely available to the public online and through libraries, and is available to teachers through in-service teacher training courses. There are a variety of system-wide resources available for teachers to engage in classroom assessment activities, including a document that outlines what students are expected to learn and to what level of performance in different subject areas at different grade and age levels. Resources also include workbooks that provide support for classroom assessment, scoring criteria for students' work, as well as item banks with examples of questions.

System-level mechanisms are in place to ensure that teachers develop the necessary expertise in classroom assessment, including in- and pre-service teacher training, and opportunities to participate in conferences and workshops. All teacher training programmes include a required course on classroom assessment. Teacher supervision also includes a component that is focused on classroom assessment.

In general, classroom assessment practices are not aligned with the national curriculum framework, and are considered weak. It is common to observe errors in the grading of students' work, teachers tend to provide little useful feedback to students, and parents are poorly informed about students' grades. There are adequate required uses of classroom assessment to support student learning. Such uses include diagnosing student learning issues, providing feedback to students on their learning, informing parents about their child's learning, planning the next steps in instruction, grading students for internal classroom uses, and providing input to an external examination programme.

There are various systematic mechanisms in place to monitor the quality of classroom assessment activities. Classroom assessment is a required component of a teacher's performance evaluation and of school inspection. In addition, there are system-wide reviews of the quality of education, which include a focus on classroom assessment. Government funding is available for research on the quality of classroom assessment activities and on how to improve the quality of classroom assessment practices.

The Continuous Assessment System (CAS) was introduced in Nepal in the 1990s. A format for recording students' progress was developed as a key component, and circulated to schools (Prasad Acharya & Shiohata, 2014). In the first years of implementation, teachers regarded the CAS as extra burden (Shrestha, 2013). They mainly used the CAS information for passing students into the next grade, and not for formative purposes or for the improvement of instruction (Shrestha, 2013). CAS form filling has become a routine for many teachers, but few of them utilise the information to identify gaps in learning or to modify their teaching accordingly (Prasad Acharya & Shiohata, 2014). As with many other countries, the policy intends CAS to support effective learning through feedback to students, but in practice it has been reduced to summative record keeping (Prasad Acharya & Shiohata, 2014).

The CAS format specifies that the teacher evaluate the students on the basis of criteria such as participation in classwork or project work, creative work, and behavioural change (Prasad Acharya & Shiohata, 2014). However, these criteria are not clearly defined, and guidance as to how the information can be gathered, and how it can be used for strengthening future teaching, was not provided. Prasad Acharya and Shiohata (2014) suggest that a radical reformulation of the roles and responsibilities of teachers, coupled with systematic teacher in-service training, is needed for the effective implementation of CAS.

A project between the government and Save the Children drew on this deficiency to move teachers away from a preoccupation with record keeping, and to draw their attention towards the importance of oral questioning and diagnostic testing, as sources of information about their students' learning difficulties, and as a basis for giving constructive feedback (Prasad Acharya & Shiohata, 2014). Training workshops on formative assessment were delivered to local education officials and teachers in five districts. The first-phase programme introduced CAS and asked participants to demonstrate it in practice teaching in schools. The second phase, which was held about ten months after the first workshops, focused on a review of the progress achieved by the participants in implementing the techniques.

In particular, oral questioning was identified as a key area for improvement. The workshops emphasised the effectiveness of the teacher questioning the class, pausing for students to think, and then indicating one student to respond. Teachers found this difficult to implement, because most were so used to asking questions of the whole class, and to accepting choral responses. Similarly, students were so used to responding to questions immediately, individually or in chorus, that teachers found it difficult to get them to wait until asked to respond. Many teachers claimed that they started asking questions in this recommended way, but lesson observations showed that in most cases, this meant that the teachers had started to ask questions of their students individually instead of initially posing the question to the whole class. In general, there seemed to be an absence among the teachers of willingness to let the students think.

This is corroborated by Bahadur Singh (2015), who finds classroom delivery to be teacher-dominated with an emphasis on rote learning. The dominant approaches used by teachers include lecturing, paraphrasing, drills, reading and repeating from the textbook, and memorising questions and answers. Some teachers who participated in development programmes have been able to implement more student-centred teaching, showing that further training can improve pedagogy. However, this paper highlights that when attempts are made to mainstream such projects, good practices are not able to scale up. For example, the 'continuous assessment' system, the 'child-centred education' approach, and 'life-skills education' have not had beneficial outcomes within the government school system despite successes demonstrated by non-governmental organisations working with small groups of schools. This may be a result of various shortcomings in the government system:

- Lack of accountability in government schools, with schools failing to delineate teachers' responsibilities for improving teaching and learning in the classroom.
- Weak monitoring and supervision at the classroom level, along with a lack of on-the-spot technical backstopping for teachers and weak skill-based teacher training, which lack demonstration, practice and feedback and instead focus on teaching content and disseminating information.
- The absence of an effective plan for mainstreaming an initiative beyond the piloting phase.

Shrestha (2013) finds that six private schools in Kathmandu use classroom assessments positively and effectively. The paper identifies factors affecting the implementation of classroom assessment, which may elucidate why it works in Nepali private schools but not in government schools at scale:

- **School culture:** expatriates had been hired to introduce the school's current assessment practices. The schools also had qualified subject coordinators and principals from whom the teachers could get support instantly through weekly and monthly meetings. Continuing professional development was kept at the centre of assessment practices. Moreover, new teachers were not left alone in the classroom, which eventually influenced the alternative

assessment practices in the school. All the respondents acknowledged and appreciated the initial support that they got from their colleagues in their early years of teaching.

- **Time management:** teachers need enough time to prepare their lessons so that they can incorporate assessment carefully. Teachers got free periods every day to plan their lessons.
- **Flexible curriculum:** school administration permitted teachers to make changes instead of pressurising them to follow the prescribed textbook. There are yearly, term, monthly, weekly and lesson plans, but the framework allows teachers to create their own worksheets and activities.
- **Involving families:** 'Curriculum Evening' was a common practice. Parents were invited in the beginning of every school year where teachers informed parents about their curriculum, explained class activities, assessment process and how parents could get involved in their children's learning process. When changing to CA, common practices among the respondents were writing a message to parents in the students' diary, making phone calls and organising an individual parent-teacher conference after each term

Pakistan

The SABER report on Punjab province (World Bank, 2012c) provides the following summary. In Punjab, the 2006 National Curriculum document provides general, non-comprehensive guidelines on classroom assessment. The document provides information on assessment purposes, types and questions, and includes some sample test content and scoring criteria. Although available online, this document is not offered through other channels that are more readily accessible by teachers and other stakeholders, such as through teacher training courses or libraries. It has not been provided to all practicing classroom teachers, and because not all teachers have access to the internet, many teachers are not aware of the guidelines provided in the document.

In addition to the 2006 National Curriculum document, there are some system-wide resources available for teachers to engage in classroom assessment activities, including textbooks which contain questions at the end of the chapters. The Taleemi Calendar is a document that contains student learning outcomes for each grade and subject. In addition, the Directorate of Staff Development has developed Teacher's Guides which contain Student Learning Outcome (SLO)-based lesson plans for each subject and grade in primary school. These guides also include a section on the kinds of activities and homework that teachers can use to assess students on the particular SLO.

There are some system-level mechanisms, such as pre- and in-service teacher training opportunities, in place that are intended to ensure that teachers develop the appropriate skills and expertise in classroom assessment. School inspection and teacher supervision also include a component focused on classroom assessment.

However, on-the-ground classroom assessment practices tend to be mainly about recalling information, provide little feedback to students and parents, and are generally considered weak. Teachers primarily develop the questions directly from the textbook and use the exercises at the end of the chapters; they do not use explicit criteria for scoring or grading students' work. In general, classroom assessment activities tend to vary from school to school and are usually based on the textbooks and not on the curricula. However, textbooks tend to not be aligned with the curriculum because they are based on a previous version of the curriculum (developed in 2002) and not on the most recent curricula that went into effect in 2006. There are no required uses of classroom assessment information to support student learning, and there are no mechanisms in place to systematically monitor the quality of classroom assessment practices.

The SABER report on Sindh province (World Bank, 2012d) provides the following summary. There are scarce system-wide resources available for teachers to engage in classroom assessment activities. Existing resources include textbooks, which contain questions at the end of the chapters, and guidelines for teachers to use when conducting classroom assessment activities. However, the majority of these textbooks are based on a previous version of the national curriculum that was developed in 2002, and all textbooks have not been updated based on the 2006 curriculum.

There are some system-level mechanisms in place (such as pre- and in-service teacher training opportunities) that are meant to ensure that teachers develop appropriate skills and expertise in classroom assessment. For example, a course on assessment is also offered in both undergraduate and graduate education programmes.

However, on-the-ground classroom assessment practices are generally considered to be weak. There are no required uses of classroom assessment information to support student learning. Classroom assessment practices tend to focus on students recalling information, and teachers often rely on the questions and the end-of-chapter exercises provided in the textbooks to assess students. Teachers generally do not use explicit criteria for evaluating students' work, and tend to provide little feedback on student performance to students and parents. Classroom assessment results are often used as an administrative tool rather than a pedagogical resource as classroom assessment information is primarily used internally to promote or fail students. There are currently no mechanisms in place to systematically monitor the quality of classroom assessment practices.

The National Curriculum of Pakistan recommends formative assessment, "through homework, quizzes, class tests, and group discussion" (Khan, 2012: 578). A case study in secondary schools in Gilgit-Baltistan reviewed assessment practices in English and Social Studies (Khan, 2012). It finds that teachers use assessment as a mechanical process, without clear understanding of how it relates to learning. Generally, assessment is used more to identify and diagnose weak areas, but not to adjust teaching or improve learning and work on students' weak areas. The focus of assessment is on what has been taught, rather than what has been learned. It is thus mostly an information collection exercise. However, teachers do use their assessments to give feedback to students. Feedback is mostly seen as commenting on students' participation in class, saying 'well done', and correcting mistakes. Teachers do share test results with parents, and find that this increases students' motivation and performance.

Bangladesh

English in Action (2009) provides a baseline report on current classroom practices in English lessons in primary and secondary schools. A total of 252 classroom observations were undertaken. Information was recorded about the classroom environment and the professional background and experience of the teacher being observed. During the lesson a 'time sampling' technique was used to record what type of activity (from a pre-determined list) the teacher and students were doing at selected points. The observers could also annotate the instrument with any details that would complete the account of the lesson.

The pedagogic approach adopted in most lessons observed did not encourage a communicative approach to learning English. Throughout the lessons, teaching from the blackboard or front of the class was the predominant pedagogic approach. In the majority of classes the teacher remained at the front of the class 'all' (24 per cent) or 'most' (50 per cent) of the time. As the lesson progressed, teachers tended to read from the textbook, ask closed questions or move around the classroom monitoring and facilitating students as they worked individually. All other pedagogic activities were observed in less than 10 per cent of classes at each of the times sampled. Most teachers did not adopt a stimulating and task-based approach to their lessons. Overall, 58 per cent did not ask any thoughtful questions to stimulate students' interest and 48 per cent did not set any challenging tasks for the students to make them think. In almost two-thirds of classes, less than half of the students had opportunities to participate actively in discussion or to answer questions: 'none or hardly any' in 14 per cent of classes, 'some (<50 per cent)' in 47 per cent. In most classes students were not interactive at all; rather they were very passive learners. They were more interested in side talking and other activities. They were only participating by answering the questions asked by the teacher.

At the end of a lesson teachers usually assign homework (53 per cent of classes) and/or recap what the lesson has just covered (49 per cent of classes). In many cases teachers provide feedback on the students' performance throughout the lesson (43 per cent) and assess students' understanding by asking summary questions (34 per cent). In almost 10 per cent of the lessons observed, the teacher simply stopped teaching and left the room.

5. Recommendations from the literature

The literature on CA is fairly consistent and conclusive that it is not currently applied effectively in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, and that its benefits are therefore not seen. Some studies provide ideas on what might work to improve this. However, it is important to remember that the only experimental study in this review found that CA was implemented correctly in India, but had no positive effects on learning outcomes (Duflo et al., 2015). Thus, there is no clear evidence presented here that CA is able to work in low-resource environments, even if implemented effectively.

Teacher training and capacity-building

Almost all the literature notes the lack of CA training. As noted above, in-service training may the most effective way to address this, as many teachers do not go through a formal training programme. The literature also notes that existing training leans too heavily on theory and does not provide enough practical experience, and not enough exemplars of CA such as pre-prepared exercises, activities, and quizzes.

The World Bank recommends (Liberman & Clarke, 2011: 23): It may be useful to develop handbooks and kits for teachers on developing (if applicable), using, and understanding student assessments and assessment results. Regional and international study tours, as well as partnerships with local and international universities and centres of expertise, can, if used judiciously, help build local human capital and provide access to international human capital. Study tours can expose the future country experts to key national and international best practices and help them form critical links for continued exchange and learning.

Behaviour change

In Nepal, Bahadur Singh (2015) notes that the lack of effective implementation is not due to a lack of resources or teaching guides, but an inability of teachers to apply the skills they learned during training and/or a failure by teacher training institutes to train teachers to implement teacher guides effectively in the classroom. This is highlighted in several other studies and described as a lack of confidence or understanding with the tools or a lack of will to change ingrained teaching practices. The study in Ghana noted that teachers showed conceptual development on CA while in the external workshop, but found it hard to apply back in their familiar contexts (Adekampong et al., 2006). The paper emphasises that new understandings must be supported while 'on the job' in order to consolidate and integrate them into practice and avoid returns to easy and familiar ways of teaching.

The World Bank suggests that teacher ownership of any pedagogical changes should help counter this (Liberman & Clarke, 2011: 22): Teacher representatives should be included in the design phase of any project that will support assessment. Otherwise, during project implementation, teachers may fear the assessment initiatives because they do not understand their intended purpose or because they worry that the assessment will be used unfairly as an instrument of accountability. Buy-in from this stakeholder group is especially important as teachers' commitment to newly introduced assessment activities is essential if these activities are to positively impact learning. Stakeholder participation at all stages of the project is imperative for optimising results.

Structural change

Several papers note that teachers work in the way they do because that is what is expected of them. Shifts in school cultures would support the greater use of CA. The resource constraints and large class sizes also inhibit what teachers are able to implement in practice.

The World Bank highlights that changes in assessment procedures must be realistic and accompanied by an understanding of local capacity (Liberman & Clarke, 2011: 22): It is important to evaluate local capacity to accomplish assessment related goals within the proposed project timeframe and budget. This includes identifying and addressing any institutional constraints and capacity building requirements. Examples of key infrastructure include physical space and information

technology. It also is important to identify what additional or backup infrastructure will be needed to ensure that the project can still be carried out even in the event of changes in government, staffing, or other major events. Additionally, it is important to conduct an evaluation of existing capacity to conduct student assessment activities. While a country may be willing and committed to develop many areas of its student assessment system, activities supported by the project should take into account the given capacity to carry out such activities in the country.

Some experts suggest that the best way to improve CA is to strengthen the enabling environment for learner-led education, which will lead to better pedagogical practice in all areas, including CA. In Uganda, Allen et al. (2016) state that changing current teacher practices in assessment will not be achieved by simply issuing instructions or by organising a widespread programme of teacher professional development. What teachers currently do in assessment in Ugandan classrooms reflects not only their individual abilities and capacities but also, predominantly, a complex set of multiple interacting factors and influences. Effective action to change teacher assessment practices will need to be built on a clear understanding of the current situation, including the factors leading to teacher absence, agreement amongst stakeholders about the importance and value of changes, and the development of actions that can be resourced and will be cost-effective.

6. Typology of classroom assessments

Type	Source of material	Instruments used	Frequency	Approaches to testing	Inclusion	Approaches to impact learning	Examples
Observation	Teachers' knowledge	Reviewing students' facial expressions; looking at their class work; asking them a question	Usually in every class.		Whole class; special attention paid to weaker students	Teachers respond to students' observed strengths and weaknesses and set them higher or lower activities; give feedback; make corrections	In Ghana, teachers said they often relied on children's facial expressions to determine how well the lesson was going and followed up with questions to confirm any lack of understanding. Others were more specific about supervision, seeing it as a more interactive process, whereby teachers went round the class, observing pupils' work and intervening as necessary (Akyeampong et al., 2006)
Questioning	Teachers' knowledge	Questions posed by teachers to students	Usually in every class.	Whether teacher deems the answer to be 'correct'	Questions posed to whole classes. Unclear if only certain students respond, or what the level of understanding is.	Teachers only adjust their teaching if a majority do not answer correctly. Teachers rarely wait for an answer, rephrase, or hint.	In Uganda, almost all teachers observed asked only closed questions, with responses in unison. In a P2 class, students were encouraged to read 'hospital' from the blackboard. One student could do so, and the others chanted along soon after. The teacher did not follow this up and help the students who could not read the word (Allen et al., 2016).
Group work in class	Textbooks; teachers' knowledge; past lessons	Items from local environment; discussion	Unclear. Few teachers regularly use group work.	Single student or whole group reports back to class; teacher deems their work 'correct'	Whole class; occasional references to streaming or to placing high-achieving students with low-achieving ones for peer learning	Group work strengthens social skills such as collaboration, sharing, listening, and peer learning. Discussion allows students to arrive at an answer through reasoning and deduction, rather than being told the correct answer.	In two classes in Nepal, the teachers divided students into groups. One of the teachers formed the groups, gave each group a list of questions, and asked them to prepare answers. Instead of working together as a group, however, the students prepared answers to the questions individually. Later, the teacher asked each group to read out an answer to one of the questions. One of the students in each group got up and read out his or her answer. Thus, although the teacher described the activity as 'group work', it was not. (Bahadur Singh, 2015).

Type	Source of material	Instruments used	Frequency	Approaches to testing	Inclusion	Approaches to impact learning	Examples
Individual work in class	Textbooks; teachers' knowledge; past lessons	Copying from blackboard; reading aloud or to oneself; completing textbook exercises	Regular. In most classes.	Unclear. Exercises/ copying are sometimes marked	Whole class	Reviewing students' individual work during class allows the teacher to provide immediate feedback and correct processual mistakes.	In Nepal, teachers asked students to turn to a specific page of the textbook and to 'recite the given content either silently or loudly'. A mathematics teacher provided a solved model on the board, explained the steps and rules, and then provided the students with a problem to solve. Then the teacher went around the class and checked the class work (Bahadur Singh, 2015).
Written test/quiz	Past exam papers; approved test instrument	Pencil and paper tests	Regular, some references to weekly tests. More usual to have around 3 tests per term.	Tests are marked by the teacher. Correct answers are derived from curriculum norms	Whole class; some references to disadvantaged students being occasionally absent and missing tests	Students with high or low scores are identified. Mistakes are identified and students corrected individually or as a group. Teacher adjusts teaching if many do not answer a problem correctly. Generally, teachers identify mistakes but do not help students learn how to avoid these mistakes.	A teacher in Pakistan says "I take one or two days and check the papers and identify the mistakes done by students and sometimes we sit with students individually and sometimes I write the correct responses on the blackboard and address the overall mistakes of students." (Khan, 2012: 582)
Homework	Textbooks; exam papers; teachers	Exercise books	Regular, after every class.	Books should be marked by the teacher; some references to teachers not marking every piece of homework	Whole class	Students with high or low scores are identified and given appropriate support. Teacher adjusts teaching if many do not answer a problem correctly. Marked books are sometimes shown to parents to improve parents' support of the child's learning.	In Nepal, some classes take up a lot of time in checking homework (Bahadur Singh, 2015).

Type	Source of material	Instruments used	Frequency	Approaches to testing	Inclusion	Approaches to impact learning	Examples
Learning logs/journal	Subject set by teacher, or general diary keeping	Exercise books	Regular; every day or weekly	Regularly read and marked by teacher	Whole class	Used to build relationship with student and get to know them, which contributes to the student's potential to learn, and teacher's ability to tailor teaching to their needs.	In Nepal, teachers avoided correcting grammatical errors in students' journal and regarded it as a medium to know each child personally. Some teachers wrote their comments on how they felt reading students' journals in their journal notebook (Shrestha, 2013).
Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL)	Pratham/JPAL visits to schools/villages	Standardised paper test, and/or intensive learning camp	Annual; or at the beginning of the learning camp	Students are measured against a standardised national scale and grouped according to ability	All students; including out-of-school children	When combined with grouping and focused instructions, good learning gains are seen.	Teachers were trained by Pratham staff to administer a five minutes oral assessment of each student's reading ability in Hindi at the beginning of the school year. Students were reassigned for part of the school day to classrooms based on these levels, and taught using the curriculum designed by Pratham (Duflo et al., 2015)

7. Methodology

Literature was searched using keywords in Google and Google Scholar. Search strings included the terms "formative assessment/classroom assessment" AND "sub-Saharan Africa" OR "South Asia" OR "fragile and conflict-affected". This produced an initial list of literature, from which further resources were identified through snowballing the reference lists and citations.

Searches were also conducted on the following websites: World Bank SABER reports; the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL); International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3IE); Center for Education Innovations (CEI); Network on Education Quality Monitoring in the Asia-Pacific (NEQMAP); the International Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE); and the Brookings Institution.

Experts were also consulted for their comments and recommendations for literature (see acknowledgements below).

Since there is not much literature dealing exclusively with classroom assessment, almost all the literature examined was included if it contained substantial information on classroom assessment, within the constraints of time. Quality assessment was very light-touch.

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Acknowledgements

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9. Further resources

Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice. Special issue on Assessment in Sub-Saharan Africa: http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/caie20/20/4

Oxford University Centre for Educational Assessment: http://oucea.education.ox.ac.uk/

UNESCO and Brookings Institution Learning Metrics Task Force: https://www.brookings.edu/learning-metrics-task-force-2-0/

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iMlango project, digital access, smartcard-based attendance monitoring and online learning tools to primary schools in Kenya: http://www.imlango.com/

10. Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) reports

This section presents a selection of the World Bank's SABER reports. These are filtered to reflect DFID's priority countries. Findings are only presented on classroom assessment.

Syria Student Assessment

World Bank (2013). SABER Country Report

http://wbgfiles.worldbank.org/documents/hdn/ed/saber/supporting_doc/CountryReports/SAS/SABER_Student%20Assessment_Syria.pdf

In Syria, formal, system-level documents provide guidelines for classroom assessment. Textbooks also provide support for classroom assessment activities, and sample questions and scoring instructions are circulated annually to schools. In addition, a variety of system-level mechanisms ensure that teachers develop skills and expertise in classroom assessment. Such mechanisms include pre- and in-service teacher training programs, all of which have a required component on classroom assessment. In the 2009–10 school year, the Ministry of Education embarked on a three-year curriculum development project for the General Education System. Among the most prominent and important training issues was classroom assessment. The Center for Education Measurement and Assessment was recently created for the purposes of evaluating all elements of the education process, putting in place appropriate tools to measure student learning, and training teachers to develop their classroom assessment skills.

At the same time, classroom assessment practices are considered to be weak, with a tendency to be overly focused on information recall and lacking alignment with the curricular framework. Additionally, it is common for classroom assessment activities to rely mainly on multiple-choice, selection-type questions. Errors in the scoring or grading of students' work are also frequently observed, and grade inflation and the uneven application of standards for grading students' work are serious problems. However, it is not common for teachers to not use explicit or a priori criteria for scoring or grading students' work. Although teachers typically use a scale or criteria to correct written examinations, students' work throughout the year is assessed without clear tools and is measured based on written assignments and oral recitations. Limited systematic mechanisms are in place to monitor the quality of classroom assessment practices. For example, classroom assessment is a required component of a teacher's performance evaluation, and national reviews of the quality of education include a focus on classroom assessment. Classroom assessment activities tend to provide little useful feedback to students and are used mainly as an administrative tool rather than as a pedagogical resource.

Iraq Student Assessment

World Bank (2013). SABER Country Report

http://wbgfiles.worldbank.org/documents/hdn/ed/saber/supporting_doc/CountryReports/SAS/SABER_SA_Country_Report_Iraq_Final_2013.pdf

In Iraq, there are no system-level documents in place that provide guidelines for classroom assessment. In addition, there are few resources available to teachers to help them with their classroom assessment activities. For example, although textbooks and workbooks are available, there are no item banks with examples of selection or supply questions, or rubrics that teachers can use for grading students' work, or documents that outline the levels of performance that students are expected to reach in different subject areas at different grade or age levels. There are also no online assessment resources, or computer-based testing with instant reports on students' performance. In-service teacher training is the only system-level mechanism in place to ensure that teachers develop skills and expertise in classroom assessment.

In general, classroom assessment practices tend to be weak. However, it is rare to observe errors in the scoring or grading of students' work, for parents to be poorly informed about students' grades, and for classroom assessment activities to not be aligned with a pedagogical or curricular framework. In addition, it is uncommon for classroom assessment activities to rely mainly on multiple-choice/selection type questions or to be used as administrative or control tools rather than as pedagogical resources. However, it is very common for classroom assessment activities to be mainly about recalling information and providing little useful feedback to students. It is also very common for teachers to not use explicit or a priori criteria for scoring or grading students' work, and grade inflation is a serious problem. In addition, the uneven application of standards for grading students' work is a serious problem.

Classroom assessment information is required to be disseminated to school administrators. However, it is not required to be disseminated to school district or Ministry of Education officials, parents, or students. Some mechanisms are in place to monitor the quality of classroom assessment practices. For example, while classroom assessment is a required component of school inspection and teacher supervision, it is not a required component of a teacher's performance evaluation. In addition, there is no government funding available for research on the quality of classroom assessment activities or how to improve them.

Democratic Republic of the Congo Student Assessment

World Bank (2014). SABER Country Report

http://wbgfiles.worldbank.org/documents/hdn/ed/saber/supporting_doc/CountryReports/SAS/SABER_SA_Country_Report_DRC_Final_2014.pdf

In the DRC, there is no national document that provides overall guidelines for classroom assessment practice. At the same time, resources are available to teachers to support them in carrying out their classroom assessment activities. These include a National Curriculum document that outlines what students are expected to learn at different age and grade levels; textbooks and workbooks; scoring criteria and rubrics for grading students' work; and school report cards that provide teachers with information on the maximum marks that students can be awarded in different subject areas.

There are also mechanisms in place to ensure that teachers develop competencies in classroom assessment. For example, pre- and in-service teacher training programmes address competencies in classroom assessment, and teachers have opportunities to participate in conferences and workshops on classroom assessment.

Classroom assessment practices are generally considered to be of 'moderate' quality. While they are typically aligned with a curricular framework, they tend to be overly focused on student recall of information and used as administrative tools rather than pedagogical resources. It is difficult to offer a definitive statement on the quality of classroom assessment practices since there are limited mechanisms in place to systematically monitor their quality across the education system. There are several required uses of classroom assessment information, including for diagnosing student learning issues, providing feedback to students on their learning, informing parents about their child's learning, planning next steps in instruction, grading students for internal classroom uses, and providing input for certification and selection. Classroom assessment marks are combined with grades achieved on the formal certification examination that takes place at the end of each school cycle.

Ethiopia Student Assessment

World Bank (2009). SABER Country Report

http://wbgfiles.worldbank.org/documents/hdn/ed/saber/supporting_doc/CountryReports/SAS/SABER_SA_Ethiopia_CR_Final_2009.pdf

In Ethiopia, there is no system-level document that provides guidelines for classroom assessment activities. There is, however, an official curriculum document that specifies what students are expected to learn, although the level of performance required is not clear. Regional Education

Bureaus receive federal support that may be applied to classroom assessment activities within the context of their curriculum implementation and teacher development activities. There are no system-wide resources for teachers for classroom assessment, and there are no system-level mechanisms to ensure that teachers develop skills and expertise in classroom assessment. In general, classroom assessment practices suffer from widespread weaknesses, and monitoring of their quality is carried out only on an ad hoc basis. Classroom assessment information is not required to be disseminated to key stakeholders. The use of classroom assessment to support student learning, while required, is in fact very limited.

Sudan Student Assessment

World Bank (2013). SABER Country Report

http://wbgfiles.worldbank.org/documents/hdn/ed/saber/supporting_doc/CountryReports/SAS/SABER-SA_Sudan_CR_Final_2013.pdf

A formal, system-level document, the Guidelines for the Two Levels, authorised by the National Center for Curricula and Educational Research in 2007, provides guidelines for classroom assessment. In addition, there are some system-wide resources available to teachers for engaging in classroom assessment activities. For example, there are textbooks or workbooks that provide support for classroom assessment, scoring criteria or rubrics for evaluating students' work, and a document that outlines the levels of performance that students are expected to reach in different subject areas at different grade or age levels.

Also, there are some system-level mechanisms in place to ensure that teachers develop skills and expertise in classroom assessment. In-service teacher training opportunities are available; however, few teachers are able to access them. In addition, school inspection or teacher supervision includes a component focused on classroom assessment.

Classroom assessment practices are known to be weak, particularly because they provide little useful feedback to students, one of the main purposes of classroom assessment. In addition, classroom assessment activities are very commonly about recalling information and rely on multiple-choice/selection-type questions. It is also common for teachers to not use explicit or a priori criteria for scoring or grading students' work. At the same time, it is rare for grade inflation to be a problem or to observe errors in the scoring or grading of students' work. It is rare for classroom assessment activities to be mainly used as an administrative or control tool rather than as a pedagogical resource, and for classroom assessment activities to not be aligned with a pedagogical or curricular framework. While classroom assessment is used for diagnosing student learning issues, providing feedback to students on their learning, and providing input to an external examination programme, it is not used for planning next steps in instruction or grading students for internal classroom uses, two of the main purposes of classroom assessment.

Limited systematic mechanisms are in place to monitor the quality of classroom assessment practices. Although classroom assessment is a required component of a teacher's performance evaluation, and school inspection or teacher supervision, there are no national reviews of the quality of education that focus on classroom assessment, government funding is not provided to conduct research on the quality of classroom assessment activities or on how to improve classroom assessment, and an external moderation system that reviews the difficulty of classroom assessment activities and the appropriateness of scoring criteria is not in place. Although classroom assessment information is required to be disseminated to all key stakeholders, including school district or Ministry of Education officials, parents, and students, there are limited required uses of classroom assessment to support student learning.

Mozambique Student Assessment

World Bank (2009). SABER Country Report

http://wbgfiles.worldbank.org/documents/hdn/ed/saber/supporting_doc/CountryReports/SAS/SABER_SA_Mozambique_CR_Final_2009.pdf

In Mozambique, there are no official guidelines for classroom assessment. In addition, there are very few system-wide resources available to help teachers to engage in effective classroom assessment activities, such as materials to help align assessment practices to the new curriculum. A new curriculum was introduced between 2004 and 2007. This curriculum includes competencies to be reached at the end of each school cycle, but does not provide information on the difficulty level of the tasks that students are expected to solve. Regardless, curricular expectations seem too high considering the typical achievement levels of students.

Teacher training in classroom assessment is very scarce and weak. It is widely accepted that teachers do not have the required competencies to effectively engage in classroom assessment activities. In primary education, for example, approximately one-third of the teachers do not have formal training to teach.

Mechanisms to monitor the quality of classroom assessment practices are ad hoc. The Ministry of Education, in coordination with the provincial and district level offices of education, has an inspection and supervision system with school visits. However, implementation is very weak and unlikely to include much focus on classroom assessment as an area of consideration. Classroom assessment information is required to be disseminated to some key stakeholders. Specifically, classroom assessment results are made public, and schools invite parents to view classroom assessment results. While there is generally limited use of classroom assessment information, students' marks are used as an input to promotion and retention decisions.

Angola Student Assessment

World Bank (2009). SABER Country Report

http://wbgfiles.worldbank.org/documents/hdn/ed/saber/supporting_doc/CountryReports/SAS/SABER_SA_Angola_CR_Final_2009.pdf

In Angola, the Ministry of Education publishes formal policy and pedagogical guidelines for classroom assessment. These documents are distributed by the Ministry of Education's evaluation unit at Instituto Nacional de Investigação e Desenvolvimento da Educação (INIDE) to all provincial offices, which are in charge of distributing them to the schools.

There are few system-wide resources available to classroom teachers to help them engage in classroom assessment activities. For example, the national curriculum provides limited guidelines on what students are expected to learn. Additionally, resources for classroom assessment activities do not always reach the schools because of distribution issues, and teachers are not always able to understand and implement classroom assessment activities that target curricular objectives, largely due to the lack of secondary and tertiary education qualifications of most teachers.

Existing teacher training does not cover classroom assessment topics. There are some system-level mechanisms in place to help ensure that teachers develop skills and expertise in classroom assessment, including the use of provincial inspectors and supervisors to monitor pedagogical practices and classroom assessment at the school level. Since 2004, technical staff from INIDE's evaluation unit has provided some training to teachers. Nevertheless, this training has reached less than one third of Angola's teachers. The trained teachers were expected to replicate the training within their provinces; however, this did not occur due to a lack of resources.

Classroom assessment information is required to be disseminated to some key stakeholders, such as parents and students. There are limited required uses of classroom assessment to support student learning. Information from classroom assessment activities is used in combination with examination scores to make decisions about promotion into the next school grade. In practice, classroom assessment information is not disseminated, and is not used by the Ministry of Education to monitor quality.

Sri Lanka Student Assessment

Classroom assessment is used to diagnose student learning issues, provide feedback to students on their learning, and inform parents about their child's learning. Classroom assessment information is required to be disseminated to students and parents. Classroom assessment information is also used as an input to the external examination programme, although it is unclear whether the results from the school-based assessments are moderated prior to combining them with the score from the external examination papers.

Although there is no official system-level document in place that provides guidelines for classroom assessment, several types of resources are available to teachers to carry out classroom assessment activities. For example, teachers are provided with Teacher Instruction Manuals and Assessment and Evaluation guidelines that outline the performance levels that students are expected to reach in different subject areas at different grade and age levels. Teachers are also provided with books that include sample questions, and guidance on using appropriate scoring criteria when grading students' work. In order to ensure that teachers develop expertise in classroom assessment, they are provided with pre- and in-service training through the National Colleges of Education and the National Institute of Education. There are currently no formal mechanisms for monitoring the quality of classroom assessment activities.

Suggested citation

About this report