

POLICY BRIEF

ASSESSMENT FOR IMPROVED LEARNING OUTCOMES



INOVASI is an education program partnership between the Governments of Indonesia and Australia. It aims to find and understand ways to improve student learning outcomes - specifically those related to early grade literacy and numeracy at the school and classroom level.



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Inovasi Untuk Anak Sekolah Indonesia



INOVASI Pendidikan

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WHY IS ASSESSMENT KEY TO IMPROVING LEARNING OUTCOMES IN INDONESIA?

An effective assessment system provides students, teachers, parents and government with valid and reliable information about learning outcomes. Assessment informs teachers' planning so they can tailor lessons to students' needs, it improves accountability, providing a basis for teachers to report to parents and the wider community on children's learning outcomes, and it informs schools and government so they can plan and devise policies based on the evidence.

McKinsey & Company identified assessment as one of six interventions consistently applied in improving school systems, alongside building the instructional skills of teachers and management skills of principals, improvement of data systems, improved education through policy documents and education laws, revisions to standards and curriculum, and appropriate rewards and remuneration for teachers and principals¹.

There are two main types of assessment:

- assessment *for learning* (formative assessment) usually conducted by teachers in class, to enable them to plan their teaching based on the learning needs of children; and
- assessment *of learning* (summative assessment) conducted by teachers, schools and the education system to measure the extent to which students have achieved learning outcomes.

Both types of assessment are important and both are part of Indonesia's evolving national strategy. The results can be used to prevent children being left out and left behind.

Under the 2013 Curriculum, teachers have been using formative assessment so called "penilaian sub-tema and tema" for individual teachers.

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

INOVASI and the Technical Assistance for Education Systems Strengthening (TASS) program have assisted the Ministry of Education and Culture's (MoEC) assessment centre (Puspendik) in developing and piloting both types of assessment. In 2016, INOVASI worked with Puspendik to pilot the grade four students' national performance assessment (AKSI, previously INAP) in districts across West Nusa Tenggara (NTB). The results of the grade four AKSI assessment are consistent with the results of the international tests like PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS. In 2019, INOVASI is supporting Puspendik to develop a competency framework and AKSI instruments for grades 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10. This is expected to greatly increase the ability of schools, districts, provinces and national government to assess learning outcomes and determine needs and trends in the performance of the system.

In 2017, working in collaboration with districts in West Nusa Tenggara, INOVASI conducted training for teachers in formative assessment. These pilots

showed that trained early grade teachers are able to identify individual students' progress in reading through formative assessments. They can gauge a child's progress on reading ability sub-tasks, such as letter identification, phonological awareness, vocabulary, reading fluency and reading comprehension. Evaluation of the Guru BAIK pilot found that teachers from pilot schools undertake formative assessment by exploring students' understanding through a series of questions. These teachers tend to give students more feedback than the teachers in the control group. Control group teachers did not conduct formative assessment as often. Again, this shows that, once trained, teachers *can* conduct effective formative assessment and adapt their lessons based on the results². Similar work is now being done with teachers in Sumba and Kalimantan. INOVASI pilots are finding that teachers *are* able to use simple class-based assessments to determine the literacy levels of children and to design teaching programs according to the needs of different ability groups.

The main problem is that, until recently, the national examination system was not regarded as credible

¹<https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/social-sector/our-insights/how-the-worlds-most-improved-school-systems-keep-getting-better>

²<https://www.inovasi.or.id/en/publication/report-guru-baik-building-teachers-capacity-in-west-nusa-tenggara-indonesia/>



and thus was not used to inform policy to improve learning outcomes at sub-national level. Current reforms of the national examinations and the introduction of AKSI and 'AKSI for schools'³ provide, for the first time in Indonesia, a credible measure of student learning outcomes. This creates an excellent opportunity to support evidence-based policy, not only at national level, but in districts that target improving learning outcomes. AKSI has the potential to monitor students' progress throughout their schooling and provide credible information for teachers, education administrators and policymakers on, for example, which cognitive skills are under-developed. It can thus inform both teachers' planning at the classroom level and policy development at the school, district, provincial and national levels.

INOVASI pilots in North Kalimantan, West Nusa Tenggara and East Nusa Tenggara are building on previous research done on assessment under the Analytical and Capacity Development Partnership (ACDP). Early findings show that results of assessments, such as EGRA and AKSI, *can* be used to alert policymakers and local government officials to serious deficits in children's learning outcomes, such as low literacy levels, and it *can* inform policy, district planning and budgeting. More work is needed to show how we can use these assessments to effectively target specific needs, such as groups of children or schools within districts that underperform.

Meanwhile, INOVASI has also found, in the *Gema Literasi*⁴ pilot in North Lombok and Sumbawa, that early grade teachers are gradually able to assess children's progress in reading, using a structured formative assessment process.

WHAT ARE THE KEY ISSUES?

Using assessment outcomes to inform policy

While government is working to ensure that the national examination results are more reliable, the

districts and provinces have no tradition of using disaggregated assessment results to inform policy, for example, to identify areas in need of resources to improve learning outcomes. Furthermore, they do not yet have the capacity to do this including to use evidence of learning outcomes as a basis for annual school planning and budgeting. In contrast to this, testing is then sometimes used to rank students and rank schools. Private schools sometimes 'over-test' their students, turning routine testing into high-stakes assessments and thereby distorting curriculum.

Linking assessment with learning needs and improvement

As seen in INOVASI's partner schools, including in its first pilot Guru BAIK, there is no consistent tradition of using formative assessment to diagnose the learning needs of individuals and groups within primary classes, for example, to identify children at risk of falling behind or in need of support to acquire basic reading skills. In addition, there is currently no reliable measure of learning outcomes in the early grades⁵.

Parental feedback

As observed in INOVASI partner schools, the practice of reporting to parents on children's learning outcomes is weak, including reporting on their children's progress in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy in the early grades. Parents receive formal reports that do not identify specific learning strengths or weaknesses. As a result, the community generally lacks understanding of the need to improve learning outcomes.



³While AKSI is designed as a sample-based assessment of learning outcomes at system level, like TIMSS or PISA, the new 'AKSI for schools' is designed for schools and districts to use on a demand basis, downloading the instruments, implementing independently and using results as a basis for planning and programs at school level. 'AKSI for schools' is being piloted by Puspendik at year 4 and year 8 level in the second half of 2018.

⁴<https://www.inovasi.or.id/en/publication/final-report-gema-literasi-improving-literacy-for-early-grade-students-in-west-nusa-tenggara-indonesia/>

⁵<https://www.inovasi.or.id/en/publication/report-guru-baik-building-teachers-capacity-in-west-nusa-tenggara-indonesia/>

POLICY IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

NATIONAL

Policy recommendations and priorities for strengthening assessment at the national level include:

1. Review the national standards on the teaching and learning process for primary and secondary education, especially with regards to the use of assessment to inform the teaching and learning process.
2. Review the national standards on education assessment, particularly the section on assessment and reporting. This could be expanded to include competence standards for early-grade students in basic literacy and numeracy, using the EGRA and AKSI assessment standards.
3. The Assessment Guide Book for Primary Schools (2015) could be changed to the status of a Minister of Education and Culture regulation or the guide could become an integral part of the Minister of Education and Culture's Decree on assessment of learning outcomes by schools.
4. Review the national standards on education assessment, dealing with the application of tests by schools and the national standard school exam at the end of class six. The new AKSI instruments for grades 2, 4 and 6 will be useful for: (a) evaluating school programs and system trends in improving the learning process on an ongoing basis; and (b) providing feedback to schools, teachers and parents on the performance of individuals to ensure that children do not fall behind and have the support to fulfil their expectations at the end of primary school.

DISTRICT

Policy recommendations and priorities for strengthening assessment at the district level include:

1. Develop the capacity of provincial and district education offices to conduct assessments (AKSI Survey and ASKI Sekolah) and to analyse the disaggregated results of national examinations and AKSI to inform policy. Local government can collaborate with teacher training institutes to build this capacity and jointly conduct assessments and analyse results for this purpose. More broadly, improved availability of data as a tool to increase the demand from parents and community for quality education is likely to be key.
2. Use assessment results at school level to not only score and aggregate student results, but to analyse student performance against certain subjects. This can then inform teacher training methods and teaching approaches in the classroom.
3. The district education office can provide funding to share promising practices from schools that have successfully implemented an effective assessment system. They can share these promising practices with other schools that still face challenges, perhaps through joint workshops – particularly when it comes to reviewing, designing and monitoring assessment strategies in the classroom.
4. Strengthen the use of formative assessment, so it can be used as a key source and reference for annual school planning and budgeting, and for continuing professional development of teachers.



This Policy Brief was prepared by INOVASI and the Center for Education Policy Research, from the Ministry of Education and Culture's Research and Development agency.

Data includes results from INOVASI's baseline and endline studies in partner provinces West Nusa Tenggara, East Nusa Tenggara, North Kalimantan and East Java.