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An analysis of the measurement of the progress in learning outcomes at country level: the case of South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This study contributes to the literature on the development and implementation of sample-based systemic learning assessment programmes which are used to measure the progress in learning outcomes in schooling systems. The justification for focusing on sample-based assessment is for reasons of cost and the need for test-security – conditions which prevail in most developing countries. The study modifies and emphasises the technical aspects of an existing framework, which classifies assessment systems by levels of development. This modified framework and modified rubric arising from the framework are then used to analyse and evaluate the dimensions of enabling context, system alignment and assessment quality of South African learning assessment programmes intended to measure learning progress at country level. Programmes examined include the Annual National Assessment (ANA), the National School Certificate (NSC) and the Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) programme.

This study contributes to the body of knowledge on large scale learning assessment at country level. The specific research contribution of the study includes a modified framework and evaluation matrix for analysing educational assessment programmes for measuring learning progress at the country level. The second research contribution is a detailed and updated chronology and profile of these programmes in South Africa. The research and policy implications of the findings of the study include detailed technical specifications for strengthening the measurement of the progress of learning at the country level, drawing on best practice and lessons learned from South Africa's rich and varied participation in learning assessment programmes.

Key words: Standardised Assessment, Large Scale Assessment, Education System Assessment, Educational measurement, Testing, Monitoring Learning Outcomes, Annual National Assessment, South Africa