

FORMATIVE STUDY ON THE UTILISATION OF LEARNING ASSESSMENTS IN UGANDA

Research Report



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Formative Study on the Utilisation of Past and Present Learning Assessments in Uganda

Research Report

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Abbreviations and acronyms

| | |
|----------|--|
| ADAPT | Adapting assessment into policy and learning |
| ADEA | Association for the Development of Education in Africa |
| AfL | Assessment for Learning |
| ALiVE | Assessment of Life Skills and Values in East Africa |
| APIM | Assessment Practices Inventory Modified |
| AUC | African Union Commission |
| BTVET | Business, Technical Vocational and Education Training |
| CEES | College of Education and External Studies |
| CESA | Continental Education Strategy for Africa |
| CLA | Citizen-Led Assessments |
| CLES | Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate |
| CONFEMEN | Conference of Ministers of Education of French-speaking States and Governments |
| CoP | Communities of Practice |
| DEO | District Education Officer |
| DES | Directorate of Education Standards |
| DfID | Department for International Development |
| DIS | District Inspector of Schools |
| DIT | Directorate of Industrial Training |
| EAC | East African Community |
| EAEC | East African Examination Council |
| ECD | Early Childhood Development |
| EFA | Education for All |
| EGRA | Early Grade Reading Assessment |
| EGMA | Early Grade Mathematics Assessment |
| FGD | Focus Group Discussion |
| GC-DWC | Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child |
| GESCI | Global e-Schools and Communities Initiative |
| GPE | Global partnership for Education |

| | |
|--------|---|
| GWP | Government White Paper |
| HEART | Health and Education, Advice and Resource Team |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technology |
| IDRC | International Development Research Centre |
| IEA | International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement |
| IGAD | Intergovernmental Authority on Development |
| ILO | International Labour Organisation |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| KII | Key Informant Interviews |
| KIX | Knowledge and Innovations Exchange |
| LaNA | Literacy and Numeracy Assessment |
| LMTF | Learning Metrics Task Force |
| LSC | Lower Secondary Curriculum |
| MLA | Monitoring of Learning Assessment |
| MoES | Ministry of Education and Sports |
| NAEP | National Assessment of Educational Progress |
| NALA | Network for African Learning Assessment |
| NAPE | National Assessment of Progress in Education |
| NCDC | National Curriculum Development Centre |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| OAA | Optimising Assessment for All |
| OECD | Organisation of Economic Cooperation Development |
| PAL | People's Action for Learning |
| PASEC | Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems |
| PIRLS | International Reading Literacy Study |
| PISA | Programme for International Student Assessment |
| PISA-D | Programme for International Student Assessment for Development |
| PLE | Primary Leaving Examinations |
| PTC | Primary Teachers College |

| | |
|---------|--|
| RAMAA | Research Action on Learning Measures of Beneficiaries of Literacy Programmes |
| RELI | Regional Educational Learning Initiative |
| SEACMEQ | Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality |
| SADC | Southern Africa Development Community |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goal |
| SHARE | Supporting Holistic and Actionable Research in Education |
| SHRP | School Health and Reading Programme |
| SNE | Special Needs Education |
| SSA | Sub-Saharan Africa |
| STEM | Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics |
| SUZA | State University of Zanzibar |
| TETD | Teacher Education, Training and Development |
| TIMSS | Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study |
| TVET | Technical, Vocational Education and Training |
| UACE | Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education |
| UBTEB | Uganda Business and Technical Examinations Board |
| UCE | Uganda Certificate of Education |
| UIL | UNESCO Institute for Training |
| UNDHR | United Nations Declaration on Human Rights |
| UNEB | Uganda National Examinations Board |
| UNESCO | United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation |
| UNICEF | United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund /United Nations Children's Fund |
| UNITE | Uganda National Institute for Teacher Education |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |
| VaLI | Values and Life Skills |

Executive Summary

The East African region has one of the youngest populations in the world, presenting an opportunity for a dynamic and vibrant labour force. To realise this potential, East African countries need to urgently focus on practices and policies that equip young people with the 21st Century skills that will help them navigate the demands of the current market. This study seeks to understand the extent to which learning assessments inform policy and practice, the extent to which they include life skills and values, and how best the data can be used to improve educational policies and practices in Uganda. It used a qualitative consultative approach and case study design to understand the learning assessments conducted in Uganda, and how the resulting data was used. The data was collected using Key Informant Interviews (KII), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and documentary analysis. It involved carefully selected officials from the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and its affiliated agencies, such as the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB), Uganda Business and Technical Examinations Board (UBTEB), National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), Uganda National Institute for Teacher Education (UNITE), three public universities, three private universities, secondary school head teachers, and teachers.

The study revealed that at the national level, learning assessment data informed decisions differently. For example, Uwezo Learning Assessments conducted since 2010 have spurred policy discussions on the quality of learning outcomes at the primary level. Multinational learning assessments such as Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA) and Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) informed policy decisions on the use of the national (local) language within Uganda's thematic primary curriculum. Data from the National Assessment of Progress in Education (NAPE) helped determine the education system's effectiveness in learning achievement. In dissemination, both Uwezo and NAPE assessments had successful activities with multiple stakeholders.

While learning assessment data has to some extent contributed to education sector reforms at both the policy and practitioners' levels, there are still challenges associated with capacity and knowledge building for teachers and other stakeholders. The inability to understand the process of assessment and how to utilise assessment data limits the latter's optimal use and its eventual translation into education policy and practice. There is also the challenge of minimal stakeholder engagement and involvement at different levels of the process. Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) is, however, supportive of the skills initiatives and the ongoing review of the teacher's education curriculum, which could be a great opportunity for the skill development, assessment, and further education of teachers. The lower secondary school curriculum, which emphasises life skills and values, is another opportunity to leverage and strengthen learning assessment in those specific areas.

The study revealed that there are various actors involved in the design, implementation, and utilisation stages. These include the MoES and its departments; assessment bodies such as UNEB, and UBTEB; curriculum development agencies and institutions such as the NCDC and Kyambogo University; teacher training institutions and universities; primary

and secondary schools and the Civil Society Organisations (SCOs). There is, however, limited synergy among these actors, which could be attributed to the inadequate conversion of learning assessment data into educational policy and practice. While there is limited stakeholder engagement in the learning assessment, the introduction of the revised Lower Secondary Curriculum (LSC), and the SCOs' innovations such as the citizen-led assessments by Uwezo Uganda, are creating platforms to remedy this. The Assessment of Life Skills and Values in East Africa (ALiVE) team could leverage such platforms to further involve stakeholders within the education system in Uganda.

The study highly recommends more targeted engagement of key stakeholders, not only the policymakers but also the end users, such as school leaders and teachers. The dissemination of the learning assessment data also ought to be more targeted to all the key stakeholders for effective use of the learning assessment evidence. Furthermore, the Lower Secondary Curriculum (LSC) was found to be a great tool for actors to positively influence the nurturing and assessment of life skills and values among the country's youth. The study also recommends the formal assessment of life skills and values at the end of the respective education cycles to motivate their development.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Background

Whereas the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights ([UNDHR], 1948) Article 26 (1-2) emphasises that education is a human right and should be directed towards the full development of human personality, the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) Goal Six states the need and urgency “to improve all aspects for the quality of education, and ensuring their excellence, so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy, and essential skills” (UNESCO 2000). Since then, the emphasis on learning assessment has shifted the focus from educational inputs and outputs such as teacher training, classroom construction, students’ enrolment, and completion rates, to what students are actually learning i.e., the learning outcomes (Learning Metrics Task Force [LMTF], 2003).

What students learn has become the centre of attention, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), which currently has the fastest-growing population in the world; expected to double in the next 3 decades, reaching 375 million by 2030 (ILO, 2020). While this could be an economic and social benefit to the region in terms of increasing the market and labour force (May & Turbat, 2017), it presents a challenge as most of its young people do not have the necessary skills and values to competitively join the labour market. For example, in Uganda, studies indicate that many learning assessments focus on the content, which has little bearing on the current and future needs of the students (Allen, Elks, Outhred, & Varly, 2016). From this view, if such countries are to thrive economically and socially, then the governments and civil society must act now to tap into the energy and dynamism of the growing young population. Urgently needed therefore is a comprehensive policy agenda, that explores how African countries can deliberately use learning assessment data to centre their educational policy agenda and practices on 21st Century skills.

SSA countries have unfortunately not paid adequate attention to help the young population to maximise their potential. The problem of youth unemployment has been attributed to countless factors, including the weak absorptive capacity of the SSA economies, inefficient labour legislations, corruption and unwillingness to use merit when awarding available opportunities, discriminatory social norms, religion, etc. These factors, coupled with a well-documented mismatch between the skills of young people entering the workforce and the needs of employers (ILO, 2020), mean young people face an increased risk of unemployment and underemployment. Without action, many young people in SSA will struggle to find employment that will improve their livelihoods and support their communities.

Several reviews and reports have highlighted the need for education programs in upper primary and secondary grades to focus on 21st century skills for adolescents (UNESCO, 2012; United Nations, 2018). Often called soft skills, life skills, or non-cognitive skills, 21st Century Skills are social, emotional, and mental competencies - like communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity, which can be learned and transferred from one domain (e.g.; school) to another (e.g.; work). There is

considerable evidence that focusing on these skills can have a positive impact on adolescent's engagement with and productivity in the labour market (Kluve et al., 2016; Lippman et al., 2015).

This study partnered with multiple stakeholders to generate data to address this policy vacuum and strengthen the culture of evidence-based planning and application of educational programs and processes by training teachers and developing the curriculum. We expect this to lead to more relevant educational policies that address youth skills and employment readiness via the school system.

“Adapting assessment into policy and learning (ADAPT): Adolescent 21st Century skills in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania” is a two-year research initiative by Global e-Schools and Communities Initiative (GESCI), Makerere University's College of Education and External Studies (CEES) and the University of Notre Dame's Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child (GC-DWC).

The project aims to promote 21st century skills for adolescents by strengthening the use of data from learning assessments in curriculum design, adaptation, and delivery. The project specifically seeks to:

- Communicate lessons from past and present National and regional learning assessments and initiatives to enhance national data-driven decision-making;
- Build the capacity of a dynamic learning community that will integrate and assess 21st Century, skills and supports the use of learning assessments at the school and sub-national (district/county/region) levels;
- Mobilize policy approval for the use of learning assessments in education plans, curriculum frameworks, and teacher development.

The project is funded by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and International Development Research Centre (IDRC) under the Knowledge Innovations Exchange (KIX) Program.

1.2 Study Objectives

The project is carried out in the three main parts detailed in the KIX impact framework i.e., knowledge generation, knowledge mobilization, and capacity building.

Under knowledge generation, the initiative aims to create useful information on the link between learning assessment data and curriculum design, adaptation, and delivery, and how they can be strengthened at the national level.

The initial study aimed to establish how past learning assessments have been used to affect policy and practice across Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania show existing learning assessments can inform and better support initiatives such as ALiVE¹. The research specifically gathered data on the following:

- What are the lessons about data-driven decision-making from past and present national and regional learning assessments in East Africa?
- How can we use the learnings from past assessment experiences to establish and strengthen a dynamic learning community in East Africa?
- Who are the key actors and networks within the education systems of the three countries, and how do they feature in the use of learning assessments?
- What are some of the best practices, successes, challenges, and barriers to learning assessments across the three countries?
- What are the best ways to encourage policymakers at the national level to include the ALiVE learning assessment in data-driven decisions for better curriculum design and delivery?

This document presents the first study report (Kenya/Uganda/Tanzania), and provides a full analysis of the key learnings from past experiences and recommends ways to support and strengthen the use of learning assessment data in educational planning and policy.

¹ ALiVE is a learning assessment model developed by the Regional Education Learning Initiative (RELI) network. The project ADAPT intends to strengthen the utilisation of the ALiVE findings for improved policy reforms and practices

Chapter Two: Study approach and methodology

The overall study design and methodology were negotiated and agreed upon by the country-specific research teams through an evolving process. The design considered that the research was being implemented in three countries and needed a similar but adaptable approach for comparing findings across the three countries. Qualitative approaches were mainly used to collect both primary and secondary data.

2.1. Methods

2.1.1 Literature review

First, a systematic desk review was done to inform on the learning assessment landscape, the key actors (practitioners, providers, and users), use of the findings, challenges, and opportunities in Kenya/Uganda/Tanzania, as well as within the East African region to some extent and in the case of regional assessments.

The desk review also informed the design of the study tools, which was done in collaboration with the ADAPT teams across the three countries. The tools formed the basis for collecting qualitative data through in-depth interviews.

2.1.2 Primary data collection

Primary data was collected using two qualitative research strategies, namely key informant interviews (KII) and focus group discussions (FGD).

Careful sampling was used to select the most relevant informants from the Ministries of Education, examination councils/boards, curriculum development institutes, teacher employment and management authorities, and non-state actors, including international agencies, civil society organisations, and individual experts. FGDs were carried out with selected teachers.

The foremost list of institutions and individuals was created through a literature review, brainstorming, and consultations with the project team. Snowballing techniques were then used to expand the list and reach other relevant participants.

Face-to-face and telephone interviews were used to collect data.

The following table summarises the profile of the participants.

Table 1: Study Sample

| Participant category | Institution (s) | Male | Female | Total |
|---|--|------|--------|-------|
| Policymakers/Regulators | Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) | 03 | 04 | 09 |
| Curriculum and Assessment Bodies | Uganda National Examinations Board | 01 | - | 01 |
| | National Curriculum Development Centre | - | 01 | 01 |
| | Uganda Business and Technical Examinations Board | 01 | - | 01 |
| Teacher Education Institutions/Universities | Makerere University | 03 | - | 03 |
| | Kyambogo University | - | 02 | 02 |
| | Kisubi University | 01 | - | 01 |
| | Uganda Martyrs University | - | 01 | 01 |
| | Uganda Management Institute | - | 01 | 01 |
| Practitioners /CSOs | RELI VaLi Organisation Members | 03 | 01 | 04 |
| | Head teachers | 02 | 03 | 05 |
| | Teachers | 07 | 09 | 19 |
| | Total | | | 43 |

2.1.3 Data quality, Management, and Analysis Plan

To achieve a high standard and control of data quality, qualitative data was audio recorded. Participants were asked for consent before any recording. Interviews were transcribed and validated by data analysts to ensure translations matched the audio.

Thematic analysis was used as per the study objectives. Where possible, participant’s voices are reflected on the report to illustrate points and bring spirit to the narration. The analysis of the cases further enriches the lessons and recommendations to inform the use of other present and future learning assessments.

Chapter Three: Overview of the Learning Assessment Landscape

3.1 An overview of learning assessments

According to the World Bank (2008) working paper number 128, on curricula, examinations, and assessments in secondary education in SSA, “the term assessment refers to all instruments applied to measure students’ achievements. This includes the norm-referenced and criterion-referenced formal examinations, and continuous assessment practices” (p.3). The following are examples of learning assessment models.

3.1.1 Learning Assessment frameworks - Norm-referenced and Criterion-referenced

Norm-referenced assessment is where the candidate’s performance is interpreted in terms of the relative position held in some known group (Muthaiyan, 2020). In a school setting, students are ranked according to their relative performance and it does not matter whether or not one has achieved the curriculum-planned competencies or not. Norm-reference assessment might be preferred when there is a need to:

- Reliably rank or order learners according to their achievement.
- Identify the pupils who have mastered the essentials of the course more than others.
- Select the best applicants for a particular programme.
- Find out how effective a programme is in comparison to other possible programmes;
- Make sound predictions in aptitude testing.

On the other hand, the norm-referenced assessment framework might present the following disadvantages. It promotes unhealthy competition among learners rather than collaboration; Since there is a dissimilarity between what the test measures and what is stressed in the local curriculum; and might damage the self-image of low scoring students.

Criterion referenced assessment on the other hand is where the candidates’ performance is interpreted in terms of mastery of the content in a specified domain of instruction or the achievement of the intended level of competency (Muthaiyan, 2020). Criterion referenced assessment is often preferred in situations where the assessment body or the users of the assessment data wish to select the top performing students from the majority. In practice however, assessment may consider to use a combination of norm and criterion referenced to optimise the advantages of each framework while minimising the respective disadvantages.

3.1.2 Formative and Summative assessment

Coe, Aloisi, Higgins & Major (2014) look at learning assessment as formative and summative. When the purpose of learning assessment is to improve teaching practices and learning, then it is called formative assessment. Firm evidence shows that formative assessment is an essential component of classroom work and that its development can

raise standards of achievement (Black & William, 1998). However, studies similar to that of Black and William continue to highlight that assessment can only improve teaching and learning if assessment results are used to refocus classroom activities and reorient pupils' thinking and learning. Assessment thus becomes formative when evidence is actually used to adapt teaching to meet pupils' learning needs (Black & William, 1998).

International research recognises the central role of assessment in influencing classroom practice (Black & William, 1998; Boit, Njoki, & Changach, 2012; Chapman & Snyder, 2000; Snyder, 1997; Spratt, 2005). While assessment is generally known to influence what happens in the classroom, international empirical research identifies the central role of formative assessment in improving learning outcomes (Bell & Cowie, 2001; Black & William, 1998; Black & Jones, 2006; Blunch, 2014). For example, Looney (2007) carried out a multi-country review of formative assessment and its impact on literacy and numeracy within the Organisation of Economic Cooperation Development (OECD) countries and found that,

“when practised systematically, formative assessment can lead to higher levels of student achievement, greater equity of learning outcomes, and the development of learning-to-learn skills” (Looney, 2007, p. 373).

Thus, assessment can be considered formative only if it results in action by the teacher and students to enhance student learning (Bell & Cowie, 2001). For example:

“The distinguishing characteristic of formative assessment is that the assessment information is used, by the teacher and pupils, to modify their work in order to make it more effective” (Black, 1995, p.8).

In an extensive review of research into teacher professional development in both the developed and developing world over the last 10 years, Avalos (2011) concludes that the way contextual factors interact with learning needs varies depending on the traditions, cultural mores, policy environments and school contextual conditions.

If, however, the goal of learning assessment is giving a final judgement about the effectiveness of teaching practices as measured by the learning outcomes then it is termed as summative assessment. In this case, assessment and evaluation mainly focuses on teacher practices, rather than pupils' academic scores. Summative assessment is not intended to have direct impact on learning as it takes place, as formative assessment does, it nevertheless can be used to help learning in a less direct but necessary way. For example, Iliya (2014), highlights three main ways that summative assessment data can be used: first, in providing a summary of students' learning to inform their next teacher when students move from one class or school to another. Second, it enables teachers, parents, schools, and the ministries of education to keep track of students' learning, both as individuals and as members of certain groups. Third, it provides data which, together with contextual factors, can be used for school evaluation and improvement.

3.1.3 National and Public Examinations

Public examinations are the assessments done at the end of a particular educational cycle. They play a crucial role in certifying student achievement, selecting students for further study, and standardising what is taught and learned in schools. Sometimes, public examinations can provide the same information as a national learning assessment, thus appearing to eliminate the need for a national assessment system. However, in Greaney and Kellaghan's (2008) view, public examinations cannot provide the information that a national learning assessment gives. For this, they argue that:

- Since public examinations play a major role in selecting students (for the next highest level in the education system and sometimes for jobs), they only set apart relatively high-achieving students and may not provide adequate coverage of the curriculum.
- Examinations, and the characteristics of students who take them, change from year to year, thereby limiting the conclusions made from comparisons over time.
- The fact that “high stakes” are attached to performance (that is, how students do on an examination has important consequences for them and perhaps for their teachers) means that teachers (and students) may focus on those areas of the curriculum that are examined and neglect important areas that are not examined (for example, practical skills). In these instances, performance on the examination does not provide an accurate reflection of the intended curriculum. Although there are some exceptions, decisions about individual students, teachers, or schools are not normally made following a national assessment.
- Information on student achievement is usually required earlier than the ages at which students sit public examinations.
- The kind of contextual information (about teaching, resources, and students and their homes) used to interpret achievement data collected in national assessments is not available to interpret public examination results.

Public examinations play various functions i.e. certification, selection of students for the next level of education or job placement, student motivation, school activity control, educational system management, and school, teacher, or student accountability for student achievement levels.

3.1.4 National Learning Assessments

National learning assessments in various parts of the world have common features, including an assessment of students' language or literacy and students' mathematics abilities or numeracy (Greaney & Kellaghan, 2008). Examples of national learning assessments include the National Assessment of Progress in Education (NAPE) in Uganda and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in the United States of America. These are large-scale assessments. Furthermore, information from assessments has often been of poor quality, and even when it has not, it has not been systematically factored into decision-making. Although national learning assessments are administered under different social, political, and educational systems, they tend to answer one or more of the following questions (Greaney & Kellaghan, 2008, p9-10):

- How well are students learning in the education system (regarding general expectations, aims of the curriculum, preparation for further learning, or preparation for life)?
- Does the evidence indicate particular strengths and weaknesses in students' knowledge and skills?
- Do certain sub-groups in the population perform poorly? Do inequalities exist, for example, between the achievements of (a) boys and girls, (b) students in urban and rural locations, (c) students from different language or ethnic groups, or (d) students in different regions of the country?
- What factors are associated with student achievement? To what extent does achievement vary with characteristics of the learning environment (for example, school resources, teacher preparation and competence, and type of school) or with students' home and community circumstances?
- Are government standards being met in the provision of resources (for example, textbooks, teacher qualifications, and other quality inputs)?
- Do the achievements of students change over time? This question may be of particular interest if reforms to the education system are underway. Answering the question requires carrying out assessments that yield comparable data at different points in time.

3.1.5 International Learning Assessments

An international learning assessment is similar to a national learning assessment in terms of procedure and purpose (Greaney & Kellaghan, 2008). They use similar methods for instrument construction, sampling, scoring, and analysis. They also have similar purposes, notably: (a) to determine how well students are learning in the education system; (b) to identify particular strengths and weaknesses in the knowledge and skills that students have acquired; (c) to compare the achievements of sub-groups in the population; or (d) to establish the relationship between student achievement and a variety of characteristics of the school learning environment and homes and communities. When conducted over time, both learning assessments may attempt to verify whether student achievements change (Kellaghan, 2004; Greaney & Kellaghan, 2008).

The main advantage of an international assessment compared to a national assessment is that the former aims to provide policymakers, educators, and the general public with information about their education system in relation to one or more other systems (Greaney & Kellaghan, 2008). The assumption is the information puts pressure on policymakers and politicians to improve services. Furthermore, the information could contribute to a greater understanding of the factors (that vary from country to country) that create differences in student achievement.

Examples of international assessments are Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ).

3.2 Learning Assessments in Sub-Saharan Africa

In the past decades, there has been a rise in initiatives intending to improve the quality of teaching and learning within the region. Many of these initiatives focus on learning assessment and how assessment data can be used to improve education policy and practice. Among the notable learning assessment initiatives are:

The Network for African Learning Assessment (NALA). NALA was initiated in 2016 by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) and the governments of Kenya, Rwanda, Senegal, and Zambia to facilitate peer learning on assessment (Kim & Care, 2020; UNESCO, 2017). It arose from the Learning Metric Task Force (LMTF) initiative to promote SDG 4-related assessments with an emphasis on the assessment of non-cognitive skills. ADEA/NALA also carries out capacity-building programmes for LMTF champion countries.

Optimizing Assessment for All (OAA). This initiative was launched and conducted by the think tank Brookings Institution, and it is designed to change mentalities and practices around the use of assessment, change perceptions on how assessment relates to the broader education structure and develop new methods for assessing 21st century skills (UNESCO, 2017). Its main objectives include: enhancing the capacity of stakeholders to teach and assess 21st century skills (or transferable skills), aligning skills assessment with the established curriculum, and strengthening the capacity of education systems to integrate the 21st century skills that promote professional integration and lifelong learning.

The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). TIMSS is an international learning assessment that monitors system-level trends in student performance in the 4th and 8th grades. Its objectives are to collect and provide information and data that enables countries to make informed decisions in the teaching of mathematics and science, and compare the results of different education systems in order to understand them better (UNESCO, 2017).

The International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). PIRLS is also an international learning assessment that monitors system-level trends in reading literacy. It collects and provides information and data to enable countries to make informed decisions, improves the teaching reading, and comparison of different education systems in order to better understand and improve them (UNESCO, 2017).

The Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (LaNA). LaNA targets grade 4 learners, and is intended for countries with difficulty implementing the TIMSS and PIRLS programmes. It allows countries to obtain information that can reveal important policy-relevant variables, understand the relationship between specific contexts and achievements in various regions of a country, and conduct comparisons with other countries.

The Programme for International Student Assessment for Development (PISA-D). The PISA-D project adapts the design and implementation of the PISA study to the needs of a broader variety of developing countries and contributes tangible elements for policy

development (OECD, 2017). The African countries participating in this learning assessment include Senegal and Zambia. The PISA-D initiative was launched in 2014 as a one-off pilot project spanning six years, which aims to make the assessment more accessible and relevant to a wider range of countries. Its objectives are to:

- Increase the resolution of the PISA tests at the lower end of student performance distribution;
- Capture a wider range of social and economic contexts;
- Incorporate an assessment of out-of-school 14 to 16-year-olds;
- Gather information about students' experience and the way their schools are managed; so as to identify which factors influence student performance.

Research Action on Learning Measures of Beneficiaries of Literacy Programmes (RAMAA). This programme provides decision-makers and development partners with sound and reliable indicators of the actual levels of skills acquired by participants (15 years and above) in various literacy programmes (UNESCO, 2017). It is based on a methodological framework that takes into account cultural, educational, and linguistic distinctions, as well as the knowledge and capacities of national experts from the participating countries in the design, management, and implementation of programmes at the local level.

The People's Action for Learning Network (PAL). The PAL Network brings together outstanding citizens from 14 countries in Asia, Africa, and Central America to assess basic reading, mathematics, and general knowledge skills of over 1 million children each year. The assessment includes a median test calibrated to the 3rd grade in the formal curriculum and a complementary test designed for children who pass the median test. The results are shared on National platforms with families and communities.

The Educational Systems Analysis Programme of CONFEMEN (Conference of Ministers of Education of French-speaking States and Governments) - PASEC: was created in 1991 and in 2014 and organised the first international evaluation in 10 countries. PASEC organises large-scale evaluations for learning outcomes at primary education that inform CONFEMEN countries on the evolution of education systems. PASEC assessments are a tool to diagnose education quality and to guide the formulation and monitoring of education policies.

The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SEACMEQ): is an independent development network of 16 ministries of education. It targets both students and teachers within the areas of reading, mathematics, and health. The assessment is designed and administered in the three regional languages of instruction, English, Portuguese, and Kiswahili. The results obtained are used to guide the design of regional and national strategies for the development of education systems in member countries and the enhancement of human resource development programmes of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), thus advancing knowledge on learning assessment.

Citizen-Led Assessments (CLA). Across East Africa, Uwezo conducts periodic independent learning assessments in households using community volunteers. Their learning

assessment focuses on literacy and numeracy for grades 3 to 6. Its purpose is to show to what extent children are learning. Secondly, the assessment considers whether the levels of learning and resources for learning have changed over time, then considers other social and structural challenges that might influence learners' performance. Overall it discusses a range of potentially important influences on learning.

Table 2: International and Regional Learning Assessments

| S.N | Name of Assessment | Acronym | Grade or Age assessed | Subject or Domain assessed | Administering Agency |
|-----|--|---------|------------------------|--|---|
| 1 | The Network for African Learning Assessment | NALA | - | 21 st Century Skills | IDEA |
| 2 | Optimising Assessment for All | OAA | - | 21 st Century Skills | Brookings Institution |
| 3 | Progress in International Reading Literacy Study | PIRLS | Grade 4 | Reading | International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) |
| 4 | Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study | TIMSS | Grade 4 Grade 8 | Mathematics Science | IEA |
| 5 | Programme for International Student Assessment | PISA | 15-year-olds | Reading, Mathematics, Science 21 st Century Skills | Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) |
| 6 | The Programme for International Student Assessment for Development | PISA-D | 14-16 Year olds | Reading, Mathematics, Science 21 st Century Skills | PISA |
| 7 | The Literacy and Numeracy Assessment | LaNA | Grade 4 | Reading Mathematics | IEA |
| 8 | Multiple indicator cluster survey foundational learning skills | MICS | 7-14-year-olds | Reading Number skills (Foundational skills) | UNICEF |
| 9 | Research Action on Learning Measures of Beneficiaries of Literacy Programmes | RAMAA | 15-year-olds and above | Literacy | UNESCO Institute for Learning (UIL) |

| | | | | | |
|----|---|---------|--------------------|---|--|
| 10 | Programme d'analyse des systèmes éducatifs de la CONFEMEN | PASEC | Grade 2 Grade 6 | Reading Mathematics | CONFEMEN |
| 11 | The People's Action for Learning Network (PAL). | PAL | Grade 3 -6 | Reading Mathematics | PAL |
| 12 | Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality | SEACMEQ | Grade 6 | Reading Mathematics HIV/AIDS Knowledge | SEACMEQ |
| 13 | Citizen-led Assessments | CLA | 5-18-year-olds | Basic reading Basic Mathematics | Uwezo |
| 14 | Early Grade Reading Assessment | EGRA | Grade 1-3 | Basic Reading | Varies |
| 15 | Early Grade Mathematics Assessment | EGMA | Grade 1-3 | Basic Mathematics | Varies |
| 16 | Assessment of Life Skills and Values in East Africa | ALIVE | 13-18-year-olds | Life skills and Values (21 st Century Skills) | Regional Education Learning Initiative (RELI) |

3.3 Learning Assessments in Uganda

In any education system, assessment plays an important role in practice, as learning assessments are used in tracking, supporting and enhancing learning and performance. It supports keen teachers who are interested in what learners write, do and say, which helps track how learners understand the material. The awareness learner's exhibit guides teachers (Swaffield, 2011). The Global Monitoring Report under the theme Education for All (EFA), documented the global learning crisis, which indicated that Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) was more affected than other regions of the world. The report indicated that 17 of the 21 countries sampled had over 50% of children lacking basic skills (UNESCO, 2015). This has been confirmed by several learning assessment surveys conducted throughout the region (Pierre Varly, 2020).

3.3.1 Locating Learning assessments in Uganda's policy discourse

During the period between 1925-1968, learning assessments were very much influenced by the colonial system at play. The end of cycle assessment was done by Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (CLES) which was largely influenced by the interests of colonisers who preferred testing academic skills over life skills and values. This bias was inherited by the East African Examinations Council (EAEC) in 1968 which managed Uganda's learning assessment until 1980 when the East African Community (EAC) broke up. In 1983, the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) Act was passed and the body was given the mandate to set and manage educational assessment for primary and

secondary schools. Since 1983, UNEB has handled learning assessment with a focus on end of cycle (public) examinations following the national formal educational structure: Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) conducted at the end of the primary school cycle; Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) conducted at the end of the lower secondary school cycle and; Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education (UACE) conducted at the end of the upper secondary school cycle.

Learning assessment in Uganda follows the country's formal education system/model which has four-tiers. It consists of seven (7) years of Primary education, followed by four (4) years of lower secondary, and two (2) years of upper secondary, and is two (2) to five (5) years of tertiary education depending on the course. The PLE provides a foundation for movement in formal education. However, there are many career paths that one can take after completing primary education. For instance, one can either continue with the main cycle (i.e., UCE for 4 years), or opt to join Business, Technical Vocational and Education Training (BTVET) for 2 years. After 4 years of lower secondary, some students join BTVET and Primary Training Colleges (PTCs). This is being phased out after the launch of the National Teacher Policy (2019)-. Others continue to upper secondary (A Levels). Students who successfully complete upper secondary join universities and other tertiary institutions for training in different fields.

During the Education Policy Review of 1989, the government of Uganda noted that learning assessments did not provide adequate information on what students learn and the system was not responsive to the social, economic and political circumstances in the country. Following the recommendations from the Education Policy Review Commission (EPRC) Report (1989) and the subsequent Government White Paper (1992), UNEB introduced the National Assessment of Progress in Education (NAPE) in 1996. NAPE is done in literacy and numeracy at primary grades 3 and 6, and English, Mathematics and Biology in year 2 of secondary school. It provides information about pupil capabilities with respect to the National Curriculum Standards (National Assessment of Progress in Education (NAPE), 2015). Although part of NAPE's purpose is to generate information (data) on the above it is still limited to assessment of hard skills, leaving out the scope of life skills and values.

In the last two decades, Uganda has had increased attention from the private sector and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) towards learning assessment for the improvement of learning outcomes and their relevancy to the needs of its citizens. For example, in 2008, the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) International launched Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and Early Grade Mathematics (EGMA) in Uganda, and in 2010, Uwezo started household-based assessments focused on basic literacy and numeracy skills. EGRA, EGMA and Uwezo's household-based assessments are all largely focused on literacy and numeracy, with minimal attention to life skills and values even though they are enshrined in the primary school curriculum on which these assessments are based.

In 2019, the government of Uganda, through the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), specifically the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), launched a revised Lower Secondary Curriculum (LSC) which commenced at the start of 2020 with Senior

One, now being implemented in two classes - One and Two. The LSC has an exclusive focus on nurturing and assessing life skills and values as well as the use of formative and continuous assessment. The LSC could be a great milestone for Uganda's education system in nurturing holistic individuals suitable for the demanding labour market.

3.4 The Scope of learning Assessment in Uganda

The evidence of learning gaps is a significant part of improving teaching and learning practice and structures, properly integrating learning processes, improving the effectiveness and the way teachers instruct (Musa & Zubairi, 2015). The qualities of learners and teachers are well demonstrated during assessments. (Musa, 2019).

In Uganda overall, a range of learning assessments provide a detailed, national image of the performance of the education system, which guide policy development and implementations (Uwezo, 2019). These can be categorised as national examinations at both primary and secondary level, national sample assessments, citizen-led assessments, donor-led assessments such as EGRA and EGMA as well as the regional SEACMEQ. They contribute to the wealth of data used by education stakeholders; the government, donors, learners, caretakers, and teachers (Allen, Elks, Outhred, & Varly, 2016) as follows:

- National examinations are the core assessments in education systems across East Africa and are administered at both primary and secondary level. These examinations form the basis of a school accountability system, and aid performance improvements for schools. In Tanzania schools are systematically given incentives based on performance in national examinations. UNEB is responsible for test development, administration, marking and the release of results, with a clear goal of assessing candidates' level of achievement using PLE, UCE for the lower secondary leaving exam and UACE for the upper secondary leaving exam (Allen et al., 2016).

UNEB also administers NAPE for grade 3 and 6 since 1996 at primary school level and since 2008 at secondary school level. NAPE is used to measure the performance of the whole education system by determining the national levels of education and achievement, and monitoring changes in those levels over time. The context in which learning occurs is highly considered, meaning the contextual factors are linked with the learning achievements to determine achievement levels (UNEB, 2018).

According to (Acana, 2006, p.2):

'... the information from these tests is supposed to serve the following purposes, among others: generate accurate information on what pupils know and can do in various curricular areas, provide guidelines for improving instruction and learning evaluate the effectiveness of inputs and processes that are employed in the educational activities, and provide guidelines on variables that affect achievement. However, the information

is not yet being optimally used by education policymakers and practitioners.

NAPE collects data on cognitive and non-cognitive skills, and findings are reported at national level and separated at sub-national levels. The 'theory of change' behind NAPE, is that the existence of data about students' learning achievement level will identify the need for changes in policies and practices, further illuminating the sorts of systemic changes that are required from time to time (NAPE, 2018).

- Citizen-led assessment. Uwezo is a citizen-led assessment across Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. It has played an important role in creating understanding on the low levels of learning in schools, and in the education debate on academic performance (Uwezo, 2019). To measure actual levels of literacy and numeracy across Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, Uwezo set out to contribute a 10% increase in basic literacy and numeracy competencies among 6-16-year-olds across these countries. (Allen, Elks, Outhred, & Varly, 2016)
- Donor-led assessments. EGRA and EGMA are the most used donor-led assessments across the region. They both measure foundation skills for literacy and mathematics in the early grades or years of education. In Uganda, EGRA is mainly used for tracking the USAID School Health and Reading Programme (SHRP), the Global Partnership for Education's School and Teacher Effectiveness Project, and DfID's Girls' Education Challenge, then both EGMA and EGRA are used to track performance progress (Allen, et al., 2016).
- Regional assessments i.e. SEACMEQ is administered approximately every five years across 15 southern and eastern African countries to students in primary six (P6). The assessment assists educational policy planners and stakeholders in academia to conduct studies about the qualities of their education systems by cooperating and consenting to comparisons across the region.
- The Directorate of Education Standards (DES) implements school-based Monitoring of Learning Achievement (MLA) that has an analytical approach to school improvements. The data generated from MLA aids DES in its mandate to provide quality supervision of all primary and secondary schools in Uganda - Quality Assurance mandate.

In 2016, the government of Uganda commissioned a study by the Health and Education, Advice and Resource Team (HEART) that would establish a roadmap to improve the use of learning assessment in the country (Allen et al., 2016). The report revealed that learning assessments at the classroom level gave little priority to matters not closely aligned to the demands of end of cycle examinations, and that much of the knowledge and skills learners need today and for their future has little or no room in formal tests and examinations (Allen et al., 2016). These findings have striking practical and policy

implications: what is assessed is largely not taught in classrooms, and second, implying that since life skills and values are not formally assessed, although they may appear in national curriculum and policy documents, teachers and schools hardly prioritise them.

Following the HEART report (Allen et al., 2016), the Uganda's MoES with support from the United Kingdom's DfID launched a national symposium to gather information and generate recommendations for improving assessments and examinations in Uganda. The symposium proposed developing tools for measuring 21st century or soft skills, re-orienting the system to recognise low grade learners and their final assessment results, and reviewing curricula and clarifying the necessary skills or identifying strategies for developing those skills to promote assessment for learning (AFL) (Luigi Giussani Institute of Higher Education, 2017).

3.5 Assessment of life skills and values in Uganda

Assessment of life skills and values has been the centre of policy debates in Uganda for the last decade. Largely because various studies today suggest that Uganda's education has fallen short of its intended objectives and aims as per the Government White Paper on Education (GWP, 1992).² The GWP highlights the central role of life skills and values in the development of an individual and consequently, assessment bodies should shift their focus to the same. However, available evidence shows the contrary, further affecting the quality of school graduates in Uganda. For example, the 2004 -2015 MoES Strategic Report argues that learners are failing to attain the skills and knowledge relevant for the world of work or further education. The report stresses that only a minority of students are achieving at the expected levels in post-primary education. Hence, far too many leave school ill-prepared to participate in the labour market as productive citizens or workers (Mitana, Muwagga, Giacomazzi, Omala, & Ariapa, 2019).

Despite the attempts by different institutions such as the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) to assess students' learning outcomes at secondary school level, the results do not necessarily paint an accurate picture of the learning outcomes. Similarly, learning assessment within Uganda's secondary education emphasises cognitive skills through standardised examinations and tests scores that concentrate on students' mastery of content knowledge and core academic skills, but neglects life skills and values. This confirms that life skills and values such as conflict resolution, communication, resilience, assertiveness, optimism, integrity, collaboration, respect, self-awareness, and patience, currently required in the Ugandan labour market, are undeveloped and uninformed. Others like motivation, time management, self-regulation, cooperation, conscientiousness, organisation, perseverance, goal setting, help-seeking, self-efficacy, self-regulation, self-control, self-discipline, motivation, convictions, effort, work habits, homework completion, study skills and learning strategies are also underemphasised or completely disregarded (Mitana, Muwagga, Giacomazzi, Omala, & Ariapa, 2019).

² See, the National Assessment of Progress in Education (NAPE) in Uganda report of 2014 and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), UNESCO (2015) and Uwezo (2015) reports for perspectives on educational achievements.

Yet these skills and values have been documented as essential for human flourishing and employment (Heckman, 2008; Farrington. et al., 2012). This has presented a contradiction between the general aims of education in Uganda and what is assessed in schools; and more importantly, between what is assessed and what is required for a student to cope with life after secondary school. Despite the growing evidence that life skills and values affect academic performance and life after school, policymakers and educators seem not to have leveraged that fact (Farrington et.al, 2012). Nevertheless, the unsupported assumption is that policymakers and educators understand the value of developing students' life skills and values, and have concrete strategies to develop them and reliable tools to measure their effect on students in close reference to the development of content knowledge and academic skills (Farrington net al, 2012). However, this seems not to be the case. This study continues to stress that educators, employers, and supervisors perceive the teaching and learning of life skills and values as problematic compared to technical skills that are normally taught according to a formal curriculum.

Chapter 4: Study Findings

This section presents the study findings according to the research questions and themes: the lessons learnt from past national and regional assessments, how the past assessments have included life skills and values, and suggestions for educational policy and practice.

4.1 The policy making process in Uganda

4.1.1 Key actors in the implementation and utilisation of learning assessment in Uganda

The study revealed that learning assessment in Uganda involves different actors at different levels - in the design or planning, implementation, and utilisation. At the design and planning level, there is the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) which creates the different curricula on which the assessments are based. When the curriculum changes, the mode of assessment also changes in terms of both content - what is assessed, and how it is assessed. For example, Uganda recently reviewed the Lower Secondary Curriculum (LSC), introducing a renewed focus on life skills and values also called generic skills. By the time of the study, many participants had perceived the LSC as a great opportunity to assess life skills and values.

“For a long time, life skills have been ignored within education system. Learners have been assessed on crammed content but now we shall have to assess these skills since the new curriculum emphasises them. This is an opportunity for us to start focusing on what is important for children - the life skills” Officer from curriculum development body

“The mode assessment is now changing. NCDC is now training all teachers to... focus on formative assessment and how to assess other skills such as collaboration and creativity which we used not to assess” Officer from curriculum development body

The interviewed participants noted, departments at the design stage including the department of Teacher Education, Training and Development (TETD) which supervises the entire process of teacher education (at both preservice and in-service levels). It is tasked with ensuring that teachers in schools and those in training colleges are adequately and professionally prepared for effective teaching.

“We are now working to see to it that all teachers are... supported on how to implement the new curriculum. We want to see that teachers can assess these skills as laid down in the lower secondary curriculum” Officer from Teacher Education Regulator

At the centre of implementing learning assessment is UNEB and NAPE. Alongside UNEB, there is also the UBTEB, which conducts all learning assessments within technical and business institutions. It is important to understand at this point that these examinations have high stakes for other stakeholders such as students, teachers, school leaders and owners. This means that what is officially examined at the end of education cycles attracts more attention from these stakeholders.

“If these skills are assessed by UNEB, all teachers and schools will put emphasis on them, and this means that students will also master them in order to pass exams.” Teacher

Besides the end of cycle examinations, there are also the national assessments which are administered country-wide to collect information regularly and systematically about what students have learned. In Uganda, NAPE is conducted at primary and lower secondary levels by UNEB. The examination results are often used for selection and placement.

“We normally use them during (of course) placement. When we get results performance of UNEB we use them to make sure we place children in Senior One, Senior Five, Tertiary institutions and even universities.” Education policymaker

Besides the national assessments conducted by UNEB and UBTEB, there are household-based assessments, often conducted by private organisations to measure the achievement levels of 6-16 year-olds. Examples include Uwezo assessments, which are also conducted in Kenya and Tanzania. There are also hybrid or donor-led assessments designed through donor-funded interventions as part of their commitment to improve the quality of learning outcomes in Uganda and/or the region. Although these assessments are conducted within Uganda, they have an international or regional bearing as similar assessments are done in various countries under similar interventions. Examples include EGMA and EGRA.

There are also regional actors such as SEACMEQ that provides an international platform for addressing most of these challenges. SEACMEQ establishes long-term strategies for building the capacity of educational planners to monitor and evaluate the quality of their basic education systems. SEACMEQs main mission is to generate baseline data concerning the general conditions of schooling and learning achievement with a view to:

(i) Expand opportunities for educational planners to gain the technical expertise required for holistic monitoring and auditing of the schooling process; and (ii) Build a dependable data bank that can be used by decision makers to plan improvements in their respective education systems. The findings, lessons learnt, and areas of good practice are then

shared and widely used for policy and planning purposes. Uganda joined the SEACMEQ consortium in 1998 after three years of its existence and has thus far participated in three SEACMEQ projects (i.e. SEACMEQ II, III & IV). The SEACMEQ's two specific objectives (which are to; (i) track changes in the quality of education of member states; and (ii) generate research-based policy advice that can guide decisions on improving the quality of Education in Africa) fit into Uganda's holistic approach for enhancing quality in the education sector.

Other stakeholders include teacher training colleges - both government and private owned, universities, employers, parents/guardians, ministry of education agencies such as the Directorate of Education Standards (DES), Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT), civil society organisations, and donors, among others.

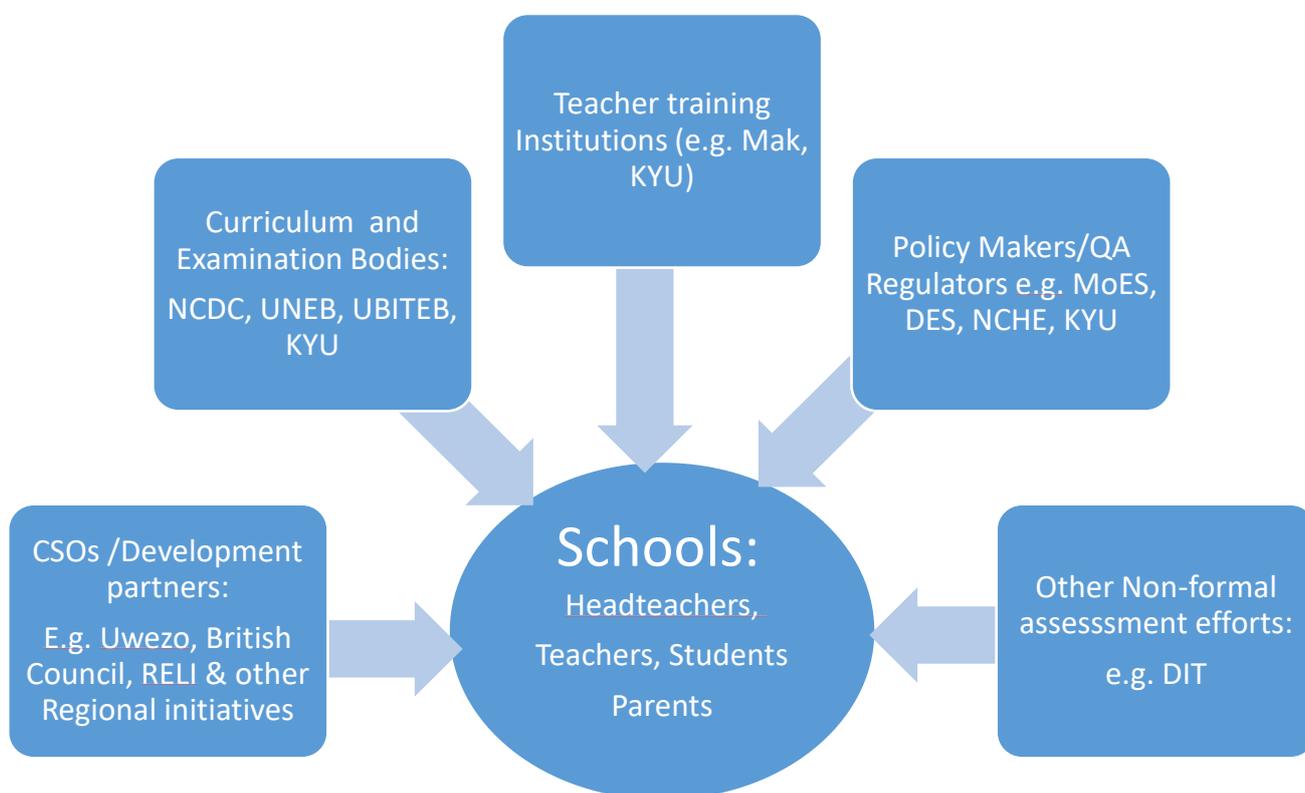


Figure 1: Learning Assessment Actors in Uganda

There are various learning assessment actors in Uganda as indicated in the figure above. However, the study revealed that there is minimal coordination among these actors leading to low utilisation of learning assessment outcomes by the schools.

The study also revealed high levels of fatigue in schools due to many and quite often uncoordinated efforts, suggesting overall resource inefficiency.

4.1.2 Utilisation of past Learning Assessments in Uganda

The study revealed that data from learning assessments has to some extent influenced policy discussions at different levels including policy agenda setting, policy formulation and policy implementation and monitoring. They have also informed reforms in Early Childhood Education (ECD), Special Needs Education (SNE) etc.

“Results from learning assessment findings inform policy discussions in Uganda for policy agenda setting, policy formulation and policy implementation and monitoring. So the data gives a wealthy kind of ground which can be utilized to improve learning outcomes. For instance, it is used to give guidelines to the teachers and to the learners, for example these learners who dislike mathematics teachers could guide- to identify the real needs of the learners and even set strategies for learners’ better achievement and make learning more interesting. They can also devise ways of encouraging specifically girls to have positive attitude towards mathematics.” Education policymaker

“We have made several policies, for example, we have a policy on ECD, policy on SNE and many other policies. In many of the cases, learning assessment data have been used to inform these polices. For example, with the data... (We) formulated policies that can improve the teaching and learning process for the special needs students. The same way we have developed several frameworks including curriculum frameworks, and these frameworks benefit from the available learning assessment data.” Education policymaker

“All these have influenced policies like that of EGRA - the impact of assessing reading in the local languages in line with the new curriculum is more funding that led to set provisions of more instructional materials to all Government Aided schools, and implementation of other interventions. All are based on the findings of the learning assessments. In fact, many of our policy reforms are bits of the data from the learning assessments; the USE also depends on that.” Education policymaker

The study further detailed that the government has used learning assessment data to inform educational policies, curriculum reforms, and allocation of resources and to

*“So, the data is used even in the evaluation of the effectiveness of educational reforms in the education system, like I have said, the lower secondary curriculum where a lot of skilling is now integrated in the curriculum, the thematic curriculum which is now turned into the EGRA curriculum - the approach is now more practical than it used to be. And it helps the ministry to allocate more facilitation and ensure the regular support supervision of head teachers and teachers.” **Education policymaker***

evaluate the effectiveness of educational reforms.

While learning assessments have been largely described by many of the stakeholders as not responsive to learners’ needs, this study explained that some stakeholders have hope, especially in the new lower secondary curriculum, which places greater emphasis on assessing learner competencies as opposed to the recall of information, often acquired through conditioning.

4.1.3 Stakeholder engagement and awareness of Learning Assessments in Uganda

The study checked the levels of knowledge and awareness of learning assessments amongst key stakeholders. It found limited stakeholder engagement, which affects the level of awareness of the assessment process among policymakers and practitioners, particularly in the public sector. While some stakeholders believe this limited understanding is associated with the lack of involvement of key stakeholders, others simply felt there was minimal consultation and dissemination of the findings particularly to the lowest level amongst the teachers therefore leaving them in the dark.

“In the past it has been very limited, that is the truth, it has been very limited. But moving forward, recently 2019, there was an approved TVET policy and it has a lot of reforms among other things, it emphasises now, they are calling it tripartite assessment. Tripartite in a way that the assessment should involve key stakeholders, the industry, or the world of work.”
Officer from assessment body

“We often hear about these assessments, but we are not usually consulted. As teachers on the ground, we have ideas about what we see happening and what we believe could improve teaching and learning. But since we are not consulted, we remain with our ideas”
Teacher

It also emerged that, the limited engagement of stakeholders in the assessment process, to some extent had created a gap between what the employers expect of school graduates and what is actually being assessed.

*“There is a huge discrepancy between what the industry expects that we cultivate in our students and what we assess - there is that disconnect between the university and the industry. And the call for university-industry partnership in form of skills development and assessment is on.” **Officer from assessment body***

The above study findings could also point to the view that stakeholder engagement influences the level of stakeholders’ awareness about the learning assessment, and the subsequent use of the assessment data. The study also revealed that limited stakeholder engagement is associated with the stakeholders’ understanding of learning assessment and their purpose as limited to accountability and gauging what learners know, and what they do not. However, recent innovations within learning assessment such as Uwezo assessment and the ALiVE project indicate increasing stakeholder engagement.

*“Under the ALiVE programme, assessment of life skills and values we have right from the beginning deliberately engaged key stakeholders and entities in the Ministry of Education, including National Curriculum Development Centre, including, for example, teachers’ unions, and then at district level.” **CSO representative***

It was also revealed that the learning assessments that deliberately engage stakeholders increased the awareness of the assessment process, the tools used, the purpose of assessment, and so these stakeholders are more likely to take on the assessment data as evidence to improve policy and or practice.

*“We ensure that the district leadership is informed, including the human administrative officer, the District Education Officer (DEO), Inspector of Schools, so that they are aware of the entire process, so that they know and understand how the assessment data is generated so that at the end of the day, we are not just giving them report but they know the process that is involved in generating the data.” **CSO representative***

The participants also emphasised that learning assessment data aided in bringing educational leaders to a clearer understanding of the gaps within the system.

“The system was always in denial when the organisation always gets overwhelming evidence that we have many of the children going to school but most of them are not with, or [not] acquiring those basic competences in literacy and numeracy. But eventually the system recognised that if we don’t have the learning assessment evidence, then it would become difficult to improve quality of education for learning in the country. So, using that learning assessments generated from independent organisations like Uwezo or early grade reading assessment, and then the official data from NAPE - National Assessment Progress in Education, we have seen progress in the last five to ten years...”
Education policymaker

The above study findings indicate a positive trend within the sphere of learning assessment towards stakeholder engagement with deliberate efforts to boost their awareness of how they can use data as evidence to improve educational policy and practice.

4.2 Barriers and challenges to utilisation of past and present learning assessments

The challenges and or barriers to the utilisation of learning assessments are structural/systemic, limited capacity/knowledge, or limited engagement. There are also challenges related to limited resources and attitudes, especially those connected to the linear view of learning assessments in terms of end of cycle examinations.

4.2.1 Structural/Systemic challenges

The study revealed that most learning assessments in Uganda have high stakes which makes it very difficult to focus on the outcomes but instead there is a huge focus on grades. Learners and teachers largely focus on the evocation of responses that involve repetition rather than critical analysis and reflection. There is lack of focus on higher-order cognitive skills, life skills, and values.

“Learning assessment in Uganda is examination oriented which could take to be a form of summative assessment because if you looked at school setting in most cases schools will wait for end of year examinations.”
Education policymaker

“Teaching has been focusing on only that what will be assessed and creating a very bad precedence or style of issues of rote learning... cramming to pass exams and not understand things. Only getting things if you can repeat a question ten times and get it crammed in your head and go and reproduce it. This has been very sad and disappointing”
University Teacher Educator

Instead of checking for learning and informing the teaching and learning process, learning assessments are often used to form a punishment and reward system of practice. This seems true at the learner, teacher, and school levels. At the learners' level, assessment/examination data is used learning assessments are often used to collect scores rather than guiding them to the next learning level.

“So, it’s more bulldozing than really checking learning. It’s more of collecting marks, it’s trying to accumulate scores, and that is not so healthy for the students. So many students hate tests, they hate assessments, that is why many of them are cheating.”
University Teacher Educator

Even teachers and school leaders view learning assessments, especially those administered by national or private agencies as accountability mechanisms by which some of them are either promoted or demoted, punished, or rewarded.

“If my school does not perform to the expectations of the school owners, I might lose my job or be transferred...so learning assessment data, in form of grades, are important because they show how we are performing as a school, and this comes with a reward system.”
Head teacher

Another interviewed participant how learning assessment in Uganda has for long focused on grades rather than life skills and values.

“Assessment in Uganda for a long time been focusing mainly towards the academics. And much less towards skills and values thus leading to the production of job seekers rather job creators.” University Teacher Educator

The study revealed that another challenge associated with learning assessments in Uganda is inadequate capacity of stakeholders, either as implementers, or as users of the evidence generated from the assessments. This is especially in the sphere of assessing life skills and values or generally the 21st century skills.

“Assessing these skills is good but the challenge lies in the capacity of the teachers to handle these tasks. Will teachers know how to assess these skills?” Head teacher

4.2.2 Capacity/Knowledge challenges

Limited capacity to utilise data: Some of the policymakers interviewed indicated that learning assessments, especially for young learners, are far above their level and often inhibit learning instead of enhancing it, due to inadequate capacity of the stakeholders to use assessment or utilise the assessment data.

“Today in Pre- primary we are fighting with teachers to tell them that these children at their age do not even know why they are being assessed. You are only traumatizing them. You already know that a child’s attention span is little then you are giving them tests for an hour and so in one place. So, it abuses the developmental ages for the children. But the teacher ensures that this child will write and then the teacher is helping the child to answer the questions, so assessment is no longer serving its purpose.” Education policymaker

Limited capacity to link assessment results and learning achievement: The study revealed that learning assessments have often been over emphasised at the expense of learning, which is detrimental to the whole meaning and purpose of assessment.

“Our main intention was teaching, and assessment was mainly for promotion. But I think as of late we are realizing the need for learning assessment so one of the gaps has been knowledge of the people who are do the Assessment and sometimes... the gap has been over emphasizing assessment per se. But not looking at it as a way of improving learning as a way of making learning meaningful to the community.”
Education policymaker

“The other loophole /gap is that our parents concentrate more on marks that students get and rarely think of what other values the student get, what other skills has the students achieved. Because the student might be weak in one area but strong in other areas. There are other areas we do not put on emphasis in assessing, for example music, games, and even other life skills there is not a lot of emphasis. We rarely report to the parents. So, it also becomes a gap that we need to address.”
University Teacher Educator

Lack of training on assessments: This study also revealed that much as learning assessment is a critical part of the learning process, many of the teachers might not be adequately trained to conduct learning assessment, especially in assessing life skills and values.

“We need serious training for our teachers, including lecturers in higher institutions of learning, to really come to terms with what the benefits of learning assessment [are] and to sensitize the communities, particularly the parents, that they should understand the value of learning assessment not just for passing exams per se, but for trying to find out whether learners have really achieved what takes them to school.”
Education policymaker

4.2.3 Limited dissemination and engagement

Inadequate dissemination of results: Another barrier highlighted in this study was inadequate dissemination of the learning assessment data. For example, most of the

interviewed teachers denied having known most of the learning assessments conducted in Uganda, save the end of cycle examinations.

“I hear about these assessments like NAPE, Uwezo, and others but I have not seen any report. Even the UCE reports which UNEB sends to schools in soft copies do not reach us. These reports largely remain with those who write them and I think that this does not serve the purpose they were meant for because we, the teachers, are the ones who should even first get access to these reports and then know where to improve in our teaching.” Teacher

Limited stakeholder involvement in the process: The study revealed limited stakeholder engagement at the design, implementation, and knowledge utilisation stages. It was for example revealed that some learning assessments do not engage many of the stakeholders at the design level, which to some extent could be responsible for limited ownership of the outcomes of the learning assessment process.

“We often hear that people, especially from NGOs are coming to our schools to assess our learners, but we do not know how the assessment tools were designed, and sometimes they do not measure what we teach the learners. ... I wish we were involved more.” Teacher

Relatedly, the study revealed that while some individuals and organisations conducting learning assessments do consult the stakeholders at the data collection (measurement) level, few of them actually involve the same stakeholders at the dissemination/knowledge sharing level. Consequently, some of the study participants perceived themselves as mere data sources and wished they could be informed of the study results and the emerging lessons.

“I hope you will invite us for a dissemination meeting. This is a very important study. Many assessments and studies have been conducted but one does not come to know the results from the assessment. We need to continue engaging even with the results.” Officer from assessment body

4.2.4 Other challenges to the utilization of learning assessments

The study findings also revealed other challenges such as limited resources. For example, UNEB used to conduct NAPE every year for both primary and secondary but due to limited resources, UNEB has not been in position to conduct the assessment as planned, i.e. every year.

“These learning assessments are very expensive and it is very difficult to sustain them, especially when the funding stops. Yet we cannot reduce the sample size to cover a few areas since would not give us the adequate information we require.” Officer from assessment body

Another challenge was linked to the attitude of the stakeholders. While many of the stakeholders appreciate the need for the 21st century skills, their attention and focus was found to be on the end of cycle examinations. Some of them perceived the assessment of life skills and values as very difficult and others expressed negative attitude about the relevancy of assessing life skills and values.

“These life skills and values can be nurtured at home. What one needs from school are appropriate grades to proceed to the next level of education. We often use these grades to place our students to the next levels of learning. I am still wondering if the assessment of life skills would be part of the grading process” Education Policymaker

4.3 Conceptualization and development of Life Skills in Uganda

The study revealed that to some extent, life skills and values have been taught and assessed in Uganda’s schools. The level of assessment referred to here is largely under

“The new curriculum (the Lower Secondary Curriculum) was introduced about 20 years ago in 2006. They started teaching life skills as well as values so the teachers could be able to observe the student and then be able to assess how they are responding to the values they have been taught. Some life skills have also been assessed to judge how a student can live maybe in the community or what skills they have achieved to help them survive in one or another.” Education policymaker

the primary school thematic curriculum. However, such assessments have been formatively done at the class level and largely lacking at the end of cycle examination.

While life skills are presented within the curriculum documents, the study participants thought that the formal assessment of these skills would encourage teachers to nurture them at the classroom level. They perceived assessment as a critical motivator for practitioners to put emphasis on nurturing life-skills.

The study also revealed that much as stakeholders have hope in the new lower secondary curriculum in teaching and assessing life skills and values, many of the stakeholders still wonder how such assessment will take place.

“Life skills and values are well laid down within the school curriculum and teachers are expected to teach and assess them periodically as guided by the curriculum document. However, the challenge is that much as some teachers attempt to assess these skills and values, they are later discouraged because of the stiff competition for grades since the life skills and values are not assessed at the end of school cycle.” **Officer from curriculum development body**

“We used to have assessment in the old system of teaching and learning which was almost demanding for rote learning and cramming but now we have changed the system to the new curriculum - but the big concern still remains, how will the life skills and values be assessed?” **University Teacher Educator**

“The biggest concern is- how do we assess the students both in mind [and] in terms of knowledge, in terms of values, attitudes and of course skills.” **Education policymaker**

*“But my concern is on the skills, values, and attitudes. How do we capture the values of saying sorry, thank you ... those small that matter they are not taught in class and they cannot be assessed but you can only see in somebody’s actions the way he/she relates with others. So those life skills..., the 21st century skills the teamwork, innovativeness, coordination, cooperation, creativity, critical thinking... are not easy to assess but you can help to develop them day to day.” **Education Policymaker***

However, the study revealed that many of the stakeholders have hope in that the new lower secondary school curriculum regardless.

*“Today there is a very big move to integrate the acquisition and application of skills into the assessment system. Similarly, the current curriculum drive is towards the provision of holistic education whose main purpose is to guarantee self-reliance. It is not fair to dwell only on the academic aspect when carrying out learners’ assessment because learners are open, gifted, or talented in a variety of ways.” **CSO representative***

The study also revealed that while some of the learning assessments in Uganda have included life skills and having been disseminated to the stakeholders, there still exist challenges to the realisation of their effect on improving learning outcomes.

*“We have the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) which assess literacy and numeracy skills which lead to problem solving, critical thinking, decision making, communication and interpersonal skills, and the NAPE, which is conducted by UNEB, which provides information about national standards over time. And its findings are disseminated to different stakeholders like teachers, head teachers, DIS, DEO’s to encourage them to use the results to improve the teaching and learning processes plus other key aspects such as the infrastructure, the provision instructional and scholastic materials, the provision of mid-day meals to their respective learners.” **Education policymaker***

4.4 ALiVE assessment tool

While discussions about the assessment of the 21st century skills in Uganda are not new, they are largely at the level of documentation at the curriculum design level with minimal efforts at the assessment level. In Uganda, just like in Kenya and Tanzania, the Regional Education Learning Initiative (RELI), has designed a tool to assess life skills and values. According to the study participants, this is the first assessment tool that is exclusively focused on life skills and values in the country.

” When we talk about ALIVE it is basically focusing on life skills and values. It is the first one that I know to focus exclusively on life skills and values. Our organisation also focusses on life skills and basically focusing on 21st century skills collaboration, critical thinking, communication, and grit, basically those.” CSO representative

The process of designing the ALiVE assessment tool was deliberately planned to be inclusive - involving all stakeholders at all levels. The tool not only focuses on engaging policymakers, but also on the practitioners, including community members. To this effect, one participant noted,

While the ALiVE assessment tool has been described as inclusive and engaging various stakeholders, the awareness of the public about the ALiVE assessment tool was found to be wanting. Apart from those that participated in the pilot phase of the project, other

“We have dissolved to conduct under the ALiVE programme, assessment of life skills and values; we have deliberately engaged stakeholders, the key stakeholders right from the beginning, engage key entities in the Ministry of Education, including National Curriculum Development Centre, including, for example, teachers’ unions, and then at district level, for example we try as much as possible to interview assessments conducted to assure that the district leaderships is informed, including the human administrative officer, the DEO - District Education Officer, Inspector of Schools, to ensure that they kind of note them as we conducting their teacher assessment, but, so that they know and understand how the assessment data is generated so that at the end of the day, we are not just giving them report but they know the process that is involved in generating the paper.” CSO representative

“No, I have not heard of initiative that is focused on the assessment of life skills in Uganda. But I know very well that the new Lower Secondary Curriculum has a strong emphasis on life skills. It would be interesting to understand how this assessment is being done.” Teacher

stakeholders interviewed indicated that they did not know anything about this assessment tool.

The study revealed that there is a gap on the utilisation of learning assessment, especially those related to life skills. The identified gap was linked to the knowledge deficiency among the stakeholders, such as teachers, in understanding what life skills mean.

“In most cases they are this assessment do not bring out the life skills and values because even the assessors and the teachers themselves they do not understand what life skills and values mean so basically in most cases to my understanding it does not bring out that component very clearly of assessment, I mean life skill and values.” CSO representative

Chapter Five: Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

At the national level, learning assessment data has been used to inform decisions for policy and practice in different ways. Uwezo Learning Assessments, which have been conducted since 2010, have spurred policy discussions on the quality of learning outcomes at primary level. Multinational learning assessments such as EGMA and EGRA informed policy decisions, such as the use of the local language within the thematic primary curriculum in Uganda. Data from the NAPE has been used to inform policy decisions about education system effectiveness in terms of learning achievement. In terms of dissemination, both Uwezo and NAPE assessments have had successful dissemination activities that have involved multiple stakeholders.

To strengthen a dynamic learning community on assessments and 21st century skills in Uganda, stakeholder involvement has to be strengthened. While the study findings indicate minimal stakeholder engagement, especially at the level of dissemination of assessment data in Uganda, they also indicate that establishing a dynamic learning community requires active and deliberate stakeholder engagement. This is particularly important for the ALiVE initiative as it aims at advocating for the assessment of life skills through a wide adoption of the assessment tool the ALiVE team has designed. Fortunately, Uwezo is one of the RELI member organisations engaged in the ALiVE initiative and so the ALiVE team can borrow best practices from Uwezo's assessment, regarding especially the stakeholder engagement.

The study findings revealed various actors and networks associated with learning assessments in Uganda's education system. These include government agencies that are mandated to conduct national assessments and examinations such as UNEB and UBITEB as well as the Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT) that is charged with the mandate to assess and certify competence-based learning achievements at different levels within the TVET sub-sector. There are also agencies and organisations that are charged with the mandate to design curricula at different levels such as NCDC (mainly for Pre-primary, primary and secondary school levels), and Kyambogo University that is responsible for the curriculum of Primary Teachers Colleges (PTC) and National Teacher Colleges.

Each university has a responsibility and mandate to manage its own curriculum and assessment systems with quality assurance and regulation from the National Council for Higher Education. There is also the MoES that is charged with the responsibility of policy and regulation working through various departments and agencies such as DES, NCHE, among others. The CSOs and regional initiatives such as RELI also participate in learning assessments and their discussions. Important to note also is schools (teachers and school leaders) and communities. However, the study findings also reveal minimal coordination and collaboration among these stakeholders and networks, reducing the possible benefits of synergies and associated benefits such as peer learning for improvement. There is also unnecessary duplication of initiatives leading, sometimes, to initiative fatigue at the school level since most of these initiatives target schools.

On best practices, learning assessment data has to a small extent contributed to education sector reforms at both the policy and practitioner level. There are challenges associated with building the capacity of teachers and other stakeholders in terms of understanding the process of assessment and how to utilise the assessment data. There also the challenge of minimal stakeholder engagement and involvement at different levels of the learning assessment processes. The Ministry of Education and Sports in Uganda is however supportive of the skills initiatives endeavours, and the ongoing teacher education curriculum review could be a great opportunity for skills development and assessment within teacher education and development. The lower secondary school curriculum, which emphasises life skills and values, is also another opportunity to leverage for strengthening learning assessment - especially for life skills and values.

The formative study findings show that the ALiVE tool is not familiar to the stakeholders beyond the ALiVE team. By the time of the study, stakeholder engagement and ALiVE involvement was by representation. This might raise serious questions on ownership of the tool and the adoption of the ALiVE learning assessment data into policy and practice beyond the ALiVE team discussions. The team should create awareness among the stakeholders regarding the design of the tool, how it is implemented and interpretation of the learning assessment data. A series of capacity building sessions would be important for different stakeholders at various levels so that they can use the tool and the learning assessment data effectively.

5.2 Recommendations

Past learning assessments such as NAPE and Uwezo have informed decisions for policy and practice in Uganda in various ways. This creates a learning opportunity for the ALiVE team to borrow lessons from these assessment initiatives to engage policymakers and practitioners. To learning therefore, the ALiVE team can work with experts of Uwezo and NAPE to borrow their experiences on how to analyze the large-scale learning assessment data, disseminate learning assessment findings as well as practical modalities for making closer follow-up after the dissemination for policy and practice.

To strengthen the dynamic learning community in Uganda, there is need for active stakeholder engagement and involvement. The ALiVE initiative would largely benefit from borrowing best practices from the past learning assessment initiatives, particularly in areas of dissemination and stakeholder involvement and engagement.

While there are various actors and networks involved in learning assessments in Uganda, there is minimal collaboration and coordination of their efforts. This reduces collective efficiency, as it leads to duplication of efforts and beneficiary fatigue. Establishing networks and collaboration among these actors would maximize their impact on education policy and practice in Uganda.

On best practice, learning assessment data has, to a small extent, contributed to education sector reforms at both the policy and practitioner level. For this to be improved, diverse actors have to be involved from the tool design, implementation,

analysis, reporting and dissemination. This will improve acceptance of the learning assessment data and their eventual utilisation of the assessment data. This will also reduce challenges associated with harmonisation of the conceptualisation of skills among the diverse stakeholders.

There is also a challenge around building the capacity of teachers as the main developers and assessors of skills in the education system. This is important now that skills are not integrated in the teacher education curriculum as an explicit subject. The Ministry of Education and Sports in Uganda is however supportive of the skills initiatives endeavours and with the ongoing teacher education curriculum review. This could be a great opportunity for skills development and assessment within teacher education and development.

For better uptake and utilisation of the ALiVE assessment tool, there is need for a series of capacity building sessions for different stakeholders at various levels so that they can use the tool and the learning assessment data effectively. This could involve sessions on how the tool is designed and how the assessment data can be interpreted so that it can better inform education policymakers and practitioners at different levels.

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Annexes

Annex 1: Successful policy influence by two Learning Assessments in Uganda

Case I: National of Progress in Education (NAPE)

National Assessment of Progress in Education (NAPE) has been a national assessment conducted by the National Examinations Board (UNEBC) in Uganda since 1996 and 2008 at the primary and secondary education levels respectively. NAPE was created in the education system as a result of the Education Policy Review Commission (EPRC, 1989), realizing the lack of reliable and up-to-date data on educational indicators. The only assessment information used then, for purposes of monitoring and evaluation, was based on results of public examinations such as Primary Leaving Examination (PLE), Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) and reports written by examiners on these examinations. The basic idea of NAPE is to collect accurate and timely information on what specified groups of learners know and can do. The data is collected by administering cognitive and non-cognitive instruments to a sample of respondents of interest. The findings are reported at national level and disaggregated at sub-national levels. NAPE is conducted at primary and secondary school levels. At the primary level, the assessment is done annually in grades 3 and 6 in the subject areas of Literacy and Numeracy. At the secondary school level, it focuses on English Language, Mathematics and Biology in Senior Two. The information emanating from the assessment is supposed to serve the following purposes, among others:

- (i) Determine and monitor the level of achievement of learners over time;
- (ii) Generate information on what learners know and can do in different areas of the curriculum;
- (iii) Evaluate the effectiveness of reforms in the education system;
- (iv) Provide information on variables which affect learning achievement;
- (v) Suggest measures for the improvement of teaching and learning in school; and
- (vi) Provide data for planning and research

However, the information is not yet being optimally used by education policymakers and practitioners. It measures the performance of the whole education system by ascertaining the national levels of pupils'/students' learning achievement, and monitoring changes in the achievement levels over time. In determining learners' achievement, national assessment takes into consideration the context in which learning occurs. Therefore, the contextual factors are correlated with the learning achievements to determine their relation to the achievement levels. The assessments are done before learners reach the final class of the education cycle so as to allow for any necessary corrective measures to be implemented. The findings from the data are critical to all stakeholders in education, particularly for purposes of planning the necessary inputs to re-direct and fine-tune efforts toward the desired educational goals. Therefore, NAPE aims to be a reliable mechanism for promoting accountability by ascertaining and monitoring the achievement of learners at the national level.

Case II: Uwezo Uganda

Uwezo Uganda is an independent not-for-profit organisation operating in Uganda since October 2019³, and has been conducting household assessments to generate data and curate evidence on actual literacy and numeracy competency levels among children aged 6-16 years in a manner that informs the public, stimulates countrywide debate, and creates pressure for policy change from the bottom up. Prior to its incorporation in Uganda, Uwezo was part of Twaweza East Africa, conducting the same learning assessments since 2010.

Uwezo uses the citizen led learning assessment approach and methodology pioneered by the Pratham Organisation through their Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) in India. The assessment tool has been adapted for the Ugandan context. Trained citizen volunteers carry out learning assessments on children's competencies in literacy and numeracy in households.

Uwezo data been used to inform policy and curriculum reforms as well as practice regarding teaching of literacy and numeracy. In particular, Uwezo has used the assessment evidence to experiment and conduct innovative interventions that demonstrate what works to improve learning outcomes. Uwezo Uganda also collects contextual, environmental, and school factors that affect learning. This information has proven to be very important for policymakers to understand why learners might not achieve the learning levels expected at particular ages/classes. For example, Uwezo reports were instrumental in informing the government on the effect of lack of feeding of the learners within most UPE schools. This led to the government and other stakeholders starting the school feeding programme.

³ <https://uwezouganda.org/>

Annex 2: 2.0 Adapting Assessment into Policy and Learning (ADAPT): Adolescent 21st century skills in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania and the ALiVE Learning Assessment

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projects that by 2035, there will be more young Africans entering the workforce each year compared to the rest of the world. It emphasises the need for students to learn not only basic reading and arithmetic skills, but also skills that empower them to face a constantly changing world. Often called soft skills, life skills, or 21st century skills include abilities such as communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity that can be learned and transferred from school to work (Farrington, et al., 2012). While there is evidence on how to address 21st century skills within technical and vocational training programs in SSA, there is limited information about how to achieve this within basic education programs and curricula. Adding 21st century skills into education programs and policies in this region has been challenging. Firstly, there is limited evidence and information on using assessment to incorporate relevant skills within school systems and curricula. Secondly, there are no proper mechanisms for measuring and validating knowledge, skills, and abilities, nor is there flexibility in assessment practice. Lastly, existing learning assessment tools were originally designed for high-resource environments and are often not relevant for low-resource settings in SSA.

The ADAPT project will build on the lessons of a learning assessment model known as the Assessment of Life skills and Values in East Africa (ALiVE). The model focuses on the long-term goal of helping education systems to assess critical skills and use assessment data to improve curricula. ALiVE is a simple, rigorous, and easy-to-use tool that is practical and affordable for in-school and non-formal education settings at a national scale. The project intends to build a robust knowledge management system that will show how including the ALiVE measures in national endeavours would develop programs and practices in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. The project's intended outcome is available and useful information and enhanced government capacity to strengthen the link between learning assessment data and curriculum design, adaptation, and delivery at the national level.

2.1 About the Consortium

Consortium Lead: The Global e-Schools and Communities Initiative (GESCI) is an international non-profit organisation founded on the recommendation of the United Nations Task Force on Information Communication Technology (ICT). GESCI was established in 2003 at the first World Summit on the Information Society. GESCI works with governments and partners to strategically develop and apply models of good ICT-based practice for high-quality education & training and to build effective leadership abilities in ICT and Knowledge Society development among Government officials across the developing world. GESCI also contributes towards a Knowledge Society for all, based on the principles of equal opportunities, inclusiveness, empowerment, accountability, and sustainability. GESCI's role in this consortium is the overall management and realisation of the project. This will include but not be limited to, leading all aspects of project coordination, knowledge generation, knowledge mobilisation and coordinating capacity building, the learning agenda, and advocacy, particularly in Kenya and Tanzania where there is a physical presence, and social capital within the education sector.

Partner 1: College of Education and External Studies, Makerere University (CEES), Uganda. As the oldest and one of the largest teacher training facilities in the East African Community (EAC), the College of Education and External Studies (CEES) is well placed to collaborate and advise governments and has great influence with educators, community workers, administrators, inspectors of schools, curriculum designers, and community outreach implementers at all levels of the education system. It also aids the provision of adult, continuing, community, open, distance, and e-learning. The College is a respected centre of excellence in the development, [research](#), and application of professional educational approaches in response to national and global needs. CEES is responsible for the project's implementation in Uganda.

Partner 2: The University of Notre Dame's Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child (GC-DWC) collaborates with researchers and practitioners around the world to ensure the physical, emotional, social, and mental wellbeing of children and adolescents in low-resource and conflict-affected settings. Using an innovative whole-child development approach tailored to context-specific needs, GC-DWC translates research into timely and thoughtful action, adapts research tools to improve the development of learning programs and policies, and activates systems (families, schools, and communities) to ensure that children and adolescents can thrive. GC-DWC has previously led global measurement and learning groups and is currently part of global working groups around social and emotional learning and skills development- for children and adolescents. As the global knowledge leads in this project, GC-DWC manages knowledge translation and capacity building.

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