
[The global state of learning](#)

BRIEF 3

[Education and development](#)

The global state of learning in 2017: Indicators and discussion from the Global Education Monitoring Report

"The basis for accountability is a credible education plan with clear targets that allocates resources through transparent budgets that can be tracked and queried."

(UNESCO, 2017: 18)

The recently released Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report [Accountability in education: meeting our commitments](#), focuses on accountability **"a process aimed at helping individuals or institutions meet their responsibilities and reach their goals"** for the achievement of the fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) on ensuring inclusive, equitable and good-quality education and lifelong learning for all. The report focuses on key actors and actions in accountability with crosscutting themes such as gender, socio-economic status, equity, and trusting relationships also explored.

The thematic section of report addresses the obligations of governments, schools, teachers, parents, international organizations, and the private sector. Each section looks at current weaknesses in accountability practices, with an indication of who can promote accountability, and how to do so. At the implementation level, governments are the primary drivers of education practice through funding and regulation. At the same time, civil society organizations, researchers, and social movements can use their expertise and engagement for important ends such as ensuring the rights of marginalized and disadvantaged populations. Non-government actors can be key in raising awareness.

Key points include:

Governments

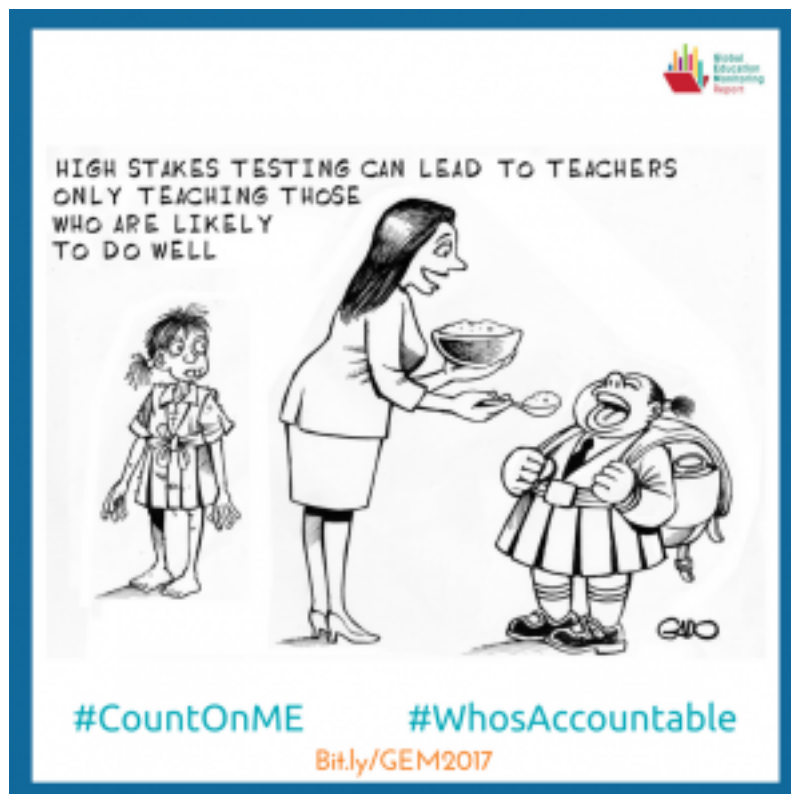
Increased attention should be given to monitoring, including choosing appropriate measurement approaches and committing to more frequent reporting on those measures. Planning and budgeting must be transparent so that stakeholders beyond the government can participate in crafting and monitoring education and accountability systems. Accurate data needs to be collected regularly and made accessible.

Schools

Schools and teachers are increasingly subject to internal and external accountability. Schools are accountable to governments, but also parents, community members and students. Without multiple measures of success, accountability practices can have negative unintended consequences. While competition can be an accountability mechanism, evidence suggests that “school choice” policies favour advantaged populations and can pose a threat to educational equity especially in low socio-economic contexts. Information needs to be accessible and understandable by all consumers so that parents and students can make an informed school choice. Schools may be held accountable by local entities: parents and civil society organizations can monitor on the ground realities and help ensure that schools are accountable and meeting the needs of students.

Teachers

Teachers have a responsibility to provide high quality instruction and are also taking on increased roles in instructional and management accountability. In the United Kingdom, 56% of teachers reported that data collection and data management constituted unnecessary workload. Teachers believed these reporting pressures also reflected low confidence in their professionalism. Some evaluation models feature data that tie student test scores to teacher compensation that can demoralize teachers. Teachers are held accountable through various approaches with feedback from multiple stakeholders. Teachers unions, communities, and parents can all play a role.



Parents and students

Academic success does not depend on schools alone. Parents are responsible for their children’s attendance and for behaviour in early grades. Countries with truancy laws that punish parents for excessive absences do not necessarily have lower rates of truancy. Holding parents accountable for children’s presence in school is successful when policy is combined with supportive measures such

as conditional cash transfers (i.e. paying families when children attend school a majority of days in a month or year). Governments can take the lead with policy that emphasizes parents' responsibilities, but local actors such as teachers and schools are key to creating a culture that values attendance and academic success.

International organizations

International organizations support countries in devising and achieving education goals but there is no entity holding them to account for their agenda setting. Civil society can support the monitoring of these global commitments. "Donor agencies are accountable to both donor country citizens and aid recipients, presenting potentially competing responsibilities". There is a lack of follow-up mechanisms holding donors to account for aid commitments.

Private and for profit actors

With expansion of the private sector into education accountability and stricter regulation is essential to ensure that profits do not take priority over equity and quality. Civil society organizations can also support government in monitoring private sector accountability.

Accountability in education requires shared understandings within a complex system. Those held responsible for meeting an expectation are influenced by related parts of the system, teachers to head teachers, head teachers to school systems, and school systems to donor organizations. With this in mind it is crucial to craft accountability systems through meaningful multi-sector engagement, building trust into the system. Transparent budgets, clear responsibilities, and independent auditing with purposeful follow-up are the best ways for governments to create high-quality equitable systems.

Monitoring progress towards SDG 4

SDG 4 has 11 global indicators and 32 thematic indicators, meaning that 43 indicators in total constitute the SDG 4 monitoring framework. A full list of SDG4 targets and indicators is available in the [Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action](#). Here we focus on the main learning-related indicators.

Target 4.1	By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes	
	Proportion of children and young people: (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex	Administration of a nationally representative learning assessment (i) during primary (ii) at the end of primary and (iii) at the end of lower secondary education.

Roughly half of all countries administer a national learning assessment in reading and mathematics at the end of primary and end of lower secondary education. However, although many countries are now collecting data on learning, cross-country comparisons remain difficult. As such there is no global estimate of the percentage of children who met a particular proficiency level in early primary grades, at the end of primary and at the end of lower secondary education.

Target 4.2	By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education	
	Proportion of children under 5 years of age who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being, by sex	Percentage of children under 5 years of age experiencing positive and stimulating home learning environments

According to the report, views differ on what should be measured with respect to the health, psychosocial and learning dimensions. The [UNICEF Early Child Development Index](#) is the main source of data. Effort is under way to further develop the methodology of this measure. Regarding home environments, in almost half the countries with data, at least one-quarter of children aged 36 to 59 months lived in households where caregivers did not engage in four or more activities to promote learning and school readiness, such as reading or looking at picture books, singing, counting or drawing.

Target 4.4	By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship	
	Percentage of youth/adults who have achieved at least a minimum level of proficiency in digital literacy skills	Proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill

Most adults in low and middle-income countries do not have even basic computer skills, and there are wide gender gaps even in simple ICT skills.

Target 4.6	By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy	
	Percentage of population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional (a) literacy and (b) numeracy skills, by sex	Youth/adult literacy rate

Between 2000 and 2015, the adult literacy rate increased from 81.5% to 86%. The number of adults with no literacy skills has fallen by just 4% to 753 million. An estimated 19% of adults did not meet literacy proficiency level 2 in a sample of mostly high-income countries. The number of youth with no literacy skills has fallen by 27% but there are still more than 100 million young people who cannot read.

Target 4.7	By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development	
	Percentage of students by age group (or education level) showing adequate understanding of issues relating to global citizenship and sustainability	Percentage of 15-year-old students showing proficiency in knowledge of environmental science and geoscience

Progress towards target 4.7 is measured through national reports on the implementation of the [1974 UNESCO Recommendation on Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms](#). During the fifth consultation period of the 1974 Recommendation, over 85% of countries reported including human rights and fundamental freedoms in education policy and curricula, but only 51% integrated education for sustainable development in policy and 33% in curricula. There is still no consensus on what outcomes education for sustainable development and global citizenship education should achieve. Measuring scientific knowledge on climate change and the earth is one straightforward option. The 2015 PISA round showed 21.5% of 15-year-olds in OECD countries performed below the minimum proficiency level in the 'earth and space' content area. The TIMSS showed earth science knowledge among primary school students improved between 2011 and 2015 in 15 countries, declined in nine and showed no significant change in 16.

References and sources

[Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all](#).

UNESCO. 2017. [Accountability in education: meeting our commitments; Global education monitoring report, 2017/8](#). Paris: UNESCO.

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