
[COVID-19 and learning assessments: Taking stock of the lessons learned](#)

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[Blog](#)

COVID-19

Student assessment

This is the first part of our annual round-up of literature published in 2020 on learning assessments. It focusses on lessons related to conducting learning assessments during the COVID-19 pandemic. Part 2 will focus on the main findings of learning assessments that were released in 2020.

A new year has begun and the sanitary emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect learning globally. Countries are seeking long-term solutions to cope with the pandemic, and moving from partial or full closure of schools to contain the spread of the virus, to major reformulations to organize most learning activities at a distance. Considering that more than 670 million students are living in countries where schools are fully closed ([Luna-Bazaldúa, Levin and Liberman, 2020](#)) and the situation is constantly evolving as schools close and reopen, the stakes are high in terms of how to continue assessing student learning outcomes as well as measure learning losses due to the pandemic.

Though some governments have progressively re-opened physical spaces of instruction, the shift to online or distance learning has taken over in a majority of countries. Teachers and students have had to adapt rapidly to radically different learning environments. This has meant rethinking the way in which learning assessments are conducted.

While assessments are currently difficult to undertake, the need for them is even greater. Parents, educators, administrators, and policy-makers need more information about how students are doing and being served during the current situation, not less. Administrators and policy-makers also need the data to allocate appropriate resources to support educational recovery ([Jimenez, 2020:1](#)).

Based on our readings, key issues for governments to consider to counter the effect of the sanitary emergency on learning include:

- Monitor learning throughout the crisis, in spite of the difficulty of collecting data ([UNICEF, 2020](#)),

and use these data to improve outreach, delivery and responses when schools reopen ([Alban Conto et al., 2020](#); [Lake and Olson, 2020](#)).

- Collect and report data on school models (methods and amount of instruction) in which students are enrolled to identify the most successful ones ([Jimenez, 2020](#)).
- Reduce expectations for what and how much children can learn during the COVID crisis period and keep the stakes of assessments low ([UNICEF, 2020](#)).
- Maintain flexibility of any assessment strategy. If assessment is undertaken, it should have a clear goal and rely on existing tools so as not to overburden teachers and students ([Lake and Olson, 2020](#)).
- Pay attention to students' physical, social, and emotional well-being to help determine any barriers to learning as well as which students may need additional support. ([Lake and Olson, 2020](#); [Jimenez, 2020](#)).
- Prioritise formative assessment, in particular in distance learning programmes, use a combination of communication channels between teachers and students ([Alban Conto et al., 2020](#); [UNICEF, 2020](#)).
- Provide appropriate training and guidance for teachers, and support for parents to monitor students' learning ([Lake and Olson, 2020](#); [UNESCO, 2020](#); [UNICEF, 2020](#)). Maintaining regular communication between teachers, learners, and caregivers to improve remote learning delivery may help keep learners motivated during school closures and strengthen engagement ([Alban Conto et al., 2020](#)).
- Focus policy on limiting hysteresis, the long-term impact on students' outcomes of school closures ([OECD, 2020](#)). Strategies may include: carefully monitoring student engagement; addressing potential constraints to engagement such as limited resources or safe places to learn; and providing individualised support to students ([OECD, 2020: 4-5](#)).
- Reschedule data collection for international, regional, and national large-scale assessments ([UNICEF, 2020](#)).
- Provide guidance on streamlining academic assessment systems in order to allow schools to evaluate students beyond the current instructional time, which is limited ([Jimenez, 2020](#)).
- Digital formative assessments can help capture diverse forms of learning by encouraging a combination of self-assessment, progress tracking, and teachers' feedback ([Le Thu Hong and Yee Ki Au, 2020](#)). This is largely dependent, however, on available infrastructure and resources, as well as on the support provided to teachers and students to overcome the digital gap ([Le Thu Hong and Yee Ki Au, 2020](#); [Luna-Bazaldúa, Levin and Liberman, 2020](#)). Software malfunctioning and remote proctoring (in particular regarding data privacy) to ensure a smooth testing process should be anticipated ([Luna-Bazaldúa, Levin and Liberman, 2020](#)).
- Setting traditional exams online poses greater challenges around academic integrity and the potential for cheating. Alternatives include online tests, setting additional assignments, open-book assessments, oral examination. Learning management systems can administer and mark exams and assignments, calculate grades, and track the students' progress. ([Uys, 2020](#)).

Quality and equity concerns

Decisions on alternative assessment methods need to ensure equitable and inclusive solutions ([UNESCO, 2020](#); [UNICEF, 2020](#)). Suggestions include:

- Consider students' earlier assessments, implement a system of automatic recognition and validation of student learning and provide remedial courses upon school reopening ([UNESCO, 2020](#))
- Use a combination of delivery channels, such as telephone-based platforms ([Alban Conto et al., 2020](#)). Angrist et al (2020) suggest that phone assessments can accurately capture basic numeracy skills and put forward a series of lessons from the use of phone-based assessments ([Angrist, et al., 2020](#)).
- Shift the focus from high-stakes assessments to asking students to perform tasks so as to observe 'how they tackle them, which ones prove difficult and how some aspects can be adapted to enable success' ([GEM Report, 2020](#)). This can help avoiding falling into the trap of stereotyping certain students based on social, racial, or other characteristics in an already challenging context.
- Take into consideration the challenge of access to appropriate infrastructure and space for some students ([Luna-Bazaldúa, Levin and Liberman, 2020](#)).
- Seek inclusiveness in high-stakes examinations by upholding the principles of universal design, while ensuring that students with disabilities will have access to the accommodations they may need to take online examinations at home ([Luna-Bazaldúa, Levin and Liberman, 2020](#))

Key resources on the education response to COVID-19

- [UNESCO's COVID-19 Education Response](#)
- [IIEP Planipolis collection of COVID-19 national education responses](#)
- [Global Partnership for Education Response to the COVID-19 \(coronavirus\) pandemic](#)
- [Education and Development Forum \(UKFIET\) collection of COVID-19 blogs](#)
- [World Bank Education and COVID-19](#)

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