

What systemic support is needed for the nurturing and assessment of life skills and values among the secondary school youth in Uganda? A Uganda's Perspective.

A POLICY BRIEF

September 2023

Introduction

In 2019, Uganda launched the revised Lower Secondary Curriculum (LSC). The LSC is a Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) that focuses on developing learners' competencies they need to meet the needs of the 21st century. The LSC presents the first major revision of Uganda's secondary school curriculum since the onset of form education in Uganda. It focuses on the second cycle of education, after the primary cycle, targeting the ages 13 to 16 years – the adolescents.

The LSC aims to provide an education that nurtures citizens who are self-assured, responsible and patriotic, lifelong learners who are positive contributors to society. To achieve this the curriculum on five (5) 21st Century Skills namely, Critical thinking and problem solving, Creativity and Innovation, Communication, Cooperation and self-directed learning, and Mathematical computation and ICT proficiency[1].

The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) launched the LSC in 2019 and the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) started training teachers and other stakeholders at the end of 2019 and the subsequent rollout at the start of 2020. However, this was disrupted by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic which had the schools closed for about two years. When schools were re-opened in January 2022, the NCDC continued the rollout process, which included training the teachers and other stakeholders as well as providing instructional materials.

The LSC Framework (2019) identifies, beyond the five Life skills also called the Generic skills in the document, six Cross cross-cutting issues Namely Environmental awareness, Health awareness, Mixed abilities and involvement, Socioeconomic issues, Citizenship and Patriotism, and Life skills. The LSC also puts importance and significance on vocational skills, learner-centred learning and teaching methods, as well as the contextualisation of the instructional materials. The main focus is to prepare the youth for the 21st-century challenges and the world of work – hence the need for creative, adaptive, critical and problem-solving skills.

With the great focus on nurturing values and life skills, it has become important for education stakeholders to reflect on the assessment systems. There is need to explore how assessment can better incorporate assessment of believe skills and values in the national assessment system.

The Research Process

This policy brief draws on the findings of the ADAPT formative study and the systems mapping process that was conducted among key actors in the education sector in Uganda. These activities were carried out between May;2022 and February 2023.

The first phase of the research consisted of a formative study on the utilization of past and present learning assessments. This phase involved the Ministry of Education and Sports officials, officials from the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB), Uganda Business and Technical Examinations Board (UBTEB), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) which conduct learning assessments, Public and Private universities, teachers and school head teachers, and development partners in the education space.

The study helped in deepening understanding of the key ecosystem issues regarding the extent to which learning assessments have been used to inform policy and practice and the extent to which they have included 21st-century skills and values.

Secondly, the research findings were then synthesized and summarized into briefing papers. The briefing papers were further discussed by the key actors in the assessment space, to further highlight the success factors, benefits/impacts, challenges, and barriers to the utilization of learning assessments. The briefs and the discussion process also helped identify the key ecosystem issues to guide the ecosystem diagnosis.

[1] NCDC (2019) Lower Secondary Curriculum: Curriculum Framework, NCDC, Kampala

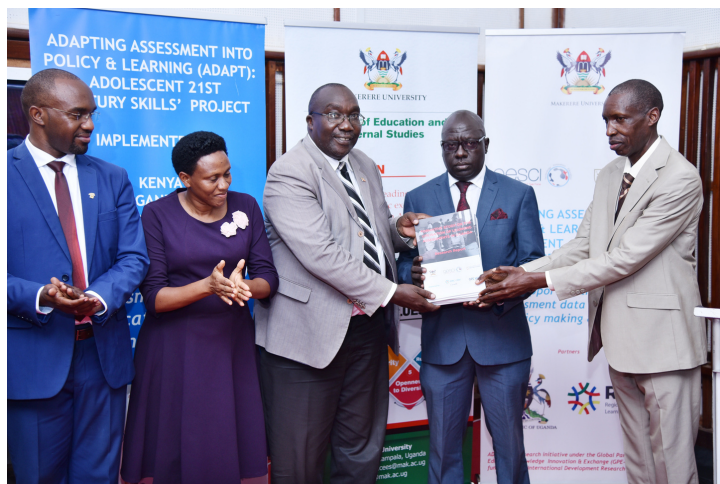
The diagnosis process led to three emerging questions:

1) Why are the current learning assessments in primary and secondary education not integrating the assessment of the 21st Century skills acquisition in learning assessments for primary and secondary school learners;

2) What are the effects of not integrating the assessments of the 21st Century skills in Current learning assessments in primary and secondary education?

3) How can the current learning assessments in primary and secondary education integrate the assessment of the 21st Century skills acquisition in learning assessments for primary and secondary school learners?

Lastly, an ecosystem diagnostic workshop was conducted with identified key stakeholders to diagnose and map the education ecosystems, with respect to the integration of assessment of 21st Century skills, the extent to which learning assessments have been used to inform policy and practice, and how best these data be used to improve educational policy and practice in Uganda.



Key Findings

The implementation of the LSC has come with various changes, including a gradual shift from summative assessments (end-of-term and end-of-year exams) to formative assessments, and school-based end-of-unit assessments which are continuous and comprehensive evaluations of learners' progress.

Key Findings...

The school-based assessments will constitute 20% of the overall learner assessment at the end of the cycle. Furthermore, while learners will exist with the Uganda Leaving School Certificate of Education (ULSCE) issued by UNEB, they will also have a vocational qualification of Level 1 which will be administered in the third year of the LSC. The research and the diagnosis and mapping of the system identified the following as the barriers to the incorporation of life skills assessments in the education assessment systems in Uganda.

The following are some of the reasons that have contributed to the inadequate incorporation of assessment of 21st-century skills within the current learning assessments in Uganda and they include among others:

- **Lack of a unified framework that guides the implementation of incorporating skills in the curricula of the primary and secondary schools:**

Actors in the education space pointed out that the LSC is a great opportunity for nurturing and assessment of the 21st Century skills. However, they did mention that the existing education policies lack strategies for the implementation and monitoring of assessments. There is also no specific policy, framework or guidelines on the assessment of 21st-century skills in Uganda.

- **Negative attitudes on assessments:**

Actors in Uganda's education space report that there is a negative attitude towards assessment of the 21st Century skills. This is coupled with the fear of change, and lack of sensitization of stakeholders such as communities, parents, teachers, and children on the role of acquiring 21st-century skills.

Barriers to Utilization of Learning Assessments in Kenya

The research confirmed that learning assessments have been used to influence education policy and practice but not to a great extent.

This study identified several factors that hinder the uptake and utilisation of learning assessments in Kenya:

- **Poor conceptualization of learning assessments:** There is low awareness of the role of learning assessments among the practitioners (teachers) and mid-level officers (county/sub-county level) as most still associate assessment with examinations.
- **Capacity/Knowledge challenges:** There is a strong insider recognition that most officers do not have the capacity to interpret data and knowledge in ways that make sense in their work, thus contributing to the low utilisation of the assessment findings. There is also lack of, or inadequate assessment capacity at multiple levels, i.e. at the personnel, teacher and policy levels.
- **High-stake examination culture within the education systems:** Even with the new CBC curriculum, the national and end of cycle examinations remains to be a more acceptable benchmark for assessing education quality rather than learning assessments.
- **Limited resources to conduct and sustain learning assessment efforts:** Conducting learning assessment was seen as an expensive venture and many of the stakeholders do not have the financial capacity to sustain the endeavour.
- **Weak institutionalization of research:** i) At the MoE level, there appears to be limited capacity in research and data translation among the technical officers and policymakers to go beyond the pre-packaged policy briefs and critically analyse and engage with the data. Linked to the above, is the issue of institutionalization of research. ii) There is no department or unit within the Directorate of Policy dedicated to research though MoE insiders talked of plans to establish a research coordination mechanism or an evidence repository that would provide a platform for analysis, the synthesis of those findings and link this analysis to policy making and see what it is working, what's not working.
- **Lack of uniform understanding of life skills and values:** The measurement of life skills and values has been challenging globally, especially at a large scale. The subject matter is complex - life skills and values are intangible, and the same concepts may be defined differently from one place to another, with nuanced differences even within the same geographical localities, same ethnicities, and religions.

● **Poor interaction among key stakeholders, and weak linkages between actors conducting LAs and the policymakers:**

The area of 21st-century skills is a relatively new area of focus for most education stakeholders in Uganda. Both the formative study and the systems mapping revealed that there are multiple actors within the learning assessment space. However, it was also revealed that there is minimal collaboration between these actors and this oftentimes leads to duplication of activities and loss of opportunities for synergy.

● **Low prioritization of life skills by educational actors:** While the LSC presents a shift from just a focus on academic achievement, actors still contend that the shift in mindsets of those within the education systems is yet to happen. Most actors including parents still consider values and life skills as peripheral competencies in education and, therefore not worth much attention.

● **Inadequate teacher capacities:** Whereas the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) has made tremendous efforts in the rollout of the LSC in Uganda, education actors still consider the existence of teacher capacity gaps in implementing the curriculum. While the NCDC is training the current teachers within secondary schools, the pre-service teacher training does not sufficiently incorporate values life skills and assessments has compounded the challenge.

● **Inadequate resources:** Actors also voiced the challenge of resource gaps at both national and school levels. It was noted that while most stakeholders agree on the importance of the 21st Century Skills, their nurturing and assessment, require a considerable amount of resources that might not be available for most skills and even the Ministry of Education and Sports.

The following are potential effects and dangers of inadequate integration of assessment of the 21st Century skills within the learning assessments in Uganda

● **Lack of patriotism among the young population:** While the LSC underscores the importance of Responsibility and Patriotism as a key learning outcome, education actors highlighted that failure to focus on the 21st Century Skills might lead to huge challenges in achieving this learning outcome. This lack of responsibility and patriotism also hinders the employability and service delivery of school graduates. The end result is a non-productive population and a low human development index.

● **Lack of feedback to inform the policy designers and implementers on how to implement and improve the incorporation of assessments of the 21st Century skills in Uganda:** Without data from the assessment of the 21st Century skills, it is virtually difficult to make evidence-based decisions for policy and practice improvement. This in turn leads to a lack of evidence-based assessment and improvement of the instruction, nurturing and assessment of life skills since the learners are not being evaluated to gauge life skills acquisition.

● **Stagnation in the education sector on a knowledge-based curriculum:** By not incorporating 21st-century assessment, there is less attention paid to creativity and innovation among young people. This also leads to less emphasis on life skills and competencies, resulting in a generation that may not be able to solve problems and generate solutions to existing problems and cannot innovate.

● **Wastage of resources in training and assessment aimed solely at cognition:** Poor acquisition of these skills means the education system will be producing young people who are ill-prepared for the modern workplace. This can compound the problem of 'incompetent graduates' who have a lot of basic knowledge but are unable to utilize the knowledge to solve situations or challenges at the workplace and within communities. This situation also leads to poor work readiness in turn leading to an increase in unemployment and youth redundancy which may end up in increased crime rates and violence among the young people.

Key Policy Suggestions

As Uganda advances in implementing its LSC, the following are policy suggestions on what could be done to support its implementation and strengthen incorporation of life skills and values in national assessments systems for better educational outcomes.

- **Formulation of nations education philosophy:** Education actors strongly expressed the need for a formulation of a national philosophy of education to capture the nurturing and assessment of the 21st Century skills in school children both in primary and secondary schools. Besides, there is need for an explicit framework and policies specifically for nurturing and assessment of the 21st Century skills.
- **Sensitization of stakeholders on the role and assessment of 21st century skills.** This can be done through advocating for a positive mindset towards nurturing and assessment of the 21st Century skills. Improve conceptualisation and understanding of learning assessments including life skills among teachers, development partners, parents and teachers through sensitisation. Besides sensitising stakeholders on how to assess 21st Century skills, they should be sensitised on why these skills are important in the 21st Century – how they are important to the learners and the general society.
- **Increase collaboration among all the stakeholders in education:** All partners in education should collaborate and have one voice in relation to learning assessments and their adoption to improve policies.
- **There is need for capacity building across all levels of education in life skills assessments:** Capacity building, for teachers in particular, in teaching and assessment of 21st Century skills should be given a priority. This will inform the teachers on what to teach about the skills. they will also be able to know what and how to assess 21st Century skills among learners. The teacher trainers should be oriented and retrained on how to nurture and assess life skills among learners. This could be done through workshops, seminars, or conferences among others, to equip teachers with the required competencies to assess the 21st century skills among learners.
- **Increase resource allocation.** There is need for allocation of more resources to implement the 21st Century skills. Prioritizing education funding towards nurturing and assessment of life-skills, targeting both public and private institutions.
- **Eliminate/reduce duplication of initiatives in schools:** There is a need to improve coordination between the public and private partners to ensure harmonization and coherence of initiatives and interventions. Currently, similar initiatives and interventions are targeted at the same beneficiaries (teachers and learners) by different partners and this tends to fatigue the beneficiaries in some way. This could be achieved, for example, through public private partnerships.

References and Citations:

GESCI (2022): **Formative Study on the Utilization of Past and Present Learning Assessments in Uganda, Research Report.** Available at: <https://adapt.gesci.org/reports/>

This brief is a product of the Adapting Assessment into Policy and Learning (ADAPT): Adolescent 21st Century skills Project implemented in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. ADAPT is a research initiative run 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 Centre for the Development of the Whole Child with support from Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) under the Knowledge and Innovations Exchange (KIX) Program.

The observations and views expressed in this work are the sole responsibility of the author(s). It draws on the Formative Research on Utilization of Learning Assessment in Kenya.

Author: John Mary Vianney Mitana PhD,

Designer: Shaylor Mwanje.

Proposed citation: John Mary Vianney Mitana 2023: **“What systemic support is needed for the nurturing and assessment of life skills and values among the secondary school youth in Uganda? A Uganda's Perspective”** Global eSchools and Communities Initiative -GESCI, Nairobi Kenya.

© GESCI 2023

Partners :



MAKERERE UNIVERSITY



Funded by:



Global e-Schools and Communities Initiatives- GeSCI

P.O Box 66380-00800

Nairobi, Kenya

e: info@gesci.org

w: www.gesci.org