

Testing Times:

Some Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

on State Level Assessment Studies

Empirical evidences are available linking education to economic growth. These evidences indicate that improved figures of enrolment and completion rates though necessary, are not sufficient information to predict for economic development. Instead, enhanced learning outcomes in the form of increased student knowledge and skills are the key contributors that help to alleviate poverty and improve economic competitiveness. The complete influence of education in relation to economic growth can only be realised if the education on offer is of high quality and student knowledge and skills are substantially enhanced. Thus retention and completion may be viewed as the quantitative indicators of the state of educational health but fail to reflect on the dimensions of quality. The assessment studies conducted, describes the learning level outcomes, which recounts the quality aspects.

At present, there are hardly any available evidences at the state level, to systematically monitor these learning level outcomes. This lack of a regular, system-level information on student learning makes it difficult to:

- gauge overall levels of educational achievement in the State,
- assess the relative performance of particular subgroups i.e. difference in educational achievement with respect to gender, urban - rural and social subgroups ,
- monitor changes in performance over time, and
- determine the effectiveness of government policies designed to improve the system in these areas.

This mandates the States to conduct a periodic (annual) assessment studies which would give a feedback on health and well being of it's educational system. Besides the above points enumerated, an added advantage in conducting a State level assessment study is that it helps to meet the local or regional educational needs.

What is a State Level Assessment Study?

- It is a large-scale assessment study at the State level, planned to understand the achievement of students in a given curriculum area, at a particular age or class.
- It involves administration of achievement tests either to a sample or to a population of students in a particular class or age group, focusing on particular subject area(s) e.g. mathematics, sciences, languages etc.
- Teachers and others (for example, parents, principals, and students) are asked to provide background information, usually in the form of questionnaires, which are then related to student achievement, so as to provide insights about how the students' educational achievement is related to factors such as levels of teacher training, teachers' attitudes, and availability of teaching and learning materials as well as household characteristics and socio-economic background of the student.
- The results obtained by conducting the assessment studies are used to provide data to inform policy makers about key aspects of the education system.

How are the Large scale Assessment Studies useful?

The assessments studies help us to:

- understand, how well the students are learning vis-a-via the aims of the curriculum.
- identify the strengths and weaknesses in students' knowledge and skills in the different subject areas.
- comprehend the disparities that may exist between the achievements of different subgroups such as boys and girls and students from urban and rural areas.
- analyse the various factors that are associated with student achievement.
- know whether government standards are being met in providing infrastructural facilities, teacher qualifications, student- teacher ratio and other quality inputs.
- determine the changes in the achievements of students over time.

How are the large-scale assessments studies different from the year end final examination or SA 2?

- Year-end examinations help to select students for promotion to the next class. It is restricted to a particular class of a given school and this is invariably not uniform over all the schools of the state. Additionally, many a times they fail to cover the curriculum adequately. The use of ‘matrix sampling’ in the large scale assessment studies, helps to cover the curriculum adequately.
- Since the examinations, as well as the characteristics of students who take them, change from year to year, they cannot be compared over time. Whereas, the results obtained through the large-scale assessment studies are usefulness for monitoring trends in achievement levels over time. The large scale assessment studies analysis involves advanced psychometrics, through which comparisons from year to year becomes possible.
- In the assessment studies additional information is collected from students, teachers and the school, which is related to the achievement level of the student, the year-end examination does no such studies to understand the background information of the students.
- The examinations are “high stakes” i.e., how students perform on an examination has important consequences for them and sometimes also for their teachers/schools. This results in ‘teaching to the test’ with a focus on only those areas of the curriculum that are examined and to neglect the other important areas that are not examined, so that the performance on the examination does not portray ‘what a student knows and can do’. These attributes are highlighted by the assessment studies.

Why are Assessment Studies being conducted for Classes III, V and VIII?

- Diagnosis of learning difficulties at an early age is of paramount importance. The assessment studies provide us the content areas in the different subjects where the student faces difficulty. It helps us in recognising the areas which the students find difficult to negotiate during the process of learning
- The assessment studies at Class III and V, is conducted in two areas namely, literacy and numeracy. In Class VIII, the assessment study in addition to the above two areas is also carried on in sciences.

- Children with low levels in ‘reading’ usually show low efficiency in other subjects. Therefore it is important that these faults are picked out early, before it is too late to successfully conduct remedial actions.
- The literacy scale in the assessment study helps us to understand the level of ‘reading comprehension’ in the child and in the identification of the ‘learning gaps’. Also, it is acknowledged that poor performance later in mathematics is often rooted in a failure to master basic mathematics competencies at an early grade. Therefore it is pertinent to understand the learning levels at the elementary stage.

How will the Assessment Studies be Implemented?

- Annual statewide assessment studies will be carried out for students in Classes 3, 5 and 8 across all schools. These assessments will be conducted across subject areas as mentioned above, and will also study a wide range of background variables that may have impact on students' learning.
- The different State functionaries such as State Ministry for Education, SCERT, Board of Education, DIETs, BRCs, CRCs and schools will be involved and participate in implementing the study.
- The assessment study conducted will be census based.
- For creating a State baseline for the academic year 2013-14, the State conducted its first assessment in the month of March 2014, for classes 3 & 5. The assessment study was conducted using a graded test design. This helped in covering the entire gamut of the curriculum from Class I to V. Now, the State is preparing to conduct its second assessment in the month of August 2014 for measuring LLOs for Grade 8 competencies. This is also designed in a graded fashion. The curriculum competencies from Class I to VIII in the four subject areas are to be tested i.e. in mathematics, Hindi, English and sciences.

Will the assessment studies be an annual feature?

- An assessment study is a quality-monitoring tool for providing feedback to the policy makers, politicians, and the educational community at large. State governments lack information on some of the aspects of the system such as student achievement levels and on basic inputs to the system. The assessments studies can provide such information, which is a key prerequisite for sound policy making and systemic reforms.

- The need to obtain information on what students learn at school has assumed an increased importance. It is argued that students will need higher levels of knowledge and skills, in the areas of languages, social sciences, mathematics and science, than in the past if they are to participate meaningfully in the world of work in the future. Conducting assessments studies regularly, over a period of time, can be used to determine whether achievement standards of the students improve, deteriorate, or remain static.

Why are we conducting 'Census' based assessments?

- Having data on learning level outcomes of every single student and every single school will allow evolving specific "School Development Plans" and tracking improvements for all schools. This will also help drive ownership and accountability at school level. It will also help the State in developing a 'Tracking the Achievement' programme for each and every child.

Why were Class 5 and 8 students asked Class 3 questions during the assessment studies?

- As per NCERT's recommendation, this was done for the purpose of linking. A few questions of Class 3 were purposely introduced in the Class 5 question paper to allow for required comparisons and analyses. The same will also be done during class 8 roll-out where some questions of Class 3 and 5 will be present in the question paper. This linking of the tests using common items helps to tell how much of knowledge and skill of Classes 3 and 5 have been mastered by a Class 8 student.

Will the state use these results for any punitive actions?

- The assessment will NOT be used in any way for determining the rank of a student, deciding on promotions or any punitive actions for schools, teachers or students. These are assessments to develop an 'understanding' of student learning levels and not to judge any school, teacher or schools. No punitive action will be taken on the basis of these tests.