



International perspectives

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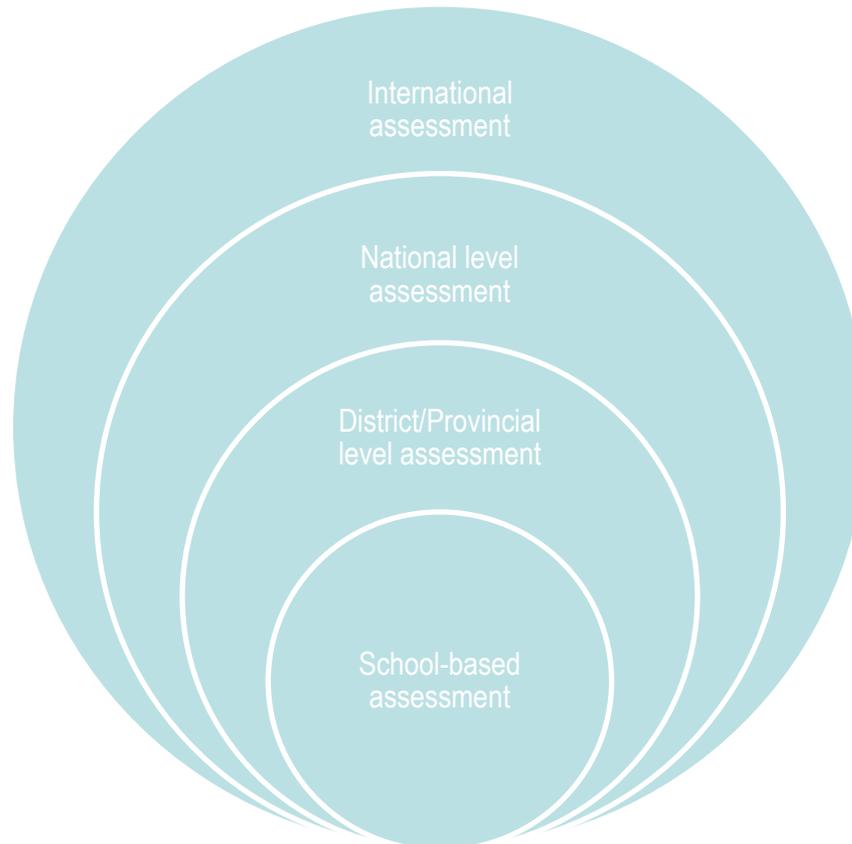
Outline

1. Introduction
2. Arguments for external assessment
3. Arguments against external assessment
4. Lessons from PISA
5. Conclusion



Introduction

Different levels of assessment





Arguments for external assessment

1. Economic perspective – encourage competition and choice by:

- Focusing on learning outcomes
- ranking schools
- promoting the establishment of private schools

“ ...parents interested in the schooling outcomes of their children will seek productive schools. This demand side pressure will create incentives for each school to produce. These incentives will also pressure schools to ensure high-quality staff and a good curriculum” (World Bank, 2007).



Arguments for external assessment(cont.)

2. External assessment:

- Provides an objective assessment of student performance
- Defines common standards of performance
- Provides detailed diagnostic analysis and feedback to schools(districts, provinces/countries)
- Helps assure syllabus coverage
- Provides a clear end point, enhancing motivation and providing a clear target (Curriculum Council of Western Australia).



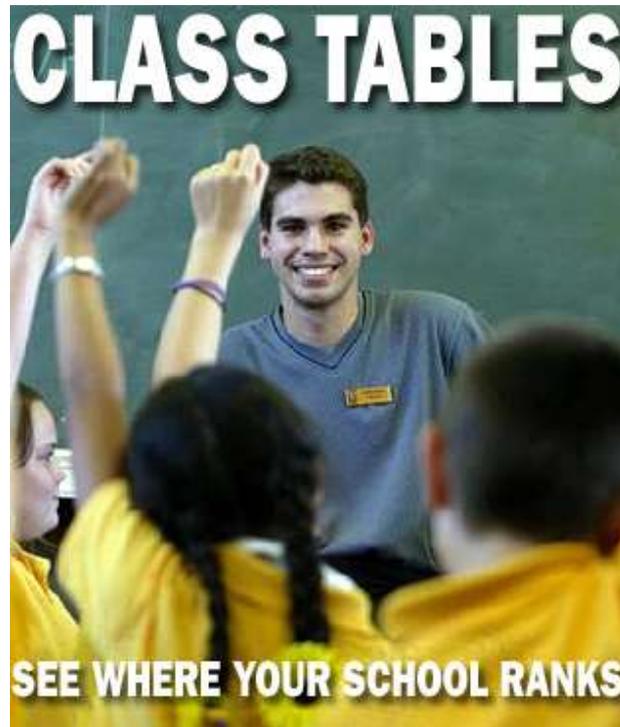
Arguments against external assessment

1. External assessment usually focuses on learning outcomes, ignoring the importance of inputs(resources) and the teaching-learning process
2. External assessment tends to focus on(limited) cognitive skills e.g. PISA focuses on mathematics, scientific and reading literacy
 - A country's education system is thus judged on the basis of these limited skills
 - Essential life-skills, such as good citizenship and artistic skills, are ignored



Arguments against external assessment(cont.)

3. The publication of simple league tables may create competition and stigmatization e.g. The high school rankings in Hobart, Tasmania, published in the Mercury(Wednesday 6 May 2009) merely drew the reader's attention to the league tables





Arguments against external assessment(cont.)

4. Competition("The Olympic approach"):

- may undermine team spirit and team work
- may encourage cheating
- usually leads to inequality

"...competition by its nature creates losers as well as winners..."(EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2009)

"Assertions to the effect that school competition creates a 'rising tide that lifts all boats' are not substantiated by cross-country evidence" (GMR, 2009)



Arguments against external assessment(cont.)

Education is a public good and a basic human right, to which every child, youth and adult is entitled. Unfortunately, competition undermines inclusion, the very essence of education.

5. External assessment may encourage “teaching to the test”, thereby undermining other essential aspects of education
6. External assessment may cause an unwarranted review of a country’s education system and the curriculum



Lessons from PISA

- The OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international standardized test undertaken by a random sample of 15 year-olds in OECD and partner countries.
- “ PISA assesses the extent to which students near the end of compulsory education have acquired some of the knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in society, focusing on student competences in the key subject areas of reading, mathematics and science”(OECD, 2007)



Lessons from PISA(cont.)

1. PISA has been a driving force for education reforms in many OECD countries
 - Sometimes policy makers institute reforms in education, not necessarily because of PISA findings, but increasingly and mostly with a reference to PISA's latest findings as a source of legitimacy for their actions...

“...we are going to do this, because, as shown in PISA, our country is lagging behind...”



Lessons from PISA(cont.)

1. Reforms inspired by PISA usually focus on:
 - The need to improve performance
 - The efficiency/competitiveness approach
 - Testing and accountability
2. The media tends to focus, almost exclusively, on league tables

When results are good, governments tend to credit themselves.
When results are poor, they blame teachers and their unions.



Lessons from PISA(cont.)

Examples from different countries (Based on survey conducted by EI in 2006-2007)

1. Mexico – In response to its low performance in PISA 2006, Mexico came up with a new reform known as the “Alliance for Educational Quality”
 - The aim of the reform is to “guarantee first rate teaching for all Mexicans” by modernizing school infrastructure and equipment, improving teaching standards and performance, ensuring that students do not drop out of school and through skills development and consolidating evaluation



Lessons from PISA(cont.)

Examples from different countries

2. Germany – PISA results have been used to justify a new focus on testing i.e. “Result- oriented evaluation”
3. Ireland – Following the publication of the results of PISA 2003, a national inspection was conducted on the teaching of mathematics, resulting in the introduction of changes in the curriculum and teaching methodologies



Lessons from PISA(cont.)

Examples from different countries

4. France – Education reforms have focused on “more efficiency and better performance”
 - This means reducing public funding for education and cuts in terms of teaching personnel
5. Japan – Teachers and their union have been blamed for Japan’s “less favorable” position on the PISA league table
6. Korea – The country is putting more emphasis on standardized testing



Conclusion

1. External assessment can be a double-edged sword. While external assessment may be valuable, putting unnecessary emphasis on league tables and competition may be detrimental to the very essence of education. It may result in exclusion and narrow the concept of education to the production of favorable test scores.
2. As educators, it is our duty to provide and defend wholesome and inclusive education, so that every child can be given an opportunity to develop their full potential