

School-Based Assessment situational analysis and needs survey

N.B The complete report is published in the Macedonian language.

1. Introduction

In 2007, USAID's Primary Education Project (PEP) conducted a survey to assess the current situation with regard to School-based Assessment (SBA) in Macedonia's Primary Schools. The survey also assessed the professional development needs of teachers' and administrators' in the area of assessment. The findings will inform further program activities, especially for development of School-based assessment standards and training modules and act as a baseline survey for monitoring and evaluation.

The following issues were studied:

- Regulations on assessment;
- Pre-service teacher training for assessment;
- Practice of assessment in schools (school assessment policy, types of assessment applied in teachers' practice; content validity of assessment; methods and instruments used; assessment principles; assessment criteria; measurement characteristics of the assessment) and
- School administrators and teachers training needs in assessment.

2. Methodology

To collect information following the following instruments were developed:

Questionnaires:

- A questionnaire for school directors
- A questionnaire for teachers
- A questionnaire for school pedagogues/psychologists
- A questionnaire for teacher training colleges methodology teachers
- A questionnaire for BDE advisors

Structured interviews for focus group discussion with:

- Parents
- Students
- Teacher training colleges methodology teachers

A protocol for law's documents content analyzes

3. Population and sample

1. All law and by-law documents
2. All teacher training colleges methodology teachers from University in Skopje, Tetovo, SEU (14 answer the questionnaire and 16 participate in two focus group discussion)
3. 20 regional BDE advisors
4. Available sample of 100 school directors (63 answer the questionnaires)
5. Available sample of 100 school pedagogues/psychologists
6. Available sample of 100 teachers from 10 carefully selected schools
7. Available sample of 100 students from 10 carefully selected schools
8. Available sample of 100 parents from 10 carefully selected schools.

The samples of respondents are not intended to be representative, but questionnaires were answered by 19% of all school directors and 20% of pedagogues/psychologists. Additional information was gathered by methodology teachers from teacher training colleges (about 50% took part in our survey). The answers of teachers, parents and students are therefore indicative.

4. Main findings

Based on the information collected by above mentioned instruments a comprehensive analysis report was produced. Below are the main findings are presented:

Law regulation on assessment

- In the law and rule book on assessment there are inconsistencies in regulation of SBA and some articles are not well-articulated;
- Issues of assessment criteria are not regulated, and issues of validity and reliability of assessment are narrowly regulated;
- It is difficult to recognize leading principles in regulation of assessment (some important principles are not taken in consideration)
- There is a need for improvement of regulation of SBA

School assessment policy

- Only a small number of schools have an official SBA policy. In schools where there is a SBA policy it primarily refers to agreed assessment rules and assessment criteria and pleading for transparency in assessment;
- Schools usually address issues of summative assessment when they consider performance on the school, class and students level in the end of official assessment periods;
- Majority of teachers plan their assessment activities, but mainly summative assessment
- Subject teacher councils discuss assessment issues occasionally
- There is no consistent and systematic work on SBA in the majority of schools

Teachers' competencies in assessment and training needs

- With regard to the pre-service training of teachers, SBA is only addressed as a part of curricula in one teacher training college
- 30% of school directors/pedagogues/psychologists and 40% of teachers, who responded to the questionnaire, participated in in-service training on assessment in the past 5 years, usually for selected topics on assessment
- Methodology teachers from teacher training colleges', BDE advisors and school pedagogues/psychologists consider that, with additional training, they can act as trainers on assessment.
- There is urgent need for systematic in-service training on assessment.
- All employees in education who participated in the survey are interested to attend training in SBA
- School administrators, teachers, BDE advisors are motivated to participate in training in SBA.

Types of assessment applied in teachers' practice

- Assessment is usually used for summative purposes. Assessment is rarely used for formative purposes
- There is a need to focus on formative assessment in everyday practice of teaching and learning.

Content validity of assessment

- Usually content knowledge and lower cognitive levels are assessed. Higher level abilities and non-cognitive outcomes are very rare assessed.
- There is a need for better connection of SBA to learning goals set in the curriculum

Methods and instruments used

- Dominant methods in assessment practice are oral presentations and teacher-made tests. Other assessments methods are not often used.
- Teacher need to be familiarized with a variety of assessment methods and tools and trained for using the most appropriate methods for different situations.

Assessment principles

- The most respected principle of assessment is transparency. It is usually connected with summative assessment and informing students, but not parents.
- The principle of continuity of assessment is not respected enough in assessment practice
- There are attempts by some teachers for individualization in assessment and students' participation in assessment
- There is a need to set clear assessment principles that will be adopted and respected in SBA practice.

Assessment criteria

- Assessment criteria do not exist neither on state level,. There are isolated attempts in some schools in some subjects to establish agreed assessment criteria

- Students usually are not informed about standards of quality and assessment criteria by their teachers. Parents are not at all informed about assessment criteria
- Most of the schools that participated in external assessments are familiar with their achievement, but they seldom use that information for setting their standards of achievement
- There is a need for setting common achievements standards based on national assessments and train schools how to use them on a school level

Measurement characteristics of the assessment

- Students grades during the school year are considered as objective, but grades in the end of school year are usually higher in comparison with criteria used during the school year.
- Assessments do not have consecutive validity
- There is a need for training on measurement characteristics in assessment and practicing them in everyday assessment

Assessment issues that need to be addressed

- Almost all participants in the survey identified the same key problems in SBA and most of them refer to lack of standards and assessment criteria.
- Suggestions for actions usually refer to setting standards and assessment criteria, focus on formative assessment, changing in grading system (combine numerical marks with descriptions of achievements), introducing external exams and change entrance criteria for secondary schools.
- There is a shared opinion that training in SBA is needed for all educational staff. The most often proposed topics for trainings are: developing and use different assessment instruments and training on assessment standards.
- The need for developing manuals and other supporting materials on assessment for schools and teachers was also revealed.

5. Lessons Learned for Primary Education Project's (PEP) assessment component

The main weaknesses of assessment practice in higher grades in Macedonian primary schools can be summed up as:

- Lack of assessment standards and criteria and based on that enormous pressure from students and parents for higher grades,
- Focus on summative assessment and neglecting of formative assessment, and as a consequence of that, assessment that doesn't support learning,
- Beginner teachers' lack of competency in assessment, and lack of in-service teacher training on assessment,
- Few professional books and other teacher support materials on assessment in Macedonian and Albanian language.

Suggested activities for PEP are:

- To help BDE and Ministry in developing SBA standards and assessment criteria (for different subjects),
- To develop draft standards for teachers competencies in assessment and to initiate improving of curricula for pre-service training of teachers,
- To develop and implement a high quality training program in assessment for school administrators and teachers,
- To develop training materials on SBA (e.g. manuals and assessment instruments) and supply them to schools and teachers or make them available in electronic version,
- To develop and disseminate user-friendly information brochures for students and parents.