

THE TERRITORY-WIDE SYSTEM ASSESSMENT IN HONG KONG: TRACKING LEARNING PROGRESS OR OVER- DRILLING OF STUDENTS?

Case ID: 2020012C

EPILOGUE

After the 2016 Tryout Study for primary 3 students, the Coordinating Committee on Basic Competency Assessment and Assessment Literacy released a report documenting the progress and the preliminary evaluation of the Study.¹

Four Specific Arrangements

To improve the quality of education, the study covered four major initiatives, including: (i) refining assessment papers and question design, (ii) strengthening school reports, (iii) consolidating diversified professional support measures, and (iv) incorporating a questionnaire survey to collect students' non-academic data. These were aimed at eliminating the rationale for over-drilling caused by the TSA; providing targeted support to enhance the efficacy of the Learning-Teaching-Assessment cycle to benefit students; and improving communication and deepening mutual trust between schools and parents. After conducting this study, the committee used both a quantitative approach as well as a qualitative approach to collect views and suggestions, hoping to receive feedback to review of these initiatives.²

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(i) Refining the assessment papers and question design

HKEAA amended the design of tests and questions, taking into account the professional recommendations provided by the Working Group on Papers and Question Design. For instance, the number of texts and items in the Chinese and English reading papers were reduced, and the number of items in the Mathematics assessment was reduced by 20%.

Regarding the objective of improving assessment papers and question design, positive responses were received from schools. The questions were adjusted to align better with school curriculum. In this way, no additional drilling was required to help students sit for these tests. Parents generally observed that the questions were easier than before, which improved student confidence. The committee concluded that with the improved question design of the TSA—i.e. making questions more aligned with the curriculum and better addressing the learning needs of students—students would be able to acquire the Basic Competencies without the need for excessive preparation. In addition, the problem of over-drilling was effectively eliminated.

(ii) Strengthening school reports

To help schools use the TSA statistics to improve teaching and learning more effectively, the Working Group on Administration and Reporting under the committee recommended there be four types of reports—the existing version, a simplified version, an integrated version, and an information analysis report.³

Schools could choose the set of reports that best fit their needs. For instance, 96 per cent of schools which undertook the Tryout Study chose the information analysis report, the contents of which most of them found helpful in enhancing teacher understanding of the rationale of the paper design as well as the link between Basic Competencies and school curriculum. With the enhanced school reports, teachers were able to choose assessment reports that best fit their needs and teaching objectives, reducing the effort needed to analyse the TSA results.

(iii) Consolidating diversified professional support measures

Schools that participated in the Tryout Study could select one or more professional support measures that fit their specific needs. The Education Bureau (EDB) provided four types of support measures: workshops for teachers on the better use of assessment strategies and enhancement of learning and teaching; on-site, school-based support services; development of teaching and assessment

materials in collaboration with tertiary institutions; and parent education. All these measures could be tailored to the needs of individual schools.

Most schools found that the professional supports measures provided by the EDB helped them better understand how to analyse the data in the reports to improve teaching and learning. Moreover, the support measures helped teachers identify their students' strengths and weaknesses, which pointed to the most suitable follow-up measures and teaching strategies. Teachers also learnt more about the planning of teaching materials and techniques, so as to better meet the needs of their students. Other schools also expressed the hope that the government could conduct similar workshops for them in the future.

(iv) Incorporating a questionnaire survey to collect students' non-academic information

In order to deepen the understanding of student learning attitudes and motivation, the committee included a survey in the Tryout Study. The survey collected the non-academic data of students, including the time students spent on after-school activities, and the perceptions of schools and parents on student workload. The Chinese University of Hong Kong was commissioned by the EDB to carry out the survey. More than 50 primary schools participated in the survey and more than 4,000 primary 3 students and their parents answered the questionnaire.

The survey results showed that students' and parents' perceptions of homework load varied greatly even within individual school cohorts. Furthermore, there was no direct relationship between the amount of homework a student had and their academic performance, which revealed that over-drilling did not necessarily improve test scores.

The committee recommended the promotion of "assessment for learning," the original purpose of TSA. It highlighted the importance of avoiding the demotivating effects of over-drilling. The TSA's main objective was to enhance schools' understanding of student learning progress and needs, and to increase the effectiveness of learning and teaching. The committee also advised that the refined design of the test papers under the Tryout Study should be subsequently extended to the entire TSA. The EDB was advised to continue maintaining close communication with educators and parents in order to, among other purposes, monitor the situation of excessive drilling in schools. Furthermore, different ways should be trialled to emphasize the importance of giving out meaningful assignments to students. Supplementary lessons could be provided where necessary, but this should not be so excessive as to affect the healthy growth and whole-person development of students.

The committee has also recommended that the EDB encourage the participation of various stakeholders to foster mutual trust, to preserve the original intent and value of the TSA, and to foster its long-term effectiveness as an assessment for learning in everyday teaching.

In March 2018, the EDB accepted further recommendations made by the committee for the primary 3 TSA in 2018 and beyond. The new arrangement was to administer the territory-wide and school-level assessments separately. Only about 10 per cent of the primary 3 students from each public sector school and Direct Subsidy Scheme school would be selected by sampling to take the TSA, and no school reports would be provided. However, schools that wanted their primary 3 students to participate in the assessment could do so by sending a request directly to HKEAA. Moreover, HKEAA would not share the TSA results of individual schools with the EDB.⁴

Endnotes

¹ The Coordinating Committee on Basic Competency Assessment and Assessment Literacy, *Report on 2016 Tryout Study (Primary 3)*, December 2016.

² The Committee conducted questionnaire or opinion surveys targeting principals, curriculum leaders, teachers, parents, and students. The qualitative approach includes interviewing principals, curriculum leaders, teachers, parents, students, councils, and other stakeholders. Four schools were invited to participate in the case studies. The aim of the case studies was to conduct an extensive investigation of the support measures and stakes involved, and to review the successes and shortcomings of the Tryout Study implemented in the relevant schools, in order to facilitate the implementation of future TSA arrangements.

³ The simplified version of school reports only provided the results for individual schools without overall statistics. The integrated version of school reports was a strengthened report on BCs by item groups and highlighted exemplary student performance in various BCs. The information analysis report explained the interrelationships between the fundamental learning purpose, BCs and question purpose of each item, and analyses of the options for multiple-choice questions.

⁴ Press Release of the HKSAR Government, “EDB accepts Committee’s recommendations for arrangement for Primary 3 TSA in 2018 and beyond,” 16th March 2018, <http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201803/16/P2018031600363.htm?fontSize=1>.