

# EXPERIENCE OF GAMBIA WITH AMPL IMPLEMENTATION

Tenth meeting of the Global Alliance to Monitor Learning (GAML)

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## 1. Overview

The Gambia, a small West African country, has a basic education system that includes primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education. Like many developing countries, The Gambia faces challenges in its education system, including issues related to access, quality, infrastructure, and teacher training. However, efforts are being made to address these challenges through government initiatives and support from international organizations.

In the late 1990s, The Gambia's education system underwent a significant transformation by shifting its focus from prioritizing access to a renewed emphasis on quality and learning outcomes. This strategic shift prompted the development of new assessments aimed at better supporting and monitoring learning within the country.

## 2. Learning assessment data and its significance in assessing educational effectiveness

To respond to the changing educational environment, two pivotal assessments were introduced, signifying a significant stride forward. The Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), launched in 2007, was designed to assess and improve early-grade reading skills. Concurrently, the National Assessment Test (NAT) was implemented in 2008, serving as a comprehensive tool for monitoring learning outcomes at the national level.

In a subsequent development in 2013, the Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA) was introduced, specifically targeting early-grade mathematics skills. This addition further underscored the commitment to a holistic evaluation of foundational skills, solidifying the efforts to enhance both literacy and numeracy among students in The Gambia.

The Gambia administers three significant large-scale assessments: the National Assessment Test (NAT), the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), and the Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA). These assessments played a crucial role in bridging the gap between educational priorities and outcomes, enabling the education sector to more effectively track and address the quality of learning. The introduction of EGRA and NAT represented a significant advancement in the Gambian education system, reflecting a commitment to ensuring that educational initiatives were not only accessible but also conducive to meaningful and measurable learning outcomes.

## 3. Importance of international comparison

Recognizing the pivotal role of assessments in tracking students' progress and adhering to the assessment triangle, it is crucial to highlight that meaningful international comparisons serves not only to bolster student achievement but also to cultivate a professional and high-quality educator workforce. Furthermore, active participation in and evaluation of the outcomes from comparative international assessments can prove instrumental in the establishment of effective accountability mechanisms.

The Assessment of Minimum Proficiency Level (AMPL) studies represent an initiative by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) aimed at evaluating student learning and contextual data. The overarching goal of this project is to assess and analyze the proficiency of learners at the conclusion of the lower and upper primary level. The assessment is designed to align with the Global Proficiency Framework (GPF) Level 2, providing a robust measure of student performance. This approach facilitates the collection of comprehensive data on minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics. The results will serve as baseline measures, aiding in the establishment of targets and enabling the comparison of learning gains and losses over time. Moreover, this assessment aims to support reporting on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.1.1 and contribute to the ongoing tracking of learning progress.

#### 4. Implementation of AMPL in The Gambia

The implementation of AMPL studies receives financial support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) serves as the technical partner, contracted by UIS, responsible for designing and executing the international technical aspects of the project. In 2023, The Gambia actively participated in the various initiatives associated with the AMPL studies. The Directorate of Performance, Management, and Evaluation (PMED), operating under the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, assumes responsibility for all AMPL activities.

The Gambia participated in the AMPLa study to enable reporting on how Grade 3 learners are performing against the set minimum proficiency levels at the end of lower primary and suggest policy interventions based on the learning outcomes posted. PMED shall be the AMPLa National Centre in The Gambia. This project was implemented in three phases:

- PHASE 1: Study initiation
- PHASE 2: Test Administration Preparation
- PHASE 3: Test administration and data submission

#### 5. Challenges

This comprehensive study aims to collect student learning and contextual data by administering paper test booklets and questionnaires to students upon completion of lower primary school. The AMPLa study focuses specifically on assessing proficiency in two critical domains: Reading (which includes an Aural Comprehension test) and Mathematics.

Several challenges were encountered during the study, including:

- Internet Connectivity Issues in The Gambia: The lack of reliable internet connectivity in The Gambia has posed challenges and caused delays in executing tasks linked to ACER MAPLE.
- Late Study Start in The Gambia: The study commenced late in The Gambia, placing considerable pressure on the National Coordinator (NC) to meet deadlines.
- Adaptation of the Test Booklet Terminology: There was a need to adapt certain names and terms in the test booklets to align with Gambian terminology, facilitating better understanding for the students.

- Aural Comprehension Challenge: Aural comprehension, not traditionally taught to Gambian students at lower primary levels, presented a significant challenge for many students during the assessment.
- Cultural Sensitivity: Gambians are accustomed to discussing their professions, educational qualifications, ages, and other social affairs openly with their children. This cultural norm posed a significant challenge during the administration of the student questionnaire.

These challenges highlight the importance of addressing contextual factors and adapting assessment materials to local conditions to ensure meaningful and accurate results.

## 6. Way Forward

**Capacity Building for Staff of the National Center:** The organizing bodies (ACER & UIS) should prioritize building the capacity of select NC members to enhance their effectiveness in supporting project implementation.

**Translation of the Student Questionnaire:** Translate the student questionnaire into the national language of the participating country to facilitate a better understanding of the questions by students.

**Parental Involvement in Questionnaire Completion:** Consider allowing students to take the questionnaire home for parents' assistance in providing appropriate responses. Alternatively, administer the questionnaire to students on a one-on-one basis with Test Administrators.

**International Experience-Sharing Conference:** Organize a conference inviting all participating countries to share their experiences in the implementation of the project.

**Offline Data Entry Platform:** ACER should consider developing an offline mode for the data entry platform to address challenges related to internet connectivity requirement during the data entry process.

**Shift Capacity Building to the Initialization Period:** Organize capacity-building sessions during the project initiation phase to ensure NC members are well-prepared to actively participate at all levels of the assessment processes.

**Support for Computer Labs:** Provide support to participating countries in establishing computer labs to facilitate project-related tasks.

The Gambia continues to solicit collaborative efforts with all partners in developing and implementing initiatives that seeks to inform the state of learning outcomes at various levels of the education system. The AMPL as a process of generating country level data for reporting to SDG 4.1.1 is as well, an opportunity for the country to determine the internal efficiency of its education system and make appropriate necessary remedies on time for improved performance. The Gambia therefore fully prepared to joins all participating countries in pursuance of the SDG 4 agenda.