

TOOL 7 Assessment of learning outcomes

Life skills education is difficult to assess

Assessing the impact of life skills education is difficult, to say the least. Very often, even when education programmes aim at teaching skills, it is still knowledge that is assessed at the end.

Achieving life skills objectives takes time. One single lesson is not likely to be sufficient. Furthermore, learning outcomes are most of the time affected by other non-curricular activities and influences (such as family and community).

However, *not* assessing the learning outcomes of HIV & AIDS and SRH education can lead to a reduction in the time allocated to the subject or in some instances, the subject not taught at all. In addition, relevant assessment, in particular formative assessment, can have a strong positive impact on the teaching and learning process.

Tool 7 focuses on appropriate assessment methods to measure learners' progress in HIV & AIDS and SRH life skills based education.

Assessment, pedagogy and curriculum

Assessment of learning can be done for a variety of reasons, including:

1. to give feedback to learners and teachers about learners' progress, in order for both teachers and learners to be able to improve the efficacy of their work;
2. to report on learner progress to parents, caregivers and school management;
3. for the awarding of national qualifications and accreditation of individuals and institutions;
4. to evaluate the education system; public accountability of institutions and teachers.

Irrespective of the actual purpose however, assessment has the potential to - positively or negatively – affect learning, pedagogy and the curriculum. For this reason, it is required to look into the relationship between assessment, pedagogy and curriculum before selecting the assessment methods to evaluate learning outcomes in the field of HIV & AIDS, sexual & reproductive health and life skills.

A range of assessment methods are described which can be used for the assessment of knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours formation in relation to HIV & AIDS and sexual & reproductive health education.

Formative assessment is generally defined as a means to provide feedback to the teacher and learners regarding present understanding and skill development of learners.

It is considered an integral part of classroom teaching, which provides necessary inputs for both the teacher and learner to modify and enhance the teaching-learning process.

Formative assessment can make use of both formal and informal assessment procedures.

Assessment is formative in its function 'only when action is taken which is intended to improve pupil learning'.

Summative assessment is used to evaluate learning achieved at different times during the school year(s) for the purposes of reporting to parents, other teachers, learners themselves, and other interested parties, including school boards or accreditors of national qualifications.

Continuous summative assessment is considered a 'weak' form of formative assessment.

Source: Ministry of Education, New Zealand (2005),

The UNICEF publication *Assessment strategies for skills-based Health Education with focus on HIV Prevention and related issues* (Fountain & Gillespie. 2003) was used as one of the main reference documents for this section of tool 7.

Assessment methods and tools

Skills-based education programmes generally focus on the development of knowledge, attitudes, values and skills which – jointly – are expected to positively influence a person's ability to adopt safer behaviours. The question we will look into here is how an educator can measure a learner's progress in these different learning objectives.

When selecting a tool to measure learners' progress toward a specific objective in life skills-based education, it is useful to distinguish between the kind of learning one wishes to assess, i.e. skills, attitudes or knowledge, which can be further broken up into the *ability to recall facts* or *application of knowledge* to resolve complex problems.

There are a wide range of assessment tools one can make use of. The first table is designed to provide the user guidelines on how to select the most appropriate tools with which to assess progress toward a particular learning goal, i.e. knowledge, skills, attitude and/or behaviour. It can assist the user in the choice of an appropriate assessment tool; depending on what one wishes to assess – one can select one or more tools with which to assess progress toward or attainment of the learning objective. For instance, the attainment of certain skills, are best assessed through role-play or observation of learner behaviour – for which one can use a checklist to systematize observation, and stimulate activities.

Please note that these assessment methods can be used with learners both before and after a skills-based health education lesson or unit is implemented in order to gain a deeper understanding of changes brought about by the lesson/unit.

The Tool 7 contains two tables providing background and technical information and one worksheet to help users developing an assessment framework.

Table 7.1. Selecting tools for assessing knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviour objectives

Type of assessment tool	Knowledge	Attitudes	Skills	Behaviours
Closed-ended questions	X	X	X	X
Open-ended questions	X	X	X	
Analysis: e.g. article/video / case study	X	X	X	
Timelines	X			
Picture sorting	X	X		
Role play / simulation	X	X	X	
Writing / performance skits or plays/poetry	X	X	X	
Observations / anecdotal records of occurrences	X	X	X	X
Checklists	X		X	
Interviews	X	X	X	
Stimulus activities	X	X	X	
Scales		X	X	
Unobtrusive techniques / indirect measures		X	X	X
Diaries and journals		X		X
“Intent to behave” statements		X		X
Learner projects	X	X	X	X

Source: adapted from Fountain, S. & Gillespie, A. 2003. *Assessment strategies for skills-based Health Education with focus on HIV Prevention and related issues*, UNICEF, p.27.

NB: Normal font (X) indicates that the tool can be useful in assessing the learning objective whilst bold font (**X**) indicates the tool is highly useful for that particular type of learning objective.

Developing an assessment framework

As we have seen above, there is a great variety of (self) assessment activities to measure progress on knowledge, values and skills objectives.

The objectives of the educational programme on HIV & AIDS and SRH determine the assessment questions, and those questions in turn, determine the criteria which give an indication whether and to what extent change has occurred. Using the assessment criteria as a basis, assessment tools can be selected and/or adapted to measure progress/achievement.

The second table provides an overview of possible objectives, the kinds of questions one can pose to assess progress toward the objective assessment criteria and possible assessment tools. It also allows us to address the linkage between different learning objectives, assessment criteria and the most appropriate assessment tools are clarified, in other words, the relevance or utility of various assessment tools for evaluating progress toward particular learning objectives. Following UNICEF, the category ‘behaviour’ is included into the list of assessment objectives.

A distinction is also made between the skill or ability and the actual behaviour; what a young person actually does when confronted with decisions about his or her own behaviour in a very concrete situation.

The table is designed to orient a user in a manner in which these different variables are and can be linked appropriately. ‘Appropriately’ meaning the kind of question that would be relevant to measuring the current level, or the improvement of knowledge on how HIV infection takes place or any other question one would want to ask in relation to whether learners’ have developed certain skills to protect themselves (for instance, the skills to resist peer pressure).

Table 7.2. Developing an assessment framework - Examples

Learning objective outcome	Assessment question	Criterion	Possible assessment tools
<p>Knowledge: Learners will learn how HIV is and is not transmitted.</p>	<p>Can learners correctly identify means by which HIV is and is not transmitted?</p>	<p>When presented with a list of ways that HIV is and is not transmitted, learners will place items on the list into their correct category.</p>	<p>Set of pictures to sort, showing ways HIV is and is not transmitted. List of descriptions of possible means of transmission; learners circle those that describe ways HIV is spread.</p>
<p>Attitude: Learners will demonstrate care and concern toward persons affected by HIV.</p>	<p>Do learners feel empathy and concern for people living with HIV and AIDS?</p>	<p>When presented with a description of a situation involving a person with HIV and AIDS, learners will express emotions that indicate caring.</p>	<p>Description of the daily life of a person living with HIV and AIDS; learners circle words, from a page of “feelings” Words that describe their reaction to the description.</p>
<p>Skill: Learners will be able to negotiate less risky alternatives to sexual intercourse.</p>	<p>If learners are pressured to have unsafe sex, can they assertively negotiate safer behaviour?</p>	<p>When faced with pressure to have unsafe sex, learners will suggest at least one safer alternative, will demonstrate confidence in proposing that alternative and will not give in to pressure.</p>	<p>Role-play scenario in which first learner pressures second learner to have sex, and third learner demonstrates the ability to negotiate. Written scenario involving pressure to have unsafe sex; learners write a sample dialog in response.</p>
<p>Behaviour: Learners use condoms each time they have sexual intercourse.</p>	<p>Do learners use condoms consistently if they are sexually active?</p>	<p>When asked to report on sexual behaviour, learners report using a condom each time they have sexual intercourse.</p>	<p>Self-report checklist on sexual behaviour, including questions on condom use in a given time period (for example, the past six months).</p>

Worksheet 7.1. Developing an assessment framework

This worksheet can be used by a teacher or teacher trainer in the development of each lesson or unit. It worksheet provides space for users to fill in themselves, as a way to elaborate guidelines for teachers on how to evaluate, or for teachers to prepare the assessment of their own learners, as a means to select appropriate assessment methods (**see also Tool 6, worksheet 6.1 of this manual**)

Learning objective/outcome	Assessment question	Criteria	Possible assessment tools
<i>Define the learning objective/ outcome</i> <i>Specify if you are assessing knowledge, attitudes, skills or behaviours (or a combination of the above)</i>	<i>Describe what learners should know, be able to do and/or what the desirable attitude is</i>	<i>Describe how you will know the learner has acquired a certain level of knowledge, skills or adopted a specific attitude or behaviour</i>	<i>What are possible tools with which to assess the kind of knowledge, skills attitudes and/or behaviours described in the preceding columns?</i>

When selecting an appropriate tool to measure learners' progress for a specific objective in life skills-based education, it can also be useful to distinguish between *norm-referenced* assessment and *criterion-referenced* assessment.

Using a criterion-referenced scale provides information on a learner's level of achievement. The example on the next page demonstrates how a 4-point criteria scale is used to illustrate how criterion-referenced testing might be operationalised for a specific range of learning objective(s). The example below is designed to measure progress on learners' ability to correctly and clearly present information in order to advocate effective prevention.

Norm-referenced assessment can be appropriate for assessing knowledge objectives and/or when the objective is to make comparisons between learners.

Criterion-referenced assessment is most appropriate for assessing more complex learning and performance of tasks.

Learning objectives:

- 1) knowledge of prevention methods
- 2) Communication skills

Assessment question:

How well do learners advocate for effective prevention of sexually transmitted infections?

Assessment tool:

Learners are asked to write and read a one-minute radio announcement that will encourage other young people to take precautions to prevent the transmission of sexually transmitted infections, and to read it as if it were broadcasted.

Assessment criteria:

Level 1: *Insufficient.* The learner is unable to produce the text for an announcement for preventing sexually transmitted infections or is not able to read an already existing text in a clear and convincing manner.

Level 2: *Needs improvement.* The learner is able to produce the text for an announcement, but suggests limited or inaccurate practical strategies for preventing sexually transmitted infections. His reading is not very convincing.

Level 3: *Satisfactory.* The learner writes an announcement that accurately gives two or more ways of preventing sexually transmitted infections and uses persuasion or other effective communication appropriate to the medium.

Level 4: *Very good.* The learner writes an announcement that gives two or more ways of preventing sexually transmitted infections that is accurate, appealing, persuasive, and demonstrates effective communication appropriate to the medium. It may also emphasise values or attitudes such as the importance of communication with a potential sexual partner, or sharing responsibility for health.

A sample x-point criteria scale

- 1. Formulate the assessment questions:
- 2. Select the assessment tool:
- 3. Formulate the possible levels of achievement and assessment criteria:

Level 1:
Level 2:
Level 3:
Level...

Note: Additional clarification of each of the criteria is required to illustrate the exact features of the knowledge, skills, behaviour and/or attitude that are expected and at what level.

Using different sources of information

It can be very useful to have information from different sources – the teacher, learners, third parties, as each group can provide different information on the changes that have taken place in a learner’s knowledge, skills and attitudes.

It is important to remember however, that no matter who carries out the assessment, it requires specific skills. In addition, it needs to be decided beforehand who will interpret the results or feedback and how they will do so, i.e. the criteria used (please see the box for a discussion on interpretation of assessment results).

Obtaining feedback from different actors on learners’ progress can be useful at different moments in the teaching-learning process and can support the pedagogical approach in different manners.

For example, self-appraisal or the joint decision on assessment tools and criteria by teachers and learners can be a particularly useful form of formative assessment.

These forms of assessment involve learners in a participatory way in the teaching-learning process and supports development of learners' ability to think critically about their own learning process. Involving learners in such a way is also consistent with the overall life skills based pedagogy as described in the section on pedagogy and teaching-learning methods.

RESOURCES TO GO FURTHER

1. “Assessment strategies for skills-based health education with a focus on HIV prevention and related issues”, 2003, UNICEF, Fountain & Gillespie. UNICEF

- Document available in: [English](#)

- Website: <http://www.unicef.org/lifeskills/AssessmentFinal2003.doc>

2. “Skills for Health: Skills based health education including life skills. An important component of a Child-friendly/Health-Promoting School”, chapter 6, 2003, WHO

- Document available in: [English](#)

- Website:

http://www.who.int/school_youth_health/media/en/sch_skills4health_03.pdf