

Smaller, Quicker, Cheaper:

Better learning indicators for the early grades*

All Children Reading by 2015: From Assessment to Action

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***Based on report prepared for the FTI and UNESCO-IIEP**

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Main points

- **The EFA learning context: A story about Aminata**
- **The problem of low reading skills – some data**
- **List of tests/assessments reviewed (in relation to EGRA and other SQC type tests)**
- **Types and choices among reading assessments**
- **Research-based recommendations from the report**
- **Conclusions and next steps**

Who is this about?

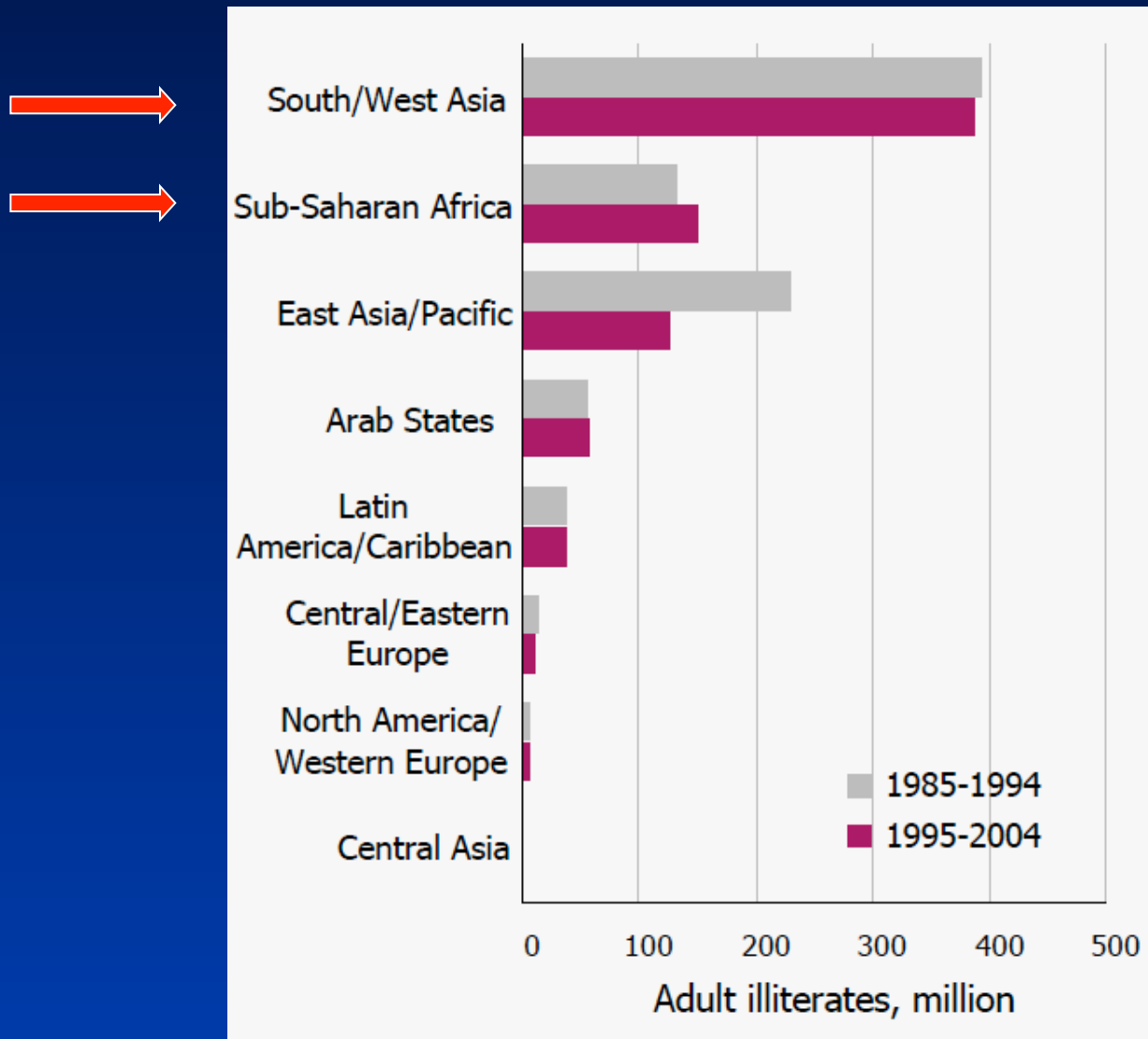
Aminata is 9 years old, and sits in row three. She has her pencil out, and begins to work in her carnet, carefully writing down each word written on the blackboard. While going to school is better than staying home, Aminata has a sense that she is not making very good use of her time. She can copy the text, but doesn't understand what it 'says' .

...

Aminata also wonders why her teacher seems only to call on those pupils to come to the front of the class and work on the blackboard, and not her. She's heard that there is a school after primary school, but only the 'first row' kids seem to get to enroll there. What is the point of studying and staying in school, she wonders?

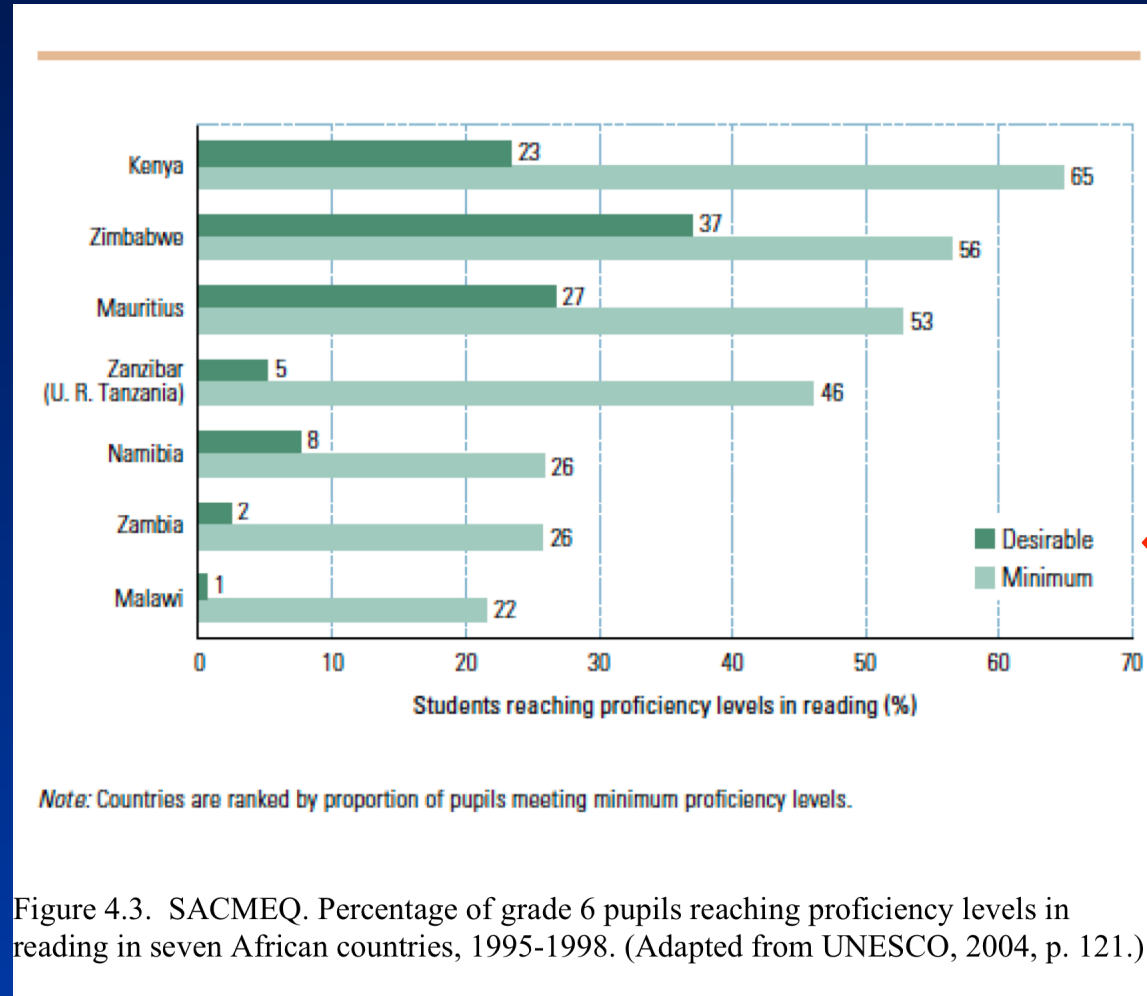


Regional adult literacy rates in FTI countries are low, and relatively unchanged over past 20 years



Unesco, 2008

Children's reading skills are also too low



SACMEQ. Percentage of grade 6 pupils reaching proficiency levels in reading in seven African countries, 1995-1998. (Adapted from UNESCO, 2004, p. 121.)

And, due to expanded basic education, some national reading scores have dropped

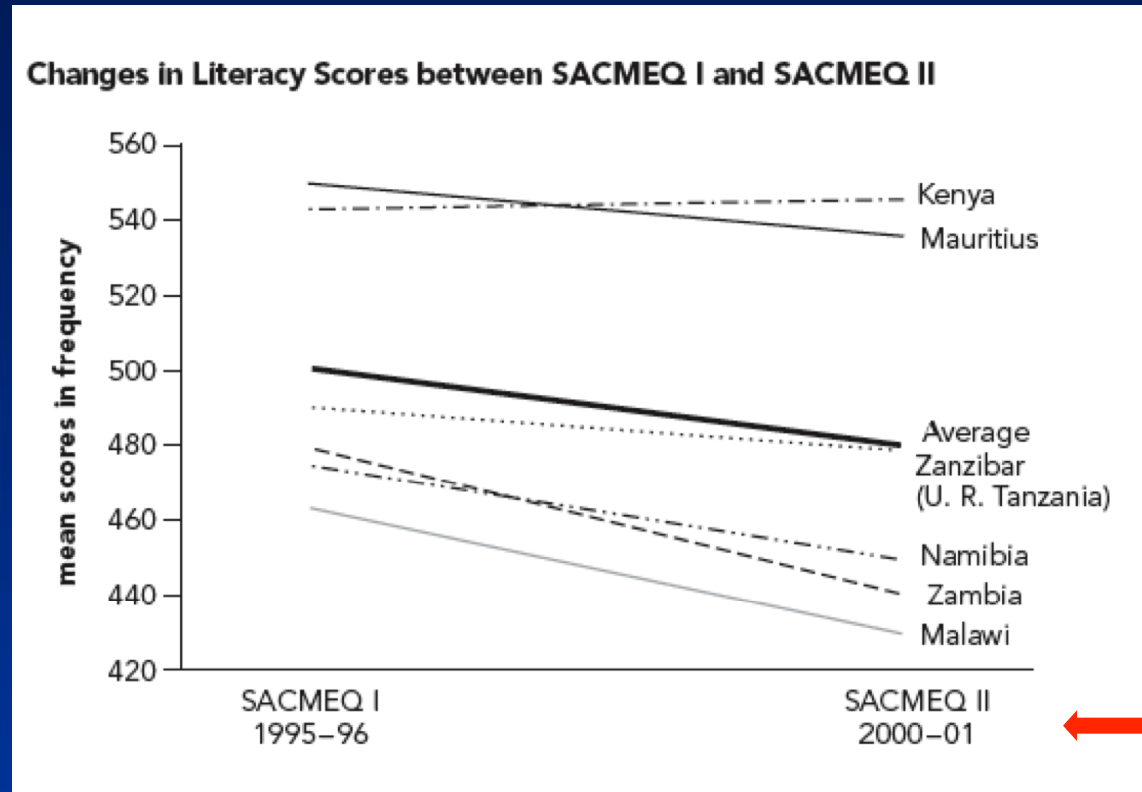


Figure 4.7. Changes in literacy scores between SACMEQ I and SACMEQ II. (Adapted from Greaney-Kellaghan 2008, p. 134.)

Changes in literacy scores between SACMEQ I and SACMEQ II.

Multilingualism (and minority languages) also lead to low literacy

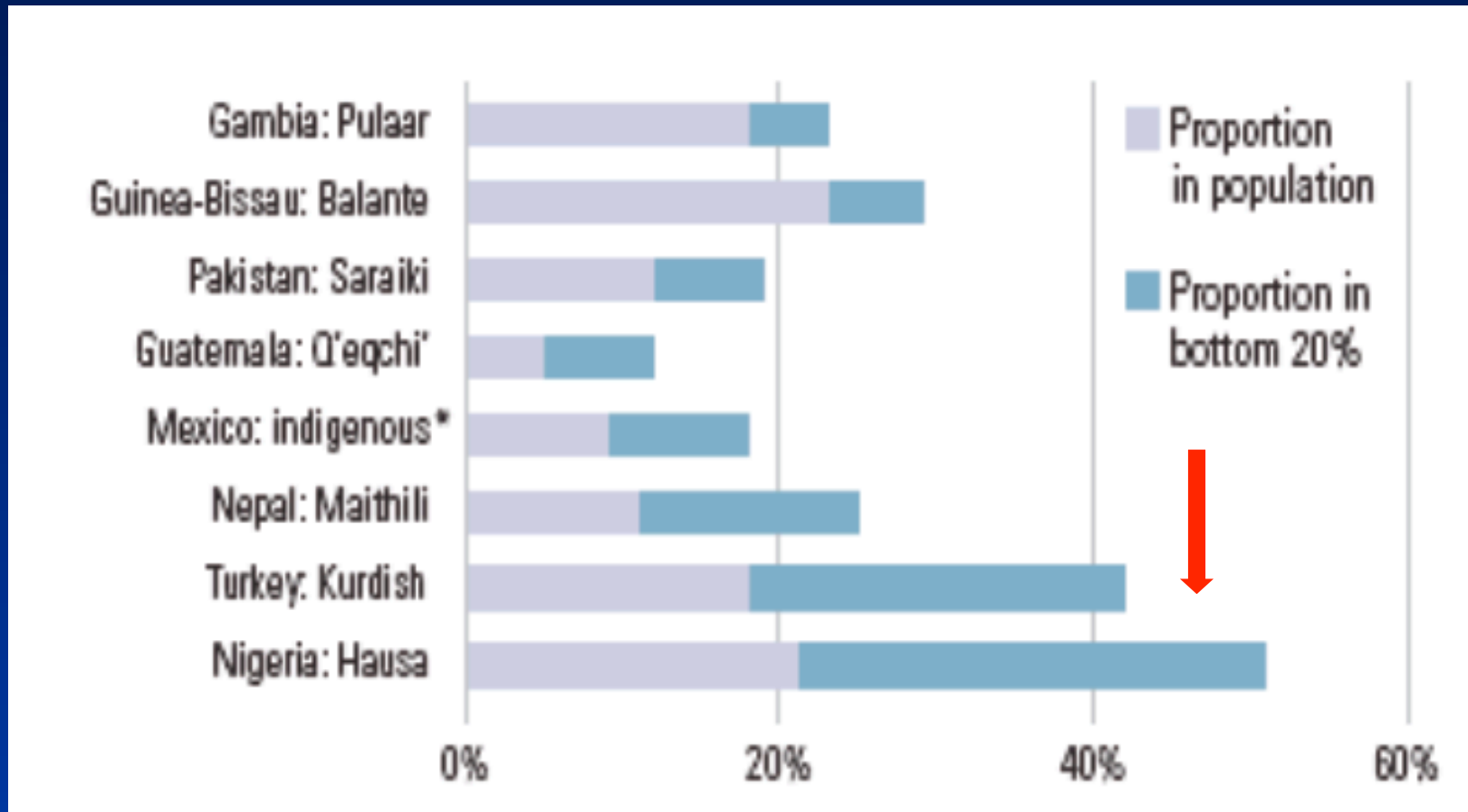
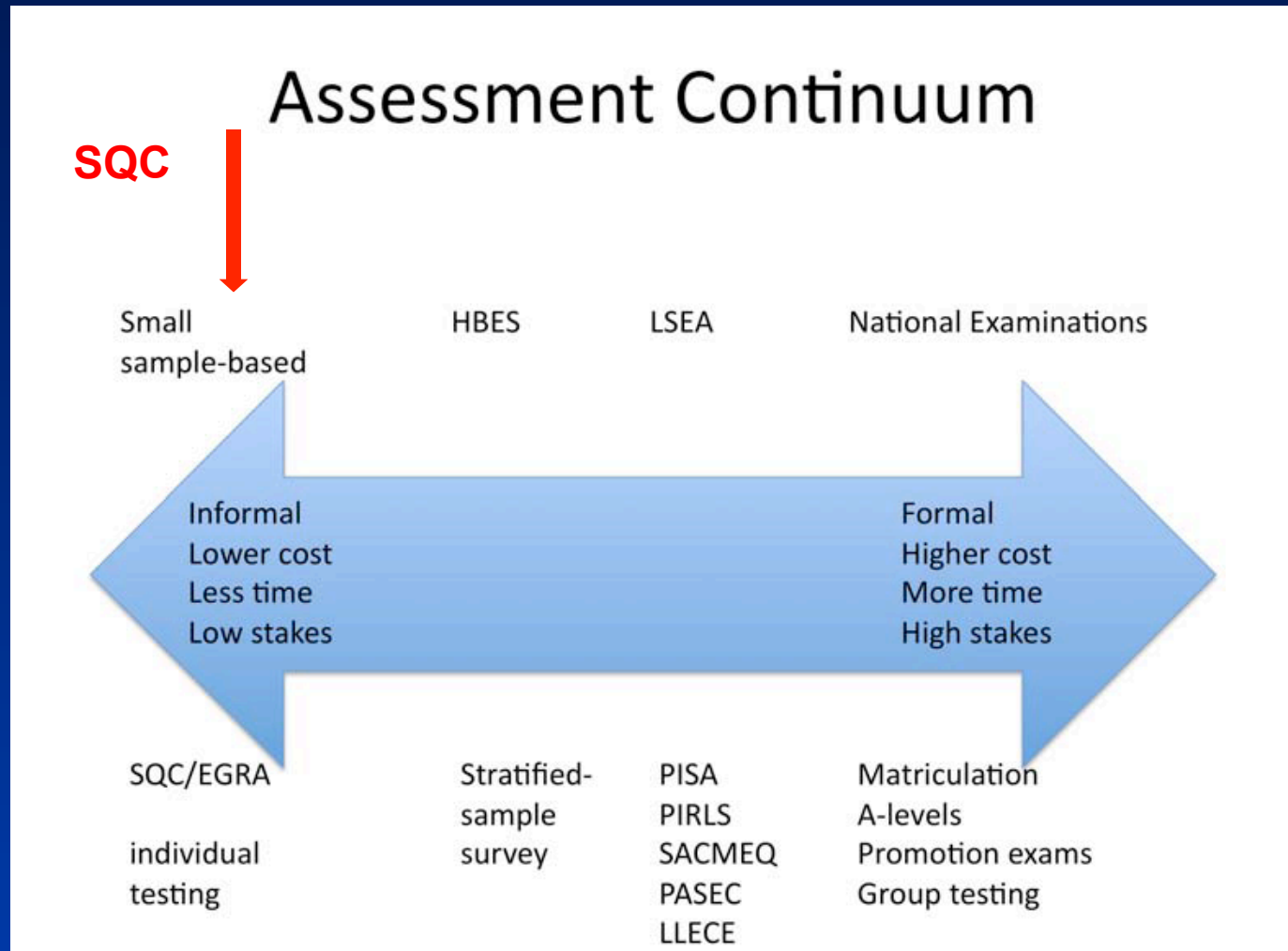


Figure 4.8. Percent of selected language groups in the bottom 20% of the education distribution, selected countries. (Adapted from UNESCO, 2010, p. 152).

The SQC report: A review of reading assessments, with implications for policy, practice and next research steps

- **LSEAs** (International and Regional), where key parameters include comparability and scale:
 - PIRLS - Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
 - PISA - Program for International Student Assessment
 - SACMEQ – Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
 - PASEC – Programme d’Analyse des Systèmes Educatifs des Pays de la CONFEMEN
 - LLECE - Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education
 - LAMP - Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Program
- **Hybrids/SQC**, where key parameters include local context and speed of analysis
 - LAP – SQC - Literacy Assessment Project – Smaller-Quicker-Cheaper
 - EGRA - Early Grade Reading Assessment

There are many learning assessments: How to choose amongst them?



Several research-based recommendations

1. ***There is no ‘best’ reading test.*** A reading test is only useful to the degree to which it responds to particular policy needs. Policy makers need to specify their goals before opting for one approach or another.
2. ***When in doubt, go with smaller assessments. Go bigger later.*** SQC (or “hybrid”) assessments have a clear, smaller-size advantage that can be better tailored to the human capacity realities of low-income societies.
3. ***Quicker results are better results.*** LSEAs are undertaken every 3 or 5 or even 10 years. By contrast, hybrid assessments have more focused aims and sample sizes as well as greater frequency. ‘Real time’ analysis becomes possible with substantial payoff.
4. ***In assessments, you don’t always get what you pay for.*** There are trade-offs in costing processes. Hybrid assessments can result in a substantially cheaper way of doing the business of assessment.
5. ***Learning assessments should begin as early as possible (within limits).*** There are many points at which one can usefully assess children’s skills, but the payoff is greatest when there is a practical way to measure at the beginning of the long trajectory of learning.

Recommendations (continued)

6. **Assessment should be designed to improve instruction.** SQC reading assessments can be conducted in time to make changes at the classroom (or individual) level before that child has left the school system.
7. **Cross-national comparability is of limited value in achieving quality EFA.** International LSEAs are aimed at cross-national comparability while SQC assessments are not. Yet, SQC tests offer other kinds of comparability that LSEAs do not. Which types of comparability are most important depends on the policy goals desired .
8. **Accountability for learning impact needs to be spread widely.** Education specialists, policy makers,, ministers of education, community leaders, teachers and parents should all be held to account for what and how children learn. SQC assessments can help in the accountability and local ownership of results.
9. **SQC assessments can significantly improve policy impact.** SQC assessments can better track learning over time, can better adapt to local linguistic contexts, and can be better designed to understand children who are at the floor of the learning scales.

Conclusions and next steps

1. Hybrid assessments offer **many advantages** over LSEAs, especially for **near-term** and **stakeholder-diverse** decision-making. Remember **Aminata's** story.
2. **Next steps** will require **further research** including:
 - Improved reading tests for **comprehension level**
 - **Longitudinal** studies
 - Impact of **assessment on instruction**
 - Further consideration of **L1 and L2** reading acquisition
 - **Psychometrics** of SQC assessments
3. Educational change requires **feedback, transparency, and accountability** - SQC measures can provide **better** learning indicators.