

Student Profile Assessment

For insightful student judgment
& informed educational policy

SPA

Educational
Research
Center

A Sayegh Company

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Educational Research Center (ERC) is currently working on the Student Profile Assessment (SPA) project, which will be officially launched in April 2011. SPA is an international, and pan-Arab, assessment program that yields common, reliable indicators of grade 11 students' proficiency in core disciplines. Students can rely on SPA to prepare themselves for higher education and prospective careers. Policymakers of all sorts, especially in education, can rely upon it to make informed and constructive judgments and decisions about education, and the job market, in their countries. As outlined below, SPA will be unique among all existing international education indicators. Above all, SPA will be the first program of its kind based in the Arab World, run by Arab and international experts, for the benefit of the entire world, but especially of Arab students and policymakers.

Key Features

SPA is an international, Arab based and run, program for ascertaining secondary school students' mastery of *cross-disciplinary habits of mind* that are critical for development of the big picture within and across disciplines, and success in modern day life. Target habits of mind include *generic thought processes and dispositions*

(values and attitudes) that are common to core disciplines (science, mathematics, social studies, and languages), and that may be ascertained in the context of particular *conceptions*

that cut across the disciplines (like systems, patterns, and constancy and change). As such, these habits of mind define a

common four-dimensional profile

for all core disciplines (Principled, Paradigmatic, Productive and Proactive).

SPA will consist of a three-hour student test to be administered, every year in April, to grade 11 students, as well as of a battery of surveys to gather particular data about participating students, teachers, schools and educational systems. SPA's key features:

1. SPA will be internationally recognized as a viable program. All necessary efforts will be deployed to ensure the viability of the program in efficiently providing unique, valid and reliable indicators for deployment by participating students and all concerned stakeholders.
2. SPA is a comprehensive assessment program. It targets the core disciplines mentioned above, all at the same level, and accounts simultaneously for variables that could affect student development of the target profile.
3. The assessed student profile is global. SPA framework fits with any educational philosophy and system, and the target habits of mind are common, and important, to all curricula around the globe.
4. The assessed profile is acultural. Students' development of the profile should not be significantly affected by cultural differences between societies.
5. The assessed profile is critical. Development of the profile is crucial for secondary school graduates to succeed both in higher education and in their prospective careers. In this respect, the profile defines by excellence the kind of literacy which all concerned organizations have been calling for lately, for success in modern day life.
6. SPA provides readily deployable indicators. Psychometric analysis of student outcomes and all gathered data will yield indicators that can be easily interpreted as well as deployed by students and all concerned and interested stakeholders.
7. SPA is user-friendly. It will be constructed in ways to make it easy and stimulating for students and their schools to participate in the program.
8. SPA is efficient. A management system will be built to make it easy and feasible to all those concerned to participate in, and benefit of, the program.

How is SPA different from existing international assessment programs?

A number of international assessment programs in specific educational fields are available throughout the world. Among the most widespread of these programs are TIMSS, PISA and

PIRLS. These programs find their roots in science and engineering indicators' programs originally instituted in the 1960s by, and exclusively for, industrialized countries, especially the then G7, and now G8, countries. Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) is organized by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). It was first administered in 1995, and every four years subsequently. TIMSS provides data on the achievement of grades 4 and 8 students in specific areas of mathematics and science. Students' achievement is correlated with some of their general dispositions and with specific teacher and school data.

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is administered by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). It was first administered in 2000, and every three years subsequently. PISA ascertains 15-year-olds' capabilities in reading literacy, mathematics literacy, and science literacy, with a focus on one of the three literacy fields every run. It also includes measures of general or cross-curricular competencies such as learning strategies.

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) is organized by IEA as an international comparative study of the reading literacy of fourth-grade students. It was first administered in 2001, then in 2006, and every five years subsequently. PIRLS ascertains student proficiency and dispositions on a combined reading literacy scale, and on a literary subscale and an informational subscale. The literary subscale pertains to reading for literary experience, and the informational subscale to acquiring and using information.

The ERC's Student Profile Assessment (SPA) program is distinguished from these and similar assessment programs in many respects. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. SPA is meant to benefit students, and not just policymakers, by providing them with data which they can rely on to reflect upon their own habits of mind, and make informed decisions about their future.
2. SPA will be the only Arab based and run program of its kind.
3. SPA is meant to be an international program, but it will especially serve the needs of the Arab World. Primary data collection and analysis will be carried out in, and for, the Arab World. Data from other countries will be collected primarily for comparison purposes.
4. SPA is the only comprehensive program. Other programs target one (e.g., PIRLS) or two specific fields (TIMSS). PISA targets three fields, but with a focus on one specific field every run. SPA is the only program that will target all core fields.
5. SPA ascertains habits of mind that cut across all core disciplines, whereas all other programs target specific conceptions and processes in particular fields, without necessarily linking common aspects amongst various fields.
6. SPA focuses on the big picture, while targeting common thought processes and dispositions, as integral parts of a student profile, in the context of common conceptions. Other programs focus more on specific conceptions than on processes in particular fields, and target dispositions as outside, independent variables that could affect student performance on specific conceptual and procedural tasks.
7. SPA is the only program that targets grade 11 students who are close to secondary school

graduation. PIRLS has so far focused on Grade 4, TIMSS primarily on Grades 4 and 8, and PISA on 15-year students who are normally enrolled in grades 9 or 10.

8. SPA will be offered annually. In contrast, PIRLS is offered once every five years, TIMSS, once every four years, and PISA, once every 3 years.

9. SPA will first be offered both in paper-and-pencil and electronic formats. At some point, and once appropriate logistics are feasibly put in place, it will be administered online only, and, eventually, on demand.