

NAFSA: Association of International Educators
Assessment and Evaluation Terms for International Educators
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This resource is designed to provide international educators with a shared language and key terminology for assessment, research and evaluation. This brief overview of terms is intended to serve as a point of reference to advance thought and conversation in the field rather than as a definitive or comprehensive source.

Assessment, evaluation, and research are increasingly important to international educators and administrators. At the same time, the terms that are used in these three endeavors are complex, and frequently used interchangeably despite their distinct meanings. We developed this guide in order to propose a shared language related to assessment, evaluation, and research for international education professionals. Many international educators approach assessment and evaluation from a practitioner, rather than a theoretical, perspective. We have selected terms and definitions that reflect this applied view.

As noted above, the terms assessment, evaluation, and research are all closely related and thus are sometimes used interchangeably. To further complicate matters, these activities are often used together in order to gain a multifaceted understanding of a program, service, or question. Thus, assessment (of student learning) may be used as part of a (program) evaluation, and evaluation and assessment can be guided by research or used to frame a research question.

Assessment, Evaluation, and Research

Assessment: Systematic collection, analysis, presentation, and use of data related to student learning and development.

Evaluation: Systematic collection, analysis, presentation and use of data to determine if resource expenditures effectively achieved the desired program quality. An example of evaluation in higher education is the accreditation review process.

Research: Systematic collection, analysis, presentation, and use of data to advance thought about a topic.

	Assessment	Evaluation	Research
Purpose	Participant progress or development related to learning objectives	Program Assessment; informing decisions about a program	Knowledge creation; development of theory
Audience	Administrators Faculty Practitioners Students	Accrediting bodies Administrators Funders Practitioners	Funders Practitioners Researchers Scholars
Type of data collected	Assignments Observation notes Scores/grades Test responses	Benchmarks Indicators Ratings Reviews	Measurements Texts Variables
Use of results	Improvement of learning environment, curriculum, and pedagogy. Results not generalizable	Program improvement Demonstrating worth or value Results not generalizable	To challenge or change thought or practice related to the research topic. Results may or may not be generalizable to a broader population
Who conducts	Teachers, professors, program directors	Directors, managers, consultants	Scholars, researchers, consultants
What is being measured	Outcomes Learning	Effectiveness Quality Satisfaction	Correlations Effects Themes Trends
Types	Formative and summative at event, course, or program level Grading	Budget analysis Program evaluation	Basic Experimental

What do we Assess or Evaluate?

Learning Outcomes (LOs) or Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs): How participants will be different after participation: the learning, growth & performance that an individual will reliably demonstrate upon completion of an intervention or experience (e.g. class, program, workshop, training, etc.).

Satisfaction: reports of students' approval ratings, response to certain elements of a program/service and how they utilized particular aspects of such services/programs.

Inputs: Resources allocated to the program or service that include time, money, technology, space, and expertise.

Activities: The distinct features or components that are built into a program or service in order to achieve the learning objective such as homestays, service learning, buddy programs, language courses, training, online discussions, and other aspects.

Outputs: Countable results of activities such as the number of hours in class or students on a program.

Goals: Broad general statement(s) about the direction, purpose or intent of an activity, a class, or a program that guide the objectives or inform the outcomes.

Objectives: Specific and measurable statements that define and describe the tasks to be accomplished to achieve the goal.

Outcomes: Participant change or development, such as higher-level thinking skills that can be observed as a behavior, skills, or useable knowledge/ displayed or observed against criteria.

Results: The tangible changes that have been achieved through the effort and are the sum of the progress toward the objectives or outcomes.

Impacts: Changes or effects that achieving the results have had on other individuals, groups, or systems. For example, a service learning program may result in student learning, benefits to the local community, and changes in practice for a partner organization.

How do we assess or evaluate?

Directly: Artifacts generated by participants as part of the learning process through which it is possible to measure growth. These include tests, papers, videos, portfolios, and other demonstrations of student learning.

Indirectly: Participant reflection on their own learning or their perceptions of the knowledge and skill that they have acquired. These may include surveys, reflections, evaluations, interviews, or focus groups.

Discrete: Assessment of one particular aspect of learning.

Global: Assessment of more complex skills that can be applied in multiple contexts.

When do we assess or evaluate?

Formative Assessment or Evaluation: Happens continuously throughout a program; purpose is ongoing improvement and to provide feedback to students or other stakeholders.

Summative Assessment or Evaluation: Happens at the end of a program; purpose is to assess overall student learning during the program or to evaluate the final value of the program.

Whom do we assess, evaluate, or study?

In the context of international education, we often assess student or participant learning or development. When evaluating the subject of study is more frequently the activity, class, or program. Researchers may focus on students, practitioners, programs, or others who may not be the central focus of the effort under examination such as host communities.

Assessment, evaluation, and research methodology

Methodology: The approach, or collection of methods, for data collection and analysis that are used for any given research, evaluation, or assessment project. The methods must be guided by the purpose or question that guides the assessment, evaluation, or research project and informed by mission and values.

Quantitative: Having to do with concrete measurement, numbers, scales, correlations, and statistics. Can be represented visually.

Qualitative: Concerned with finding or constructing meaning in texts, recordings, images, and other non-numeric data sets.

Mixed Methods: Uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to research, evaluate, or assess.

Triangulation: Using multiple data sources collected through different methods, not necessarily quantitative and qualitative, in order to gain a multifaceted perspective and strengthen validity or reliability of data.

	Quantitative	Qualitative
Type of data	Numbers	Text (written words, sound recordings, images, moving images, observation notes)
Collection methods	Instrument Inventory Scale Survey	Content analysis Focus groups Interviews Open-ended items in surveys or tests
Analysis	Statistical	Coding Identifying themes
Reporting	Charts, tables, graphs, narrative explaining analysis	Narrative using quotations
Ensuring rigor	Reliability Validity	Dependability Trustworthiness
Generalizability	Can be generalizable to other contexts if effective sampling method is used	Little or none
Sample	Requires larger sample sizes to show trends and for generalizability	Large sample size not required

Population: The entire group of individuals from which a sample is drawn. Examples: all international students studying in the United States; all undergraduate students in Germany.

Sample: The usually smaller number of individuals participating in a given research project, chosen randomly or purposefully according to a rationale given in the methodology.

Measurement: Part of the research process that involves collecting and analyzing data in order to be able to describe degree to which changes in variables such as knowledge, skills, or attitudes have been attained.

Instrument: A tool in the form of a survey or test, used in quantitative research. Usually validated in some way before it is used in assessment, evaluation, or research.

Portfolios: Collections of many types of student work that can be considered together as part of assessing student learning.

Rubrics: Tables that allow for quantification of qualitative data or of multiple forms of data by describing examples of direct evidence that demonstrate the amount of learning or degree of competency in an area.

Stakeholders: All of the people or roles who are involved in the process or who will use the results to inform practice or scholarship.

Validity: The extent to which a given research method or instrument measures what it is designed or intended to measure.

Reliability: The extent to which a given research method or instrument gives consistent results.

References on Assessment, Evaluation, and Research in International Education

This list includes references that are guides to the research process that provide frameworks and methodologies for assessment, evaluation and research in international education.

Bolen, M. C. (2007). A guide to outcomes assessment in education abroad. Forum on Education Abroad.

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Other Glossaries:

These glossaries clarify terms used in education abroad and intercultural education and may be of use to researchers and practitioners conducting assessment and evaluation.

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