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CSF CIES 2026 Paper

Leveraging OpenEMIS for Efficient, Fair, Secure, and Accessible
Education Assessments: Pathways to Integrated National Systems



28 March 2026

Leveraging OpenEMIS for Efficient, Fair, Secure, and Accessible Education Assessments: Pathways to Integrated National Systems

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Conference Sub-theme

Technology Integration

Abstract

Education systems worldwide are under increasing pressure to deliver assessments, which measure the educational achievement and progress, while remaining efficient, equitable and secure, and ensuring alignment with national education goals. As countries advance their digital infrastructure, the integration of assessment systems within broader Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) becomes not only desirable but essential. Traditionally, EMIS and examination systems are separate due to concerns over data, privacy and security especially for high stakes, national examinations. In most cases, these EMIS and examination systems are not integrated. This often creates a situation where data is duplicated and inconsistent and where schools need to use multiple systems.

This paper explores how OpenEMIS¹—an open-source suite of tools designed to support education planning and management—can be leveraged to create, manage and administer integrated national assessments that address these imperatives.

Drawing on experiences from multiple country contexts, the paper presents concrete examples of how OpenEMIS has been deployed to support diverse assessment needs. Through modular design and interoperability features, OpenEMIS enables education stakeholders to collect, analyze, and act on assessment data in real time, linking student performance to school profiles, teacher data, and policy planning frameworks.

The paper proposes clear pathways for Ministries of Education and education partners to adopt and adapt OpenEMIS for assessment purposes, including implementation strategies, system architecture considerations, data security protocols, and approaches to institution strengthening. It also outlines options to integrate examination systems with EMIS, increasing efficiencies and facilitating opportunities for deeper insights into student learning and achievement.

Particular attention will be given to the generalized and highly configurable OpenEMIS software, ensuring Ministries require little to low software coding. Moreover, the paper discusses how OpenEMIS can serve as a vehicle for increasing transparency and stakeholder trust in national assessment processes through open data standards and clear pathways for dissemination of education data.

¹ OpenEMIS. (n.d.). OpenEMIS: Education management information system. <https://www.openemis.org/>

Ultimately, this paper argues that leveraging open-source technology like OpenEMIS can democratize access to high-quality assessment systems, reduce dependency on proprietary platforms, and empower governments to build resilient, data-driven education systems.

Keywords

OpenEMIS, Education Assessment, Education Management Information Systems (EMIS), Open Source Technology, EdTech, Fair and Inclusive Assessments, Digital Assessment Integration, Data-Driven Education, National Education Systems, Assessment Accessibility, Education Data Security, Formative and Summative Assessment, Real-Time Data Analytics

Full Text

Introduction

The paper proposes clear pathways for Ministries of Education and education partners to adopt and adapt OpenEMIS for education management and assessment purposes. It posits OpenEMIS, an open-source suite, as a viable solution, presenting implementation strategies, system architecture considerations, data security protocols, and capacity-building approaches for its adoption and adaptation in assessment. Furthermore, the paper explores options for integrating examination systems with EMIS to enhance efficiency and provide deeper insights into student learning and achievement.

Benefits of Open Source EdTech Solutions

Open-source education technology, including EMIS solutions, offers numerous advantages, including cost-effectiveness, customizability, and community-driven development. By eliminating licensing fees, education authorities (national, regional, and institutional-level) can allocate resources to other critical areas, such as teacher training or infrastructure improvements. Moreover, open-source platforms allow for extensive customization, enabling adaptation to specific pedagogical approaches and local educational contexts. The transparent nature of open-source code fosters community collaboration, facilitating bug fixes, feature enhancements, and the development of innovative tools that respond to the evolving needs of educators and learners. This collaborative model ensures continuous improvement and robustness, creating a more resilient and adaptable technological ecosystem.

OpenEMIS offers significant advantages for education authorities aiming to enhance their Education Management Information Systems (EMIS). The implementation of a novel EMIS requires substantial investment in resources, skilled personnel, and time. OpenEMIS mitigates these demands by providing an established platform, eliminating the need for de novo system development. Consequently, organizations can avoid protracted software development cycles and mitigate the significant financial burdens associated with designing, testing, and maintaining new proprietary systems.

OpenEMIS incorporates essential functionalities, including student enrollment management, teacher administration, school infrastructure monitoring, and educational performance tracking, facilitating rapid deployment and immediate operational utilization. The platform comprises a suite of advanced modules designed to manage diverse facets of educational administration, including national examinations².

Furthermore, OpenEMIS supports integrated plugins such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), Learning Management Systems (LMS), and real-time data dashboards, thereby enhancing usability and operational efficiency. In contrast to proprietary systems that necessitate extensive customization periods, OpenEMIS provides pre-built configurations suitable for various educational contexts. Its modular architecture allows for selective deployment and its use of flexible Application Programming Interface (API) enables the integration of external tools and local enhancements. Additionally, multi-tenancy support permits multiple institutions to utilize the platform independently within a single installation, thus significantly reducing implementation time and ensuring rapid adaptation to specific institutional needs.

Educational systems require seamless integration with multiple external platforms, including government databases, Learning Management Systems (LMS) such as Moodle or Google Classroom, student assessment and exam platforms, and Identity Management Systems to ensure secure authentication and role-based access control. OpenEMIS, constructed upon open standards, facilitates data exchange and migration through RESTful APIs, interoperability with various data formats (XML, CSV, JSON), automated synchronization with diverse database systems, and support for blockchain and digital credentials, ensuring verifiable educational certifications. These features ensure that educational data is portable, transferable, and accessible across different platforms.

² See annex for examples of features to meet specific areas of education concern.

Security is critical for EMIS due to the sensitive nature of student and school data. OpenEMIS incorporates end-to-end encryption for data transmission, role-based access control (RBAC) to restrict access, compliance with GDPR and other data protection regulations, regular community security updates, audit logs and access monitoring for compliance and transparency, and two-factor authentication (2FA) for enhanced protection. These features strengthen the system's resilience against cyber threats, ensuring secure storage and controlled access. A comprehensive data security framework ensures the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of educational data, fostering trust and accountability.

Beyond its technical advantages, OpenEMIS offers substantial cost benefits, including cost-effectiveness by eliminating proprietary licenses, sustainability through community maintenance, the availability of training and support, scalability for future expansion, and compliance with international educational standards set by UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank. Consequently, choosing OpenEMIS instead of developing a new system from scratch is a strategic decision that fosters efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and long-term sustainability. Its comprehensive modules, rapid deployment capabilities, advanced security features, seamless integration, and robust business advantages position OpenEMIS as a leading platform for contemporary educational information management.

Examples of OpenEMIS Deployment

Specific deployments of OpenEMIS in Guyana, Jordan, and Namibia showcase its adaptability and ability to meet a range of needs in diverse settings.

In Guyana, OpenEMIS has been implemented to streamline student registration and attendance tracking, including in hard to reach schools, leading to improved data accuracy and reduced administrative burdens on teachers. Guyana began implementing OpenEMIS as a component of a Ministry of Education EMIS Master Plan. Recently the Ministry has expanded the scope of use to cover TVET institutions as well as primary and secondary schools nationwide.

The Ministry of Education Jordan began using OpenEMIS to track student learning in the Zaatari Refugee camp, the world's largest camp for Syrian refugees. After recognizing immediate benefits, the Ministry expanded the use of OpenEMIS to all schools across the Kingdom. OpenEMIS has been used extensively to track student learning, the monitoring of the Education Sector Plan, and to serve as the centralized repository of all education-related data in the country.

In Namibia, the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MOEAC) first leveraged OpenEMIS technology for the management and administration of national examinations, replacing a costly proprietary system with an open source solution. Through funding support from UNICEF, the MOEAC vision for an Examinations management solution was realized through a generalized but highly configurable application within the OpenEMIS suite of software. This application is designed to be integrated with other OpenEMIS software.

These examples highlight the versatility of OpenEMIS in addressing diverse educational needs across different national contexts. Each country's deployment has been tailored to meet specific challenges, showing the flexibility of OpenEMIS in supporting various aspects of educational administration.

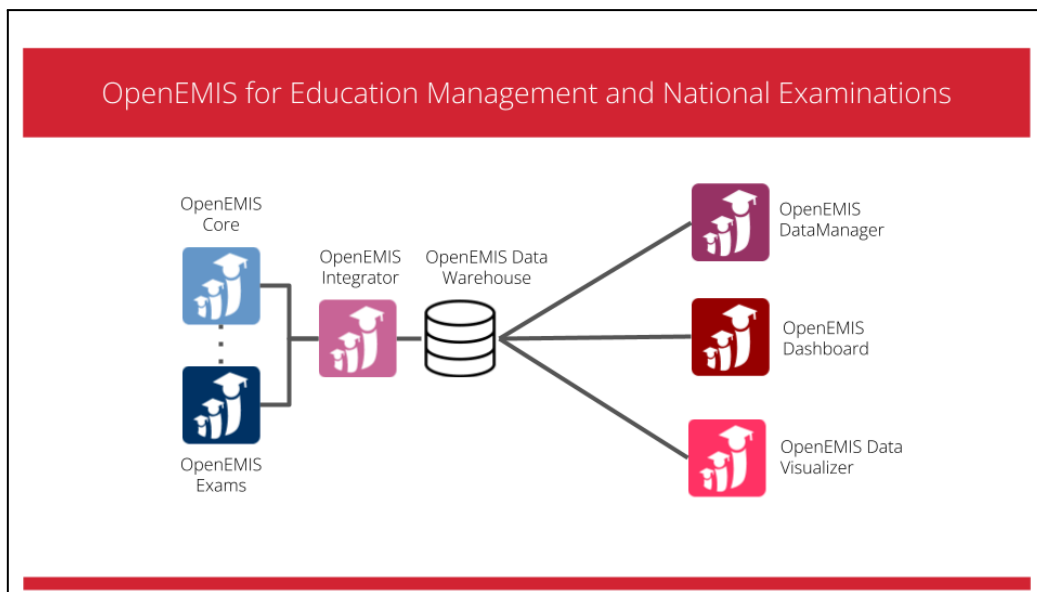
Furthermore, these deployments demonstrate an alignment with the vision for OpenEMIS:

A sustainable **global public good**, supported by a multi-stakeholder community, ensuring the availability of a cost-effective, flexible, **shared EMIS solution**, guided by **international standards and best practices**, underpinning the data needs of teachers, school administrators and education authorities wherever it is needed.

OpenEMIS for National Assessment

Organizations seeking to adopt OpenEMIS for assessment can explore several pathways. A phased approach could begin with a pilot project in a limited number of schools or districts to evaluate its effectiveness and identify necessary customizations and / or enhancements. Alternatively, a full-scale implementation across all educational institutions could be considered, requiring significant upfront investment in training and infrastructure. Another option involves integrating OpenEMIS with existing assessment tools and data systems, allowing for a gradual

transition and leveraging prior investments. Additionally, collaborative adoption models, possibly involving multiple organizations across a region or regions, can pool resources and expertise, promoting standardization and enhancing efficiency. Each implementation strategy must be tailored to the specific needs, resources, and strategic goals of the educational context, ensuring successful integration and long-term sustainability.



A key consideration in utilizing OpenEMIS to support national assessment is the integration of student personal and educational data from a national Education Management Information System (EMIS). The sensitivity of all data necessitates a robust and secure data exchange mechanism. This can be achieved through well-defined Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) that enable seamless data transfer between the two systems. The EMIS, serving as the central repository of student data, can utilize RESTful APIs to transmit relevant data elements, such as demographics, enrollment details, and prior academic records, to the assessment system. Examination results and assessment data captured within the national assessment system can be pushed back into the EMIS to enrich the student record, providing a comprehensive view of each student's academic journey. Each implementation strategy must be tailored to the specific needs, resources, and strategic goals of the educational context, ensuring successful integration and long-term sustainability.

Implementation Strategies

The adoption of OpenEMIS for educational assessment necessitates a strategic and phased implementation approach. The successful implementation of OpenEMIS for national assessment is predicated upon the establishment of robust, coherent and supportive policy frameworks. Specifically, national assessment policies should delineate the objectives, procedures, and standards for assessment practices, ensuring alignment with educational goals and principles. Concurrently, a comprehensive data security policy is imperative to safeguard sensitive student and school data, mandating stringent protocols for data handling, storage, and transmission. Furthermore, the efficacy of EMIS rollout through OpenEMIS necessitates a clear and actionable strategic plan, developed with the active support of national government and education partners. Such a plan should outline phased implementation strategies, capacity-building initiatives, and mechanisms for ongoing evaluation and adaptation, fostering a sustainable and integrated system that effectively supports educational management and assessment.

EdTech Ecosystem Considerations

Integrating OpenEMIS into the existing EdTech ecosystem requires careful consideration of interoperability, compatibility, and scalability. Cloud hosting for national government systems offers scalability and cost-effectiveness

by reducing infrastructure expenses and providing flexibility to adjust resources as needed. However, cloud hosting for systems containing sensitive data should be governed by strict security policies accounting for potential breaches or unauthorized access, necessitating robust encryption and strict access controls. Dependence on external providers for cloud services can also create a risk of vendor lock-in, limiting the government's ability to switch providers without significant disruptions.

Moreover, considering the long-term scalability of the system to accommodate growing data volumes and evolving needs is imperative for sustained effectiveness. The EdTech ecosystem must be designed to support continuous improvement and adaptation, fostering an environment conducive to innovation and technological advancement.

Approaches to Capacity Strengthening

Effective utilization of OpenEMIS relies on a well staffed and well-trained and capable workforce. Capacity strengthening initiatives should encompass a review of personnel, technical training for administrators, educators, and IT personnel. Comprehensive training programs covering system administration, data management, and utilization of assessment tools are crucial for successful deployment and ongoing maintenance. Moreover, accessing established communities of practice allows focal persons to share knowledge, experiences, and best practices. Investing in ongoing professional development and building in-house technical expertise ensures long-term sustainability and reduces dependency on external support. Furthermore, integrating OpenEMIS training into existing teacher training curricula and educational management programs strengthens capacity at all levels of the education system. Capacity strengthening efforts should be tailored to the specific needs and context of the user community, promoting empowerment and ownership of the system.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this paper advocates for the strategic adoption of open-source technology like OpenEMIS to revolutionize education assessment systems globally. By democratizing access, reducing dependency on proprietary platforms, and empowering governments to build resilient, data-driven education systems, OpenEMIS can serve as a catalyst for equitable learning outcomes. International collaboration, adherence to shared standards, and sustained investment in open technology ecosystems are essential to realizing the full potential of OpenEMIS and ensuring that assessments accurately measure progress, inform instruction, and enhance educational opportunities for all.

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