

## ASSESSMENT IN SCHOOLS: THE CURRENT SCENARIO AND POSSIBILITIES

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper discusses the main challenges related to assessment in schools of India. It tries to highlight the real situation of school assessment with an effort to elicit the important factors affecting it. The issues related to examination driven assessment and not being able to live with the expectations of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation is highlighted. The paper also discusses the possibilities in terms of making some changes in the assessment at school level with approaches that are in sync with the pedagogy and the diversity of the learner.*

**KEYWORDS:** *school assessment, Performance Driven Education, Lesser Scope for Creativity*

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Tracing the Realities of School Assessment: Examination Driven Education**

Assessment in schools has been a major concern since decades. There are multiple views related to learning as concept, how children learn, what children should learn, who should learn what? Due to these multiple views there are major conflicts relate to how we should assess students in schools, thus we have multiple ways in assessment is being recommended and conducted in schools.

Apart from all these issues there are few other issues which impact the way assessment is being done at school level. One, society's expectations from the schools is guided by changing trends in entrance examinations. Two, our teachers prepared academically well enough to deal with the requirements for assessing learners appropriately? Third, do we have a system which expects assessment to done in a particular way, forcing teachers and students to follow a specific pattern?

One of the major issues related to assessment is it being completely examination centric. In our country examinations are playing gate keeping role at every stage. With ever increasing competition at every stage, especially when students pass out after 12<sup>th</sup> grade, there is a huge number of applications for limited seats and thus examinations are used as a tool to reject (rather select) candidates for different courses. Some specific courses have found immense demand among parents and which has led to increased pressure on schools also to prepare students for the same pattern of examinations. Even if the schools are not consciously preparing students for these entrance examinations, there is an indirect acceptance to the norm that students who do not clear these entrances or do not score immensely well in board (majorly written) examinations, they would not be able to get admission to higher education.

This leads to a vicious circle where the students are expected to be prepared for these examinations since a very young age. Those who can afford private coaching are sending their wards to schools which focus only on entrance

examinations or sending their children to coaching centers after school. There are some pockets in every city which has become hub for preparation for these entrance examinations and in some states there are small cities which are famous for residential coaching for the same. The focus has completely shifted from all round development of students to preparing them for entrance examinations and be ready for so called 'cut throat' competitions. Everywhere, there are many cases which are reported from different part of country about suicide cases among young adolescents, who were unable to face the pressure. This pressure needs to be addressed at various levels, if we want to reduce the burden of expectations among our children.

This competition not only impacts assessment at higher level, it influences learning at secondary level also. Increased expectation for performance at higher level has led to change in how assessment is seen at secondary level also. Students are joining coaching classes at a very early age and parents are more and more averse of alternative modes of assessment.

Following are some of the ways in which examination driven education is responsible for certain issues in current scenarios:

### **Performance Driven Education**

Examination driven education system focuses primarily on performance. Performance expectation sometimes may be beneficial to those who are intrinsically motivated learners and want to have some challenges. But, for many students it may lead to increased pressure as it expects the learner to perform in structured format and in rigid conditions. Due to lack of flexibility in the modes of assessment as well as poorly prepared tests, majority of the students are not able to perform up to their potential. Majority of the times the examination favors certain type of students in the schools and is challenging for many others. Increasing stress on performance creates anxiety among majority of the learners to present their learning in a very specific way. Generally the examinations are focused on lower order thinking skills and do not have scope for higher order thinking skills which the students may have learnt.

### **Lesser Scope for Creativity**

Due to lack of flexible nature of the tests, students who have creative bend of mind are lost in the process. As a society we require creative individuals to be nurtured and recognized. Rather, examination based education does not give scope for presentation of creative aspects of the learner at different level. For a learner who is creative in certain aspect, examination based approach gives rarely a chance to present that talent. Examinations do not have scope to recognize creative ability of the learners.

Also, because the stress is more on examinations, majority of the teachers and parents do not appreciate creative expressions of the learners. There is hardly any time given for creative expression in the classroom as well as due to increased amount of time required for preparation for examinations, students are rarely given time to practice and elaborate their creative skills. There is a need to give time for creative expression to be nurtured and it also requires the teachers appreciate diversity in the classroom.

### **Diversity among Individuals is not Considered**

Examinations based approach being structured in nature provides lesser scope for diverse population to be considered. The diversity among the students is an aspect which needs to be addressed at every level. As majority of the psychologists have

suggested that every individual does not learn with same pace and has different learning style, it is being challenged by rigid examination centric education. Examination driven education expects learners to be achieving similar level at similar amount of time, which may not be the case with majority of the learners. This creates a great divide among the learners and their academic achievement in that particular grade. As there is a tendency to address those learners who are doing at a specific level in the classroom, examination based achievement becomes the main criterion for their progress and learning. This increased stress on reaching to a particular level in a particular way, which goes against the understanding of human development. It is important that students are given opportunity to learn differently based on their individual differences. These individual differences in classroom can be based on multiple planes. Students may have different cultural background, students may have lingual diversity, students may have completely diverse aptitude, and students may have diverse abilities and many more.

### **Decreased Stress on Learning**

Examination centered education has a typical issue of ultimately preparing students for examinations. This stress on being examination ready has led to increased emphasis on understanding the mechanism of cracking the examinations and decreased importance of actually learning the concept. There is a certain expectation with which certain topics are kept in syllabus but when examination criterion is being devised, it is very well understood as the maximum limit related to the concept. Due to this, stress is given mainly on achieving those specific objectives related to the topics and not on actually learning the topic to its core. If the examination centric approach is replaced by learning centric system, it would create more possibilities for individual development as well as help in creating a more effective education system.

### **Examination Centric Pedagogy**

Pedagogy is influenced by the objectives with which the curriculum is being organised and implemented. Learning experiences to be organised for students need to be valid and reliable. If there is an excessive emphasis on examination it influences the pedagogical approach in the classroom. Organisation of learning experiences is replaced by learning question answers for the examination. This leads to rote learning in classrooms and an increased emphasis on methodology which helps the learner prepare for examination.

### **Mushrooming of Coaching Classes**

One of the major issues in last few decades is mushrooming of coaching classes. Examination based approach can lead to excessive pressure on individuals who are performing well as well as those who are not performing well also. Those students who are left behind the classroom studies, try to find ways to deal with it outside school. And those who are performing well, wants to keep doing better in examination and thus look for extra support. This mushrooming of coaching Centre has led to a cyclic issue, where the students are again forced to be prepared for examinations and taking these issues to school. This mushrooming of coaching classes has created an imbalance, where substandard and knowledge based education has crept into the most important development years of the students. Apart from these in some places, teachers are aware that majority of the students are going to coaching classes and don't take the school classes seriously. An immediate check is required on the coaching classes which run their parallel system of education and create confusion among the learners.

These issues are creating a situation which is leading to reduced authenticity of the learning among students. Thus

it's important that assessment should focus on the learning of the students and nurture their potential. Creating opportunities for an alternative system of assessment needs to be formed so that every individual is given an opportunity to be critical thinker and be a lifelong learner.

### **Assessment for Nurturing Student's Potential**

Every individual comes with weaknesses and strengths in a class. In country as diverse as our, students come with diverse background as well as immense potential which needs to be nurtured for their individual development as well as development of the society.

How assessment is being organised for students, gives opportunities to students to express their ideas as well as it can be a source of desired feedback. As we are aware that assessment can be formative as well as summative, it can provide learning opportunities for students provided we use the desired ways. Assessment should be used to take the learning to higher level for every individual. Alternatives modes of assessment can be linked with positive engagement with activities which lead to better learning. There are certain basic skills, processes and conceptual ideas which can be addressed by carefully linking them with assessment tasks. These assessment tasks can be step wise prepared for strategically achieving the objectives which needs to be achieved.

To achieve development of specific process skills among the learners apart from conceptual development in science, it's not the teaching methodology which is important but creating assessment opportunities for students. Assessment tasks can be based on specific concept learning areas and process skills as well. Consider an example of concept of measurement in grade 6.

- Objectives may be following:
- Students may be able to
- describe different modes of measurement of length
- list different units used for measurement of length
- measure length of different articles
- compare different modes of measurement of length
- apply different modes of measurement of length in different situations

Different instructional tactics can be used for organizing the learning experiences for the learners. Learning styles of the students can be matched with the requirements of the conceptual understanding. For nurturing these concepts in more effective way, assessment can be used for nurturing student's potential in different ways. Apart from providing regular feedback at different stages to the learners, the teachers can also create multiple opportunities for the learners to analyse their own learning during different stages of the conceptual development. For example, while developing ability to apply different modes of measurement of length in different situations, students may be given different articles. These articles can be selected by the students also and they can be encouraged to present their work in form of different modes so that they either explore different modes of presentation or expand their concepts by expanding the idea with their choice of measurement activities

## CONCLUSIONS

Assessment in schools needs to see differently with respect to the changes that are taking place in education system. Also, it requires to be in sync with the learning curve of the students. Assessment tasks can be designed differently for different learning styles as well as they can be specifically designed to address specific parts. Assessment also informs the teachers about the pedagogical interventions, so that the teacher can modify the planning. Students can be given feedback as well as supported for better learning outcomes.

Alternative modes of presentation of ideas during assessment give confidence to a learner which is crucial for the achievement of potential. Different learning styles as well as preferred modes of presentation can be considered by teachers at different stages.

Alternative modes of assessment can be explored for better achievement of potential of the students as well as addressing individual differences. Different modes for representing your ideas find placement in the system only when we try to move away a bit from traditional written tests and give opportunity for other modes of expression.

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