

Building The Ability To Learn How To Learn

Ahead of Pariksha Pe Charcha, Union school education secretary writes about repurposing exams

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The word 'assessment' figures 65 times in the National Education Policy, 2020, while the word 'examination' figures only 11 times with respect to school education. That in itself is saying a great deal. It is crucial that our school ecosystem comprehends the subtle difference between the two.

Towards assessments, distinct from exams

An exam is typically understood as the formal process of testing the knowledge/skills gained by a student at the end of a course/module/syllabus in a predetermined period of time. In our system, it is either the term-ending or the year-ending test, or both. The results of an exam are often used for the purpose of moving to the next stage, promotion to a higher grade, higher education, employment etc.

An assessment on the other hand is broadly a continuous process of measuring the knowledge and skills acquired, and the learning outcomes achieved over small intervals of time, undertaken in flexible formats and settings.

Generally, it is not used for the purpose of promotion or employment, but mostly to check if the child is progressing as desired and whether any improvement or remediation is required. The terms 'summative' and 'formative' assessment are used interchangeably with the terms 'examination' and 'assessment'.

Mending the colonial legacy, via NEP 2020

A Unesco publication of 2013, entitled *Examination Systems*, states, "Curiously, although examinations originated in Asia, most secondary school examination systems within the Asia-Pacific are modelled on European, and to a lesser extent, North American patterns. This reflects colonial histories that have exerted an influence that has persisted since the colonial powers withdrew."

NEP 2020 for the first time after Independence lays down certain fundamental principles that point to a much more robust, yet student-centric approach to exams than what has existed so far. It focuses on regular



Bring down the burden and stress

formative assessment for learning rather than the summative assessment that encourages today's 'coaching culture'. It envisages a continuous system of formative/adaptive assessment to track and thereby individualise and ensure each student's learning.

There are two formal secondary boards of the central government – Central Board of Secondary Examination for formal education and National Institute of Open Schooling for distance learning. The National Assessment Survey 2017 report for CBSE schools showed that the students from these schools were certainly performing better than those from other boards/states, but were still performing in the range of around 50% in the assessed subjects through a competency-based assessment.

CBSE reforms, in order to become SAFAL

NAS 2017 and NEP 2020 were the precursors to several reforms undertaken by the board, including structured school-based assessment system, focus of teaching-learning on well-laid and grade-appropriate learning outcomes, systematically including more and more case-based, source-based, and competency-based questions in the year-ending exams, providing the opportunity for one improvement exam, offering mathematics at two levels in Class 10, doing away with the word 'fail' from the board's vocabulary, rolling out a teachers'

training module on competency-based education etc.

Realising the need to bring down the burden and stress that children experience during board exams, a handbook on 'Best Practices in Item Design and Test Development' has been developed by the board to help teachers of all subjects to design test items that are a valid and reliable measure of student-learning and do not promote rote-learning. NIOS is also following quite a few of these practices.

CBSE has also launched SAFAL (Structured Assessment for Analysing Learning), a competency-based, diagnostic assessment for Classes 3, 5 and 8. This is in line with recommendations made by NEP 2020 for a school-based exam to be conducted in these classes to test achievement of basic learning outcomes, through assessment of core concepts and competencies along with relevant higher-order skills and application of knowledge in real-life situations, rather than rote memorisation.

Feedback loops, to help both students and teachers

As a diagnostic assessment, it will provide developmental feedback to schools and teachers to improve teaching learning without additional exam pressure on students and to help parents to track learning progress throughout the school years.

As we move towards a regime of scientifically designed formative and summative assessments, our focus has to remain on ensuring the holistic growth of the child through an engaging and joyful learning experience, where the child develops capabilities and abilities for living a good quality of life.

During his tremendously popular Pariksha Pe Charcha interactions with school-going children, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has always insisted that, "Exams should never become a burden. They should be celebrated like a festival as exams give us an opportunity to judge our capabilities." Exams are a stepping stone for the child to develop the ability to learn how to learn. It is not higher grades but higher learning that will build the foundation of our children's future.

Pariksha Pe Charcha 2022 will be telecast live at 11am today on Doordarshan