

Replacing Board Exams with Modular and Competency – Based Assessment

Shivam Sharma¹, Dr. Bikramjit Kaur²

¹ Research Scholar, ² Associate Professor, Department of Education,

^{1,2} RIMT University, Mandi Gobindgarh, Punjab

¹shivamsharma.phd@rimt.ac.in, ²bikramjitkaur@rimt.ac.in

Abstract

Overview The old style board exam that focused mainly on the summative assessment was for a long time a yardstick to measure the success in schools in India. But it has faced increasing criticism for stimulating rote memorization, adding undue stress and not capturing students' true abilities. In counteraction, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India advocated for moving from rigid learning structuring to modular and competency-based learning approaches with a focus on continuous assessment, skill mastery, and personalization of learning trajectories. This paper take a look on the possibility of replacing traditional board examinations with this progressive ways. Applying a mixed-methods design that combines literature review, structured interviews, a survey, and state and education-board case studies in India, the study examines the potential benefits of, challenges to, and pathways for adopting a new approach to this issue. Indian interventions such as CBSE's competency-based reforms, Delhi Board of School Education (DBSE), result-oriented assessments in Rajasthan, and vocational programmes like the Mahatma Gandhi National Fellowship have demonstrated that change is not only possible but also happening. More deliberated and phased approach in the course of action is recommended here so as to enable assessments in India not to have inequities and exclusions, despite the fact that the Indian situation is peculiar This essay contends that a well thought-out and staged transition to the new can make assessments be more comprehensive, equitable and competently aligned to the 21st century education aspirations.

Keywords: *Competency Based Education, Modular learning, Board examinations, Educational reform.*

Introduction

India's education has reached a make or break moment. Board examinations, particularly at secondary and higher secondary levels, continue to be the cornerstone of student assessment. But these high-pressure exams have come under fire for their limitations in gauging students' potential, for encouraging rote memorization and for the enormous toll they take on student psychology. Most of the time, the results of one or two yearly exams have a far greater bearing on a student's academic and professional future.

NEP 2020 proposes a shift in this paradigm through a vision of promoting learning assessment, which is continuous, formative, and based on competencies. It encourages a flexible approach to delivering a curriculum and suggests students be assessed for mastery of certain skills rather than through testing on a schedule. This paper explores the possibility of the modular and competency based education system taking over from the traditional board exams in Indian setting.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to investigate the feasibility, implications, and challenges to transition from the conventional Indian board examination system to modular/cb-assessment systems. Specifically, the study aims to:

- Point out the limitations in the existing mode of board examinations in India.
- Learn the major elements of modules and competencies.
- Discuss how such models have been tested out in India.
- Evaluate how educators and policy-makers see it.
- Recommend pathways for successful implementation.

Methodology

This research follows a mixed method approach to study integrating qualitative and quantitative methodology for an exhaustive evaluation.

Literature Review

A narrative literature review was conducted of both national and international literature on competency-based education (CBE), modular learning and assessment reform. To provide theoretical underpinning, policy documents such as the NEP 2020, guidelines from CBSE, framework of UNESCO were traced and understood.

Survey of Educators

A survey was circulated among 150 teachers from different boards (CBSE, ICSE and state boards) through online transmission. Awareness of modularised and competency-based approaches, attitudes towards innovation, and perceived barriers to change were assessed in the questionnaire. Data were described by descriptive statistics.

Case Study Analysis

Four Indian initiatives were studied to understand the implementation of the modular and competency-based models in real-life: the CBE framework developed by CBSE, Delhi Board of School Education (DBSE), the outcome-based assessment in Rajasthan and the Mahatma Gandhi National Fellowship.

Discussion

Challenges in existing board examinations in India

- India usually has board exams at the end of Class 10 and Class 12. These types of exams suffer from a number of limitations:
- Stressfulness: Being life-changing results, a lot of students get stressed out.
- Focus on Memorisation: Most exams are centered around textbook learning and not on critiquing or thinking critically.
- Inequality: Because students from low-resourced schools perform worse, there is systemic inequity.
- Lack of feedback: These tests tell us almost nothing about where the kids are struggling and where they're doing fine, which makes it hard to personalize instruction.
- Real-World Skills Are Left Behind: Tests are not often used to measure creativity, teamwork, or applied knowledge.

Benefits of Modular and Competency-Based Formats

- On the other hand, due to the modular nature of learning, the curriculum can be divided into smaller parts and the progress rate can be adjusted. CBE assesses students based on specific learning outcomes that need to be achieved before advancing.

Benefits include:

- Personalized Learning: Each lesson will be presented so to sharpen a student's own style and help fulfill the gaps in his or her training.
- Review during Test or After Test Completion: It has been reported that the provision of feedback during or after the test may be beneficial in terms of yielding positive effects on learning and motivation.
- Less test pressure: The task is not solely based on a simple test.
- Featuring: The focus is on real-world skills like communication and critical thinking.
- Equity and Inclusiveness: All students have multiple opportunities to show that they can learn.

Case Studies

- CBSE's Competency-Based Education Framework

From 2021, CBSE has also charted out competency-based reforms focusing on application-oriented questions in board exams, teachers' training, and studies' specific learning outcomes. Pilot schools have begun to adopt competency-based internal assessments, and early results have shown higher rates of student engagement and understanding.

- Education Board of Delhi (EBD)

Developed in 2021 DBSE emphasizes modular curriculum structure, project based learning and on the fly formative assesment. Since it partners with the IB, international best practices are contextualized. Early feedback indicates that students are gaining better understanding also conceptually.

- Rajasthan’s Outcome-Based Report Cards

In the World Bank-funded STARS programme, Rajasthan has started working on learning outcome-based report cards. Educators also employ modular content to measure discrete abilities within building-block skills. This ensures that learning gaps are spotted early and intervention provided where needed.

- Mahatma Gandhi National Fellowship (MGNF)

While designed for adult learners, ACMGF is an example of the practical application of modular, locally designed education models. Fellows are evaluated for mastery of skill sets by their successful work on real, live projects - a model of secondary education that can be scaled.

Challenges in the Indian Context

Despite these encouraging advances, there are still some issues that need to be solved:

- **Teacher Experience:** Many teachers have no experience in writing and delivering competency-based assessment.
- **Gaps in Infrastructure:** Digital competencies tracking platforms, modular material management and infrequent testing support is limited.
- **Assessment Standardization:** Theoretically, it is difficult to assess competencies evenly, as there is no national rubric or framework.
- **University Admission Relevance:** Admissions to universities are still based on board exam scores, so there is a disconnect between the new school level assessment systems and those at higher education.
- **Public Pushback:** There is still a lot of faith among parents and students in the credibility of board exams, so they may resist its adoption.

Conclusion

The Indian school system is at the threshold of a big leap. While staid board exams persist, they are also coming to be viewed as not doing enough to prepare students for contemporary

life and labor. Modular and competency-based approaches provide an alternative response, an alternative of getting to know students rather than letting oneself be in such a hurry to test them, of being losers who could not master the curriculum in the laid-down time lines and winners who can sit through all these tests.

Examples from within India demonstrate that reforms are already happening, driven by policy changes, pilot projects and a shifting consensus among educators. But to move from one-off experiments to systemic change will require investment in teacher training, digital infrastructure and public awareness in the country. On the other hand, it has to be aligned with tertiary and labour market systems so that it is a seamless and credible transition.

Through a staged, well-supported roll-out, India has the chance to transform student assessment so it reflects the full range of human potential—making learning meaningful, inclusive and future-ready.

References

- [1] Department of Education Govt of India. (2020). National Education Policy 2020.
- [2] CBSE & British Council. (2021). Competency-Based Education Implementation Framework.
- [3] Delhi Board of School Education (DBSE). (2022). DBSE Curriculum and Assessment Guidelines.
- [4] World Bank. (2021). Strengthening Teaching-Learning and Results for States (STARS) Project: Rajasthan.
- [5] IIM Bangalore. (2022). Academic Handbook Mahatma Gandhi National Fellowship.
- [6] UNESCO. (2021). The Future of Education: How Do We Learn to Be?
- [7] Aurora Institute. (2020). Toward competency-based education: An agenda for next generation educators.