

Assessment in school education: what does it mean for a child?

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The Indian education system has taken a step forward towards reviving the education system with the introduction of grading system in session 2009-10. This will help in reducing the pressure on students during exams. In the last five years the meaning of education has changed for students from imbibing knowledge to merely scoring marks, resulting in myriad forms of education policies. As per reports, every day more than 17 students aged between 15-25 years commit suicide in India due to non performance in the examination or an entrance test. Watching young children of the country succumbing to the undue pressure of scoring high marks is horrifying. One of the points to note here is the thinking of the society, which puts lot of pressure on students to 'perform'. This pressure from schools, parents, peer groups and society takes away the youthfulness of a child. Further, a health report also supports that this often causes health hazards such as fatigue, body aches, eye weakness, stress and in more severe cases, depression (neurotic/psychotic.) Looking at today's education scenario, the Central Board of Senior Education has introduced educational counselors and child psychologists in schools to boost the confidence of young students and mentally prepare them for the board examination. This method has helped in reducing the stress and making them comfortable with the examination. Understanding the board exam system in India and its relation with students is of great importance in present times. While coping with the expectations of school, parents and society and keeping pace with their talent, students face a lot of hardships. Thus, the implementation of a grading system and abolition of board exams is really a boon for students. The grading system was introduced in 2008-09 from class I-VIII, reducing the exam stress. Extending the concept to class IX and X has further reduced the pressure, giving students an opportunity to explore other avenues. Following the US model, the implementation of the grading system is to bring in more practical education than the current theoretical method. This model prescribes a varied range of opportunities, providing children of all levels a platform on which to showcase their talent and pursue their interests traditionally. Class XI students were given subjects as per marks scored in Class X. This system often disappointed students if they scored low. Moreover, if a student didn't get the required percentage due to a poor score in one subject, then the entire percentage was affected. The grading system will give students relief. It will provide ample opportunities to students to excel in their choices. Its implementation will help an average student to cope with the stress, though leaving a lot of toppers to question it. Students will be evaluated on a 9-point grading system, which will diminish the difference between a student scoring 99% and one scoring 91%. Both students will get the A+ grade. To make the grading system a success, parents and teachers need to acknowledge children's special assets and encourage them pursue their interests. The strongest argument in favour of grading system is that it is a qualitative assessment of achievement of a student not a quantitative one. The strength of personality of a person is determined on the basis of the quality of his work. Desirable changes in the behavior of a learner is determined on the basis of its quality and grades assigned to behavioural changes are the best parameter of determining quality. In the grading system, grades instead of marks are assigned to the examinee on the basis of quality of his answer. Various grades referring to various qualities are pre-determined. An example will illustrate this point in which various grades ranging from excellent to very poor are given.

Quality	Grades
Excellent	O
Very Good	A
Good	B
Satisfactory	C
Average	D
Poor	E
Very Poor	F

On the basis of the quality of the question, the examiner gives various grades to different examinees by keeping in mind the parameters from excellent to very poor.

Methods of grading

There are basically two methods of grading used

1. Direct grading: In this method grades are allotted to questions directly on the basis of their quality. If answer written by the examinee is of very fine quality, almost incomparable to any answer, it will be considered excellent and grade 'O' will be assigned to it. If the quality of the answer is very poor, F grade will be assigned to it on a seven point scale as is the example given above. If there are more than one question in a question paper, say, seven and each question is graded differently by the examiner, then the final grade of the examinee will be calculated by using the following formula

Overall grade = Sum of grades / No. of questions

An example will illustrate this point. Suppose seven questions were graded by an examiner in the following manner on a seven point scale. Find the overall grade of the examinee

Grades allotted to different questions from first to seven = A, C, C, D, O, F, C

Solution:

Step I: Numerals are assigned to different grades from 1-7 in the following manner

Grades	O	A	B	C	D	E	F
Numerals	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Step II: These numbers are put below the grades in the following manner

Assigned Grades	A	C	C	D	O	F	C
Numerals	6	4	4	3	7	1	4

Step III: These numerals are summed up and total is divided by the number of questions in the following way

Overall Grade = $6+4+4+3+7+1+4 = 29/7 = 4.14 = \text{grade C}$

Though this system is easy to calculate, it has some limitations such as :

Determining the quality of an answer is a subjective process. It lies in the mind of the examiner and can vary from examiner to examiner. Thus different persons will grade the examinee differently, Even the same examiner cannot grade the same way because criteria of quality may change over a period of time. An examiner cannot judge the quality of a question without evaluating some answer books of different examinees. This could take time and if all the examinees in the group are very poor, the exact quality of a question cannot be determined.

2. Grading by Score Conversion: It is a mid-way approach between grading and marking and thus it can remove some of the defects of both systems, i.e. It classifies students into fewer categories and thus creates less confusion. Qualitative assessment which is advocated by philosophers is possible here. In this method, answer sheet of students are first scored in usual manner, then these scores are converted into grades on the basis of any of the two criteria given below:

Criteria A: Determination of grades by fixing range of scores: In this method different grades are allotted to student on the basis of ranges of scores, e.g. seven point scale can be prepared in the following manner

Criteria B: Determining of grade by preparing a merit list of all students has been adopted by CBSE in India.

Grade	Scores
O	Above 91%
A	81% - 91%
B	61% - 80%
C	51% - 60%
D	41% - 50%
E	33% - 40%
F	Below 33%

In this method answer sheet of all the students are evaluated in a usual manner. Then subjectwise merit list of all students is prepared. Those students who score less than 33% in a particular subject are considered failed in that subject and they are allotted grade E. The remaining pass students in that subject are equally divided into eight sections. 12.5% passes students who are on the top of the merit list are allotted grade A1, next 12.5% students are allotted grade A2, next 12.5% students are allotted grade B1 and the last bottom 12.5% are allotted grade D2 and in this way a nine point scale A1,A2,B1,B2,C1,C2,D1,D2 and E are prepared. Though this system is easier than another one but it has some limitations, such as:

It cannot work with hectic examination schedules where the purpose of learning is to pass the examination and nothing else.

It suffers from all those defects which annual system of examination has. Students start their study only when the examination is near. After the examination is over, students do not start their fresh study before they get feedback from their exam's result.

So, we can say that though grading system is good but still faces the problem of how it can be tackled.

What some teachers think about the grading system

Mr. Thanak Singh Bisht (CRCC, Dundagaon, Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand) says the grading system classifies students into fewer categories and hence the tendency of cutthroat competition among them for solitary marks is checked. It decreases stress.

Ms. Soniya Saini (Asst Teacher, GGIC, Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand) says the grading system is a boon for weak students more than for bright students. It reduces the stress level of weak students very much but there should be some space to tackle weak students in such a system.

Mr. Bhupi Gusai (Asst Teacher, GPS, Balla, Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand) says, if this grading system between examinees of the same subject and between examinees themselves is possible.

Ms. Manju Rawat (Head Teacher, GPS, Dundabazar, Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand) says with the grades given in the board examination, a school can know at what level of teaching is present. If majority of students have got grade C or D in a particular subject, then it can be concluded that teaching and preparation in that subject was definitely poor.

Mr. Naresh Lal Shah (Parent, Chunyalisaur, Uttarkashi) says grading system is a gift for C or D in a particular subject, then it can be weak students, but not for intelligent students, because there is an error in the division of grading system.

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