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## School assessments: Is CBSE losing ground to international curriculums?

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This year, Delhi University cut-offs for Economics, Political Science and Psychology were an unbelievable 99.50%, 99.75% and 99.75%, respectively. It makes one wonder if these marks are a true reflection of students' calibre in today's world. Does it mean that a child who gets 95% in school-leaving examinations is any less proficient than someone who gets 99%? The meaningless of CBSE grade 12 scores got amplified when grade 12 exams were cancelled due to Covid, leading to CBSE arriving at unfair and an arbitrary formula to 'arrive' at a grade 12 score not just for one year but two years consecutively. In contrast, the international curriculums had robust round the year assessments which ensured that cancellation exams did not impact the student grading at the end of the year.

Unlike other international curriculums, CBSE has not invested in valid and reliable internal year-round assessments (also known as formative assessments). In International curriculums, the formative assessments over grade 11 and grade 12 provide a fair prediction of a student's performance in the final grade 12 exam. In CBSE, there is not much correlation between internal exams and final external exams. Clearly, the methods and criteria used by the Indian education system to assess children's performance leave a lot to be desired – they check a child's memorisation ability at a particular point in time rather than her true potential.

Another structural problem with CBSE is the lack of rigorous moderation process to ensure a valid and reliable assessment process. CBSE has been inconsistent with the consistency and quality of its question papers. In fact, for various legacy reasons, CBSE's quality and rigour of the final exam are itself very inconsistent. It is a national tragedy that for an institution that is primarily an examination body (unlike international curriculums that are also curriculum bodies), CBSE still doesn't have reliable and valid assessment protocols. I had written about CBSE's structural weakness in an article.

For this reason, universities and colleges abroad place much greater credence on International Baccalaureate (IB) assessments to gauge a child's performance and preparedness for college life. For some subjects like Humanities, Oxford and Cambridge don't even recognise CBSE's marks as a credible exam! Ms. Yogesh Dhingra, an educationist with over 30 years of experience in CBSE schools and IB schools, believes that IB assessments are much more robust because there is a clear link between educational objectives, learning outcomes, and assessment design. "The IB assessment is a process that takes place over the year, using both formative and summative approaches to assess the performance of a child. It stems from academic honesty, statistical validity and reliability," she says. "Assessments are not all written. They address a variety of skills, which is what makes them comprehensive and relevant. A variety of assessments are included in the final IB grade — oral commentaries, case studies, internal assessments in all subjects that receive feedback on drafts from subject specialists where the drafting process is as important as the final product."

The mission of IB to transform students into inquirers, critical thinkers and caring and compassionate young people is reflected in its assessment methodology. It considers Approaches to Learning and Approaches to Teaching when assessing students. The former focuses on thinking, communication, self-management, research and social skills while the latter focuses on inquiry, conceptual understanding, developed in the local and global context, driven by effective teamwork and collaboration, and are differentiated to meet the needs of the students.

“In effect, IB assessments are truly meaningful in today’s world since they aim at the holistic development of the child, including the nurturing of a spectrum of skills,” points out Spokey Wheeler, Director and Head, Heritage International Xperiential School, one of the best performing IB schools in India at an IBDP score of 38.3.

While the IB approach to assessment is finding traction in the Indian metro city schools, much-needed reforms have been initiated by the CBSE in the wake of the new National Education Policy. It is, of course, understandable that these reforms will take time to take root in the 25,000+ schools across the country and the pace of adoption will be different in each one. But it is a hopeful sign that change is being proactively sought in our education system; in another five years, we could be witnessing a transformation of the way our children are taught and assessed.