

Going beyond Rote learning key for learning outcomes

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The key to learning outcomes is going beyond rote learning. Here's how.



[India Today Web Desk](#) 

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By India Today Web Desk: As early as the 1960s, policymakers and experts recommended that exam reforms be made a top priority if we were to improve the country's educational status and ensure better learning outcomes for students. Sadly, seven decades since Independence, we still grapple with issues of rote memorisation, narrow and textbook-driven teaching, and testing that is limited to assessing knowledge and minimal skills. This is not to say not much has been done on this front.

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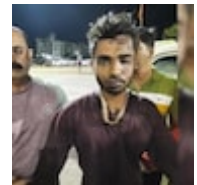
Many recommendations have been adopted and many more suggested in the NEP2020, are being implemented with great diligence. These measures are not leading to desired outcomes, and therefore, deserve closer scrutiny.

It is a fact that what gets tested gets taught. If we wish to change the way we teach and create a generation of learners who not only have deep subject knowledge but can put that knowledge to good use in life, have the right attitudes and values to be productive members of progressive societies, then examinations must test knowledge, skills as well as dispositions.

Therefore, consistent attempts have been made both at the Centre and state levels to reform the question papers, ensuring that questions assessed not just content knowledge but also higher- order thinking skills. A massive drive is on to build the capacity of exam paper setters to create blueprints, devise marking schemes and design questions that can accurately capture student learning in all domains.

In line with change management principles, it is key that these changes be shared with all stakeholders to avoid taking them unawares in such a crucial matter as a Board exam. Teachers and learners need to know the changes in the type and pattern of questions to align their teaching and learning to attain the expected outcomes.

Unfortunately, this communication, more often than not, takes the conventional route of creating question banks and model papers. This practice can be grossly deleterious to the very purpose of bringing about these reforms.



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Despite taking concrete steps such as doing away with marks, introducing grades, and all the rhetoric in the media, Board exams continue to be high stakes, with all the associated malaise of stress, anxiety, fear, and frustration. It is extremely difficult to combat the deep- rooted and compelling social lore that the Board occupies in our collective psyche.

As a result, the pressure to perform is extremely high -- for both teachers and students. When question banks and model papers are available, teachers feel compelled to focus on practising and mastering model questions to help their students score high, at the expense of time spent on deepening knowledge and building competencies over time.

Also, our attempts at creating 'fair and equitable' exams and curbing the commercialization of education are foiled when new markets are created for the latest model papers and question banks that are within reach of a privileged few. It also

perpetuates the coaching culture that thrives on peoples' desperation to give it all they have to ace the Boards. Both these are damaging consequences that compromise the validity and reliability of these exams.

Therefore, communicating exam reforms in a manner that is cognizant of how these changes will impact classroom teaching, the learning process and social behaviour is extremely critical to making them effective. We must strike the right balance between making exams transparent yet unpredictable, to ensure that the education system can be rid of reliance on memorisation. Until then, exam results will continue to be poor predictors of success in life, and society will continue to value certificate over learning.

--Jwairia Saleem, teaches at Azim Premji University. Views expressed are her own.

