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Standardized Testing Methods: Challenging the Traditional Structure of Evaluation

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Abstract: Education is a route through which knowledge is acquired through training and then applied with intelligence, thinking and experience. Standardized testing in the field of education is a testing method safeguarding consistent conditions, scoring rules and interpretation of results. The objective of standardized testing is to make available educational institutes with a calculable and cohesive method of evaluation of the learners. Today, the children who enter school in the early years are no more blank slates like they used to be in the earlier times. The focus of imparting knowledge has shifted from effective teaching to active learning. In this paper, we shall challenge the standardized testing methods and debate over the strategies that can be considered to make childrens' education more qualitative.

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I.   The role of Curriculum/Syllabus in students' learning process

The design and spread of curriculum material is one of the oldest strategies for attempting to influence classroom instruction.[1]

The Curriculum/Syllabus plays an important role in determining a student's learning process: either mastering that process or coming to dislike it. The Curriculum decides the students' attitude towards liking or disliking a particular subject. If the student is given a broad range of subjects to choose from, the student will surely find something that appeals to his/her interest. An individual is subject to performing well (even exceptionally) when given a chance to learn something which he/she is interested in. The students' beliefs strongly influence the understanding and implementation of the curriculum. If a child fears or loathes one particular subject which is compulsory in the syllabus, it will result in the child's low marks in that subject. This is not because the child is not good at that subject but because he/she had a strong feeling about not doing well purely due to the child's strong dislike towards that subject.

Analyzing curriculum in terms of development is the traditional and most common approach to the field. The idea is to show how curriculum evolves or is planned, implemented, and evaluated, as well as what various people, processes, and procedures are involved in constructing the curriculum. Such development is usually examined in a logical step-by-step fashion, based on behavioral and managerial approaches to curriculum and rooted in scientific principles of education. In other words, the principles are generalizable. Many curriculum texts today use the terms development and plan in their titles and thus reflect this thinking.[2]

A static Curriculum can prove to be boring and curb the student's creativity, imagination, resourcefulness and originality. It makes the process of Education in a students' life, mundane and monotonous. Sydney J. Harris once said, "The whole purpose of Education is to turn mirrors into windows." It certainly implies that Education should impart knowledge to the student without condemning the students' freedom of choice. The central idea is that the student enjoys the process of acquiring knowledge. The students' awareness of his/her strengths and also the ability to embrace his/her weaknesses is very important. One shouldn't force a musician to like physics or an artist to enjoy mathematics. The syllabus should not be stringent which makes decisions for the students. The student should not be forced to follow a certain list of subjects. The curricula should be flexible to the child's needs and diverse enough to include something that would intrigue everyone.

Curriculum is a strategic educational experience. The planning of the curriculum should be rational. It must state clear and specific objectives. It should be progressive and should not dominate the child's psychology in anyway. The syllabus should motivate the learner to do better and not discourage the child or break down his/her morale.

Standardized tests can't measure initiative, creativity, imagination, conceptual thinking, curiosity, effort, irony, judgment, commitment, nuance, good will, ethical reflection, or a host of other valuable dispositions and attributes. What they can measure and count are isolated skills, specific facts and functions, the least interesting and least significant aspects of learning.[3]

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It is taken for granted that tests are an integral part of the curriculum. Mandatory exams are conducted irrespective of the students' choice. The learners' field of interest or whether the student is willing to study that specific subject is not taken into consideration. Forced things do not last long. Such exams are biased towards few students because not every student is able to keep up with studying a variety of subjects. This in turn leads to low scores of those students. It ends up demotivating the student and in few cases, the child eventually loses interest in the subject he/she liked studying. Such acts of testing curtail the child's inspiration and make the child doubt his/her competency.

Unlike frameworks, objectives, assessments, and other mechanisms that seek to guide curriculum, instructional methods are concrete and daily. They are the stuff of lessons and units, of what teachers and students do. That centrality affords curricular materials a uniquely intimate connection to teaching.[4]

There are numerous reasons why the role of curriculum in practice has been uneven. One of the major reasons is that the curriculum is designed in a fundamental manner. This is because our education system lacks strong curricular guidance. Another prominent reason is the teacher only teaching what's in the textbook. A learner can only make the most of any learning strategy when the teacher brings something into the classroom which cannot be found in the textbooks prescribed as per the syllabus. That is the difference between just teaching the curriculum and teaching the student. This would help broaden the learners' horizons and give the child a reason to look forward to come to school. The connection between designing the syllabus and implementing it by the teacher is undeniably strong. A good syllabus would be of no use unless there is a qualitative teacher who would take it to the next level for making sure that the student not only comprehends what's taught in the classroom but also remembers it and learns how to practically apply it in his/her life. That would be when the role of syllabus would come in full circle. Moreover, we should emphasize on effective methods of learning instead of only thinking about effective methods of teaching. A teaching method can only be effective when the child is comfortable with what he/she is learning. It is very important to note that the children are the curriculum ultimately.

II. Importance of Teacher training for pertinent delivery of the curriculum:

It is generally acknowledged that promoting teacher quality is a key element in improving primary and secondary education in the United States. Indeed, one of the primary goals of the No Child Left Behind law is to have a "highly qualified teacher" in every classroom. Despite decades of research, however, there is no consensus on what factors enhance, or even signal, teacher quality.[5]

A teacher's classroom management communicates information about the teacher's understanding of the content and its learning process. It also confines the process of instruction giving that might take place in a particular classroom. A classroom in which the teacher takes complete responsibility for guiding students' actions constitutes a different learning environment than one in which students are encouraged and taught to assume responsibility for their own behaviors. Content will be approached and understood differently in each of these settings. Furthermore, more intellectually demanding academic work and activities in which students create products or encounter novel problems require complex management decisions. This correlation between instructional activity and management complexity further reinforces the interrelated nature of classroom management and curriculum.[6]

A classroom's learning environment must be envisioned by the teacher in both a physical space and a cognitive space. The physical space of the classroom is taken care of as the teacher sets the classroom for the students to learn a concept. The teacher might want to ask certain questions to maximize the learning in the classroom. Is the space warm and engaging? Does the classroom arrangement match the teacher's idea of learning? Do the students have access to essential materials or learning aids? Are the distracting features of a room eradicated? These kind of questions benefit a teacher in managing the physical space of the classroom.

Various different kinds of ways of learning can be opted by the teachers to maximize the output of the child. Experiential learning is one classic example of such a method of learning. It is any learning that supports students in applying their knowledge and conceptual understanding to real-world problems or situations where the teacher directs the students' learning. Another example of such a learning is Collaborative Learning. It is a method of teaching and learning in which students team together to explore a significant question or create a meaningful project. *What makes a classroom's environment physically conducive learning?*

- Co-setting of rules and expectations:
  The teacher can have the students to follow a set of instructions/rules in the classroom which can be preplanned by the teacher. These guidelines might help the classroom to be better managed.
- Value based learning:

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Value based learning is transformative. It greatly improves our students' capacity to learn and grasp. In this kind of a setting, the focus on ethical and emotional intelligence, deepened relationships, social cohesion and a strong values-culture give students the best occasion of academic success to the learners.

- Peer learning:

Learning can be accelerated and made interesting by explaining the learner's ideas with the other learner and by participating in activities in which they can learn from their peers. During Peer learning, the learners develop skills in organizing and planning learning activities, working collaboratively with others, giving and receiving feedback and evaluating their own learning.

To narrow the achievement gap in detracked, heterogeneous classrooms and to build equitable classrooms, teachers need to work towards equal-status, balanced interaction among students working together in small learning groups. A view of the classroom as a social system has allowed us to specify the processes and the conditions that allow teachers to understand and to practice their pedagogy in ways that acknowledge the range and the diversity of students" intellectual competence and realize their potential for academic achievement. Teachers learn and utilize equitable pedagogy through a solid connection between theory and practice, and a healthy dose of social engagement. [7]

III. Incorporation of soft skills in school curriculum

What are soft skills? Why build emotional intelligence? They are nothing but traits that children need to handle their lives on daily basis. It is referred to as Emotional Intelligent Quotient. While we as educationalists must equip the child with at least a few essential soft skills, we 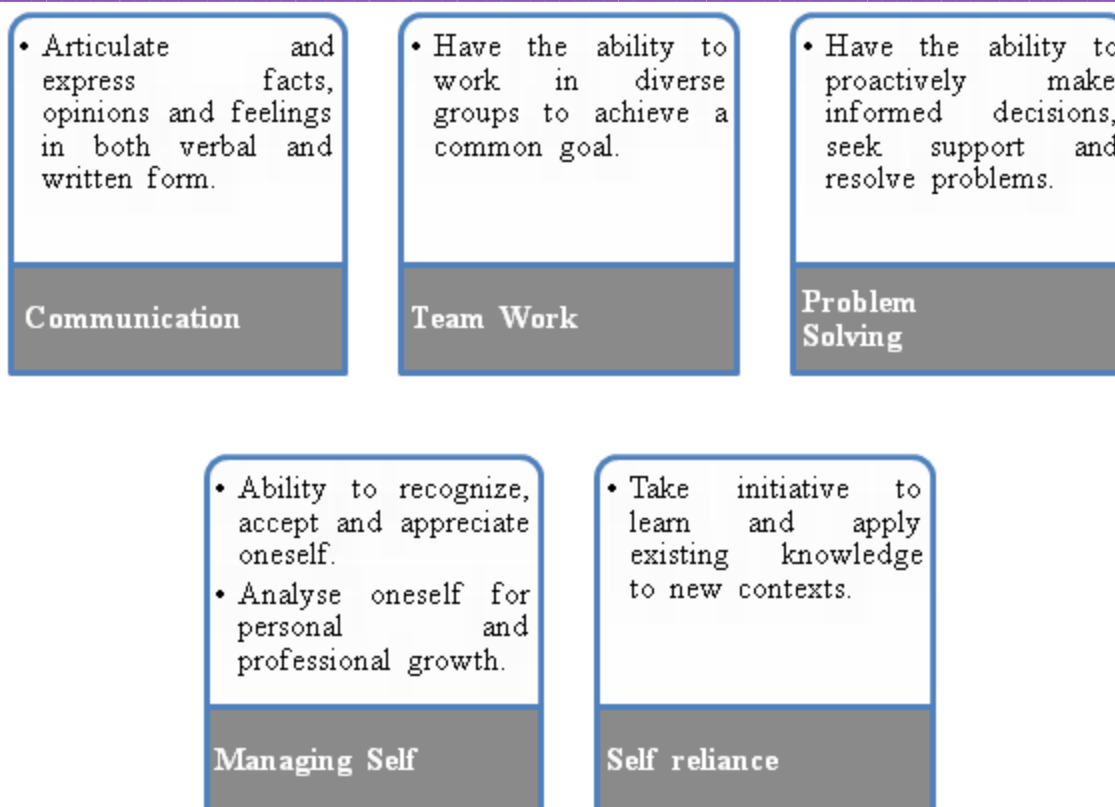mustn't limit the learning to them. Some of the most commonly cited soft skills are decision making, managing self, selfreliance, teamwork, communication, perseverance, problem solving, and collaboration.

The classrooms today follow the age old ritual of focusing on the hard skills to get an A which determine the intelligence of the learners. These hard skills include reading, writing, speaking, etc. It goes without saying that these skills are essential, but not at the cost of losing the importance of soft skills. The EQ plays equivalent role in a child's life to that of the IQ. IQ is a score based on a standardized test of your intelligence. EQ is a measure of a child's level of emotional intelligence to understand the world around him/her. American entrepreneur, author and motivational speaker Jim Rohn once said, "Our emotions need to be as educated as our intellect." But with the competition of getting an 'A' soft skills have always been left unacknowledged behind the curtains.

To cope with the increasing pace and change in the modern lifestyle, students need effective skills to deal with them. Too often, the parents are busy and spend very few hours with their children, and thus, the responsibility of inculcating values in children lies on the shoulders of teachers. These skills help the students to accomplish their ambitions and live to their full potential. It is essential that soft skills become an integral part of the class time table.

As said by Kurt W. Fischer, a newborn baby is mostly helpless and unable to deal with much of the work around him. Over the years the baby grow: into a child, the child into an adult. Explaining the psychological transformation that the individual undergoes in these twenty odd years is one of the most challenging tasks facing psychology. The theory presented in this article, called skill theory, attempts to explain a large part of this psychological transformation. It focuses primarily on cognition and intelligence, and it deals with aspects of learning) and problem solving. [8]

The table below elaborates the learning and application of the essential soft skills:

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- Articulate and express facts, opinions and feelings in both verbal and written form.

Communication

- Have the ability to work in diverse groups to achieve a common goal.

Team Work

- Have the ability to proactively make informed decisions, seek support and resolve problems.

Problem Solving

- Ability to recognize, accept and appreciate oneself.
- Analyse oneself for personal and professional growth.

Managing Self

- Take initiative to learn and apply existing knowledge to new contexts.

Self reliance

Often the instructors are deliberate about identifying and communicating cognitive skill goals to the learners. Shouldn't one be equally deliberate with non-cognitive skills and consider incorporating student self-assessment into teaching? While a student can readily measure their cognitive gains, thanks to our standardized testing methods, they do not always take time to reflect on their own work, be it successes or challenges, in specific non-cognitive skills. Remember the story about the tree cutter we learnt in our childhood? The lives of our children are very similar to that these days. We have got them so much into the hard skills through our hostile curriculum that we don't take time to sharpen the 'axe', which is to build their EQ. In today's classrooms, it seems that all the children are trying to be intelligent, but are far from sharpening their socio-emotional skills.

There's nothing wrong with hard skills learning and intelligent quotient. But we should not get so busy that we neglect the truly important things in life. Emotional intelligence is a flexible set of skills that can be acquired and improved with practice. Although some people are naturally more emotionally intelligent than others, children can develop high emotional intelligence even if they aren't born with it.

Having students judge their own grit and persistence or highlight an area where they exercised effective failure helps them understand that resilience is potentially more important than memorizing the state capitals. Deliberately adding reflection on soft-skill challenges and growth to lesson design helps students add goal-setting and self-reflection to their educational experience and helps prepare them for long-term success. [9]

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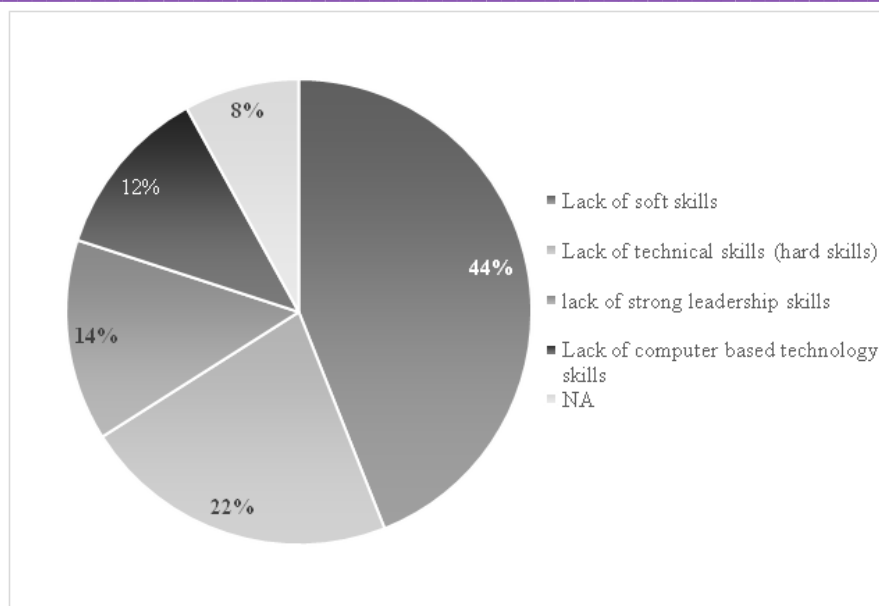
A report by Helen Robinett, these are the things that d efine the best 'gap' in the U.S. workforce skills. The g raph below illustrates the given statement:[10]

IV. The influence of language as a mode of inst ruction

The role of language development is discussed and som e Imsic questions are raised about the need for special assessment instruments for limited English proficient (L EP) students. The extent to which positive transfer take s place across languages is noted and related to success ful functioning of LEP students and school settings. Th e concept of interactional competence is also examined. It is suggested that reading achievement in English as a Second Language is more dependent on reading achie vement in the native language than it is on relative ora l proficiency in English. Academic competence requires knowing how to use language as a tool in acquiring k nowledge and performing analytic processes, but these s kills relate more closely to language competence in gen eral. Radical changes, it is argued, are needed in testin g procedures and interpretation for LEP children. The model of special education may offer answers to appro priate assessment and placement procedures. Federal law requires that students from non-English backgrounds must be assessed in their primary language as well as in English. It is concluded that test of English language proficiency alone-- tests that are not based on or related to standard curric ulum content for native speakers-- should not be allowed to be used as the basis for acad emic placement for LEP students.[11]

Every mode of instruction largely depends on the langu age chosen as a medium of teaching. The language can either be a connecting bridge or a barrier between stu

dents' understanding of a concept and the curriculum. The most significant factor which determines a student' s inference of the syllabus is the student's comfort wit h the language used as a mode of instruction. The chil d should be at ease with the teaching as well the learn ing methods used. Every child is subjective and has his /her own set of likes and dislikes. Also, every child ha s some method of learning which works the best for hi m/her. The child is like wet mud, which can be mould ed into beautiful shapes and providing them with educa tion by understanding their comfort zones is the best th ing we, as society as a whole, can do for them.

Most times, testing methods are rigid in nature. Student s are expected to perform well in oral tests (viva), writ ten exams as well as practical assessments. Every stude nt has a varied approach towards learning as well as e xams. Similarly, every student has core strength as well as core weakness. For e.g. one student might be very good at expressing views orally and as a result might s core very well in oral tests. On the other hand, a stude nt who might have studied really well for the same mi ght not be able to perform due to nervousness and lac k of confidence. Despite being the same test for the sa me grade, the reaction and perception to every test wid ely differ from one pupil to another. Every student has some skill(s) which makes them special. We can never realise these skills if we continue to test each and eve ry student by using the same methods of evaluation. W e can try and make sure that exams are not something students are scared of. In fact, the exams can be desig ned in such a way which makes them look forward to appearing for them. This can be achieved only when we use a broader perspective and appreciate the fact th at exams, marks or grades are not the only factors in determining a child's intellect. Such tests should be hig

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hly integrative in nature and impact a large amount of the skills which govern school achievement.

A significant aspect is the language used as a mode of instruction which later also becomes a language on which a child is evaluated. All students in the class might not be fluent and well versed with one particular language. Studying in vernacular medium school previously, family background, individual interest or lack of resources might be few reasons for the same. In this case, a child should be assessed in his/her native (comfortable) language and their native language should be taken as their first language. This first language acts as a catalyst to the child's progress since a child is more comfortable in being assessed in his/her native language and this will automatically uplift the overall conduct of that student. This process not only boosts the student's self-confidence as a whole but also succeeds in retaining the student's interest for a longer period of time. This would make the education system more student focused than exam focused. Instead of building walls around students' brain, its best to give them the freedom of performing well by choice and not pressure. Also, a few skills such as generalizing, making logical inferences from known information and constructing complex strategies are not specific to a particular language. These tactics can easily be transferred to academic tasks in a different language after it has been developed in the native language.

To understand how language relates to academic achievement, we need to consider that relationship in terms of language development as more comprehensive cognitive processes.[12]

The cognitive aspect of a student's psychology deals with the process of gaining knowledge through thought, experience and the senses. A child's mental ability to perceive thoughts and build beliefs largely affects their level of understanding. A few students struggle to cope with some basic components which apparently others have mastered. This perception might make some students feel inferior to those who could manage to do well.

No student deserves to feel mediocre. Education is a tool to elevate the student and prepare them to take challenges head-on. There are number of factors which influence a child's belief and perception towards education. A student is like a seed which will surely grow into a yielding plant, included it is provided with proper guidance is taught in a manner which he/she understands the best.

The usage of a language which is suitable for the students learning can in turn result in outstanding academic accomplishments by the students. This is because the student no longer dreads assessments but learns to excel in them.

Below is a model by Saville-Troike, Muriel that assigns various areas to different aspects of the cube resembling Rubik's famous six-sided cube.
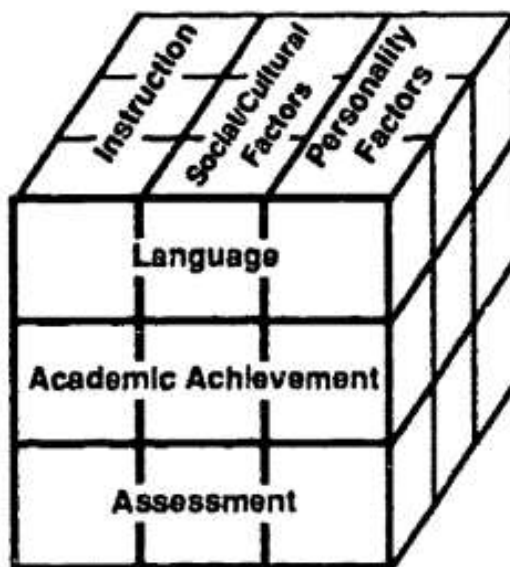
The main idea of such a model is to identify not only the intricacy of the aspects involved, but their interconnection as well.

Pioneering approaches to pacify the standardization in testing

Understanding that every student has a different learning style

- **Types of learners**

Every student has a different learning style. Each learning type responds best to a different method of teaching

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. There are four primary learning styles: Visual (spatial), Auditory (aural/musical), and Kinesthetic (physical).
The best way to ensure that every child in the classroom understands what is being taught is by including activities while teaching that comprise of all learning styles. A visual learner learns best when they are taught by displaying images, pictures, PPT presentations, and spatial understanding. An auditory learner absorbs maximum knowledge when coached by playing sound and music. Lastly, a kinesthetic learner likes to acquire information by using the body, hands and sense of touch.

- **Theory of multiple intelligences**

According to Howard Gardener theory, there are nine types of multiple intelligences: spatial, naturalist, musical, logical-mathematical, existential, interpersonal, intrapersonal, kinesthetic, and linguistic. This theory helps the educators understand how children process information. Although each of us have all nine intelligences, no two individuals have them in the same exact structure - similar to our fingerprints. There are few intelligences in us which are dominant over others. In order to make the curriculum design and methods of teaching more effective, maximum types of intelligences should be covered. Students produce work of better quality when their respective dominant intelligences are stimulated and applied to their work. This accelerates the students' innovation and creativity since the child is acquiring knowledge by the means he/she is at ease in.
The purpose of the learning option is to provide choices and creative options accentuating the different intelligences. Creativity and use of one's imagination is highly encouraged and rewarded. The written and reflective component of the learning option format is an integral part of the student's learning experience.[13]

V. Improv activities

Improv activities are favorable for atypical kids, no matter where they come from. They help children with learning and physical disabilities develop a sense of play, broaden the opportunities for introvert earners to mingle easily. When they know they'll be supported no matter their answer, introspective kids thrive. "Introverts give improv its richness," says Deana Criess, director of ImprovBoston's National Touring Company, adding that many improv instructors identify themselves as introverts.

When one adopts improvisation of learning, every learner's contribution to the group discussion is accepted without any judgment. The four 'c' s of improve that are inevitable from its learning are: creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and communication. These support in

abandoning the fear of mistakes which is one of the most stringent challenges of introvert learners. These activities and learning style persuades the learners to be more participative which makes the learning process fun, despite their limitations.

Curriculum through sports
As they say, "all work and no play makes jack a dull boy", how about being smarter by teaching jack while he plays? As interesting as it sounds, it is a fine idea for incorporating kinesthetic style in learning. Using Sports for the development for learners provides them with an experiential platform for learning, which makes it suitable to engage with a range of stakeholders. Particularly with adolescents and young people, it enables them to experience and reflect both as individuals and as teams. As a result, learning is not just by rote, but understood, retained and applied in real life.

Prominence of Student Feedback
Students are the centre of the education system. They are at the receiving end of the system and are the pillars of the future. In order to improvise, it is vital to ask the students for a timely feedback. They can state their concerns and honestly provide a feedback about their experiences regarding the curriculum, language, teachers, teaching style, their expectations, etc. This will not only help the education system to improve but also bring in a fresh perspective. The students can also appreciate what they like about the current educational structure and what changes would they like to incorporate.

VI. Conclusion

Everything around us is changing rapidly. Technology has taken over almost every aspect of our lives. Then why should we still use the traditional methods of testing? Why not make exams approachable and doable and clear all the negative air around it. Education is an enriching experience for the student and not just a mere statement of numbers called marks. When we can equip our classrooms with the latest machines, why not adapt to the students psychology and give them the chance to outshine their own expectations.

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[11] See Armour et al. (1976), Harris and Sass (2007), Murnane (1975) and Jacob and Lefgren (2005), A related line of research looks at subjective evaluations by prinicipals and whether they are correlated with teacher quality

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