



CASE STUDY

MEETING INDIVIDUAL LEARNING NEEDS: IS TRADITIONAL ASSESSMENT SYSTEM BEST SOLUTION IN SCHOOL "XYZ INTERNATIONAL"

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ABSTRACT

"XYZ INTERNATIONAL" is a school from preparatory classes to class-12 which follows CBSE pattern. School management is keen to provide quality education along with inculcating good moral values, proper physical & mental growth of its students. This school is performing good academically & financially, yet, the management is interested in improvements, whatsoever, to align itself with new ways of teaching/learning/collaborative learning so that school's reputation is enhanced. With this objective, school management invited one of the reputed consulting firms "PALASH" to study the school's systems & working and suggest improvements in various functional areas. PALASH critically analysed and found that school is taking only marks scored in tests as a measure to find whether a student is brilliant or not. The way this routine activity is conducted leaves behind a big question mark about the objective(s) of conducting such activity as it simply informs about the level of learning of some specific part of the subject by each student considering that Test Paper is prepared carefully so that it tested the learning properly? But this whole activity is silent about any remedial measures to be taken. Many students attaining the same percentage of marks may or may not have same need as one of them may have performed good in questions involving a particular concept while performed bad in questions involving another concept but same is not true for other student who share the same percentage of marks. Considering parents view/suggestion, it is the assessment & its reporting system which should be looked into and should be improved. Therefore, study of prevailing assessment system and its adequacy in present scenario is a matter of concern for the consulting firm. If prevailing assessment system is not adequate then what system is best for the school. Keywords: Learning needs, Traditional Assessment, School Management, Teaching ways, Remedial measures

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INTRODUCTION

"XYZ INTERNATIONAL" is a school from preparatory classes to class-12 which follows CBSE pattern. School management is keen to provide quality education along with inculcating good moral values, proper physical & mental growth of its students. Management is open to any new idea which can help students learn better. This school has regular features like classes, internal assessment tests, parent-teacher meetings, outdoor sports activities, annual sports meet, annual functions etc. This school is performing good academically & financially, yet, the management is interested in improvements, whatsoever, to align itself with new ways of teaching/learning/collaborative learning so that school's

reputation is enhanced. Organisational chart of school is given in Exhibit 1 Fact Finding Study by Consultant With this objective, school management invited one of the reputed consulting firms "PALASH" to study the school's systems & working and suggest improvements in various functional areas. The consulting firm conducted the school's fact finding study & gave following findings – School Building – School building is of sufficient size to accommodate all office, classes, staff room, teachers' room, place for indoor games, good sized playground etc. The school has enough land which can be utilized for further expansion if required.

1. Teacher / student ratio is adequate (1:30) which is in accordance with similar type of schools.
2. Parents profile / Background-School is catering the need of middle/upper middle class people. They are from different professional backgrounds and are well educated.

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3. Transport- School offers transport but it is not mandatory. School have its own buses and regular staff for operation of transport system. Buses are fitted with GPS system and hence always can be tracked.
4. Library-School has a good library. Collection of books is good. A good ambience for reading is maintained. Students are encouraged to read books other than their course. Books catalogue and records are being maintained manually.
5. Playground – Good sized playground exists and students play outdoor games
6. Annual function – This event held in routine way
7. Annual sports meet -This event held in routine way
8. Extra curricular& co-curricular activities-like indoor & outdoor games, music & dance classes, art classes etc which are conducted on regular basis but are optional for students to take part in them.
9. Usage of Technology– School has aComputer Lab having 30 computers. Computers are used to teach computer related subjects. School also runs smart class where subject is taught using software and multimedia system, but it is very limited as one class gets a chance to attend the smart class once a week. Hence, it is ornamental kind of thing only because teachers don't have adequate training & mind set to utilize these equipments. Moreover, they are solely dependent upon the educational stuff created by the technology company which is a great limitation in its regular use. Regular smart classes require enhancement of infrastructure. This may require capital as well as money for running expenses. Running Finances are also required for maintenance of technological equipment, and for salary of staff deputed for this purpose. Also recurring expenditure will be needed to pay franchise fee.
10. Teachers' training – Regular training programme for teachers is not in place
11. Conduct of class – Classes are conducted in standard class room environment where teacher teaches through lectures.
12. Teaching aids- Depending upon class level (i.e. preparatory, primary, middle, secondary level) school uses various teaching aids like -
 - Toys / puzzles
 - Projector
 - Rhymes / stories
 - White board
13. Assessment / Tests / exams-In this school, class tests are conducted periodically for each subject(s), usually in an interval of one month / end-of-unit or chapter tests / end-of-term or semester (quarterly/half-yearly/yearly). Concerned subject teacher prepares Test Paper based on what she taught in last month (say any period), test is conducted, answer sheets are checked by teacher, merit is prepared, marks are shown to students/parents. This whole exercise is conducted in a routine way through out the whole academic session.
14. Competitive exams-Students are encouraged to participate in competitive exams like NTSE, Kishor Vaigyanik Pariksha, National Science Olympiad etc. Few students of school perform well and secure some good rank also.
15. Reporting system-Standard Report card which reflects academic performance only (i.e. only marks obtained in various subjects).
16. Internet / phone based communication -School communicates important announcements via SMS/emails.
17. Website-School has its website. Important events are uploaded in announcement section of the website. Other than that usually website has static content which rarely gets updated.
18. Database -Data is being maintained using excel sheets for different purposes. It is considered to be maintained manually.
19. Parent-teacher meetings-Parent-Teacher meetings were being organised in a conventional way. Usually class teacher informs parent if any area needs to be taken care about the student and/or parents asks the same from class teacher. Usually, replies from teachers are – doing fine, just ok, should work hard, not sincere, shy, speaks too much, hyperactive etc. The replies are based on her memory/class test results only. They are not substantiated by any specific data, hence except some/any exceptional cases replies/suggestions are general in nature.

Feedback to management regarding expectation/grievances of parents/students is not existent. Management usually don't get feedback through teachers, it gets feedback only from parents who reach out to management regarding expectation/grievances.

Views of teachers & parents as collected by consultant

By the above fact finding study's observation the consulting firm "PALASH" suggested that there is scope of improvement in many areas, but taking up all at the same time is not necessary. They suggested that school management should pick-up one aspect for improvement which may make the difference in a big way and the outcome of it may be felt by students, teachers, parents & management. During initial study, while interacting with group of parents, consultants got parents point of view regarding assessment system which is currently prevailing in school. Parents pointed that they simply get the marks obtained by their child, which definitely remains less than 100% all the time. They don't get any other information regarding assessment done. They also feel that if a student has not done 100% then it indicates that there are areas/concepts/topics which has not been understood/grasped properly by student. Hence, after assessing those gaps in understanding / grasping of concepts need to be filled up by proper remedial actions – such as repeat class / tutorials etc. Parents feel that apart from information regarding marks obtained by their child, it will help them, if they get some advisory notes also regarding his/her areas of strengths/weakness. This advisory note may well be beyond the academics, it can include behaviours etc. in its ambit.

Identified problem of the internal assessment in a particular standard by consultant

Considering parents view/suggestion, it is the assessment & its reporting system which should be looked into and should be improved. Therefore, study of prevailing assessment system and its adequacy in present scenario is a matter of concern for the consulting firm. If prevailing assessment system is not adequate then what system is best for the school?

Class Tests / Assessment

Objective of class test / assessment – To measure each students learning of various subjects?

In this school, class tests are conducted as a routine. The complete cycle of this activity for each test is as follows:

- Class tests are conducted periodically for each subject(s), usually in an interval of one month / end-of-unit or chapter tests / end-of-term or semester (quarterly/half-yearly/yearly).
- Concerned subject teacher prepares Test Paper based on what she taught in last month (say any period),
- Test is conducted,
- Answer sheets are checked by teacher,
- Merit is prepared,
- Marks are shown to students/parents.
- Role of subject teacher is pivotal and most important for this complete activity.

This whole exercise is conducted in a routine way throughout the whole academic session. As anyone can expect the test results remain heterogeneous in nature as some students performs excellent, some students perform very good, some students perform good, some perform average, some performs poorly. The same is conveyed to students/parents and the story ends here. The way this routine activity is conducted leaves behind a big question mark about the objective(s) of conducting such activity as it simply informs about the level of learning of some specific part of the subject by each student considering that Test Paper is prepared carefully so that it tested the learning properly? But this whole activity is silent about any remedial measures to be taken. Many students attaining the same percentage of marks may or may not have same need as one of them may have performed good in questions involving a particular concept while performed bad in questions involving another concept but same is not true for other student who share the same percentage of marks. Even if it is understood/accepted that some remedial measures (like repeat class / tutorial etc.) are required, then what those measures could be? As test result indicates that class is heterogeneous as far as learning levels are concerned, hence, will one measure be adopted for the whole class? Will it not affect those who already learned well (i.e. they will be compelled to repeat learning for concepts they have understood well)? Will lesson plan permit the time required for remedial activity?

Suggestions of consultant

The consulting firm “PALASH” suggested that the internal assessment should be considered as information gathering tool in which we gather detailed information about learning of different topics, concepts, formulas, subjects etc by students & by utilising this information addressing the need of individual student. But, before planning something, we need to consider that the subject teacher who is pivotal for this activity is already fully/optimally engaged all the time. She has a lot of other activity to perform, like preparing lesson plans, preparing

class notes, writing daily diary, participating in parent-teacher meeting etc.

Teacher’s point of view

Teachers was in dilemma regarding this idea, They said that they can do it for 1 or 2 students but doing for whole class may not be possible for us. The reason they gave was – say there is a class of 40 students, some of them may have performed good in questions pertaining to concept A but performed bad pertaining to concept C, some of them may have performed good in questions pertaining to concept B but performed bad pertaining to concept C, some of them may have performed good in questions pertaining to concept A and C but performed bad pertaining to concept D, some of them may have performed good in questions pertaining to concept D and A but done badly in questions pertaining to concept C , and so on..... The very first task is to segregate them in groups as there will be too many heterogeneous groups, having different strengths, weaknesses and overlaps of students. If whole class will be considered, then it may happen that more than 80% of the things need to be re-taught because of students A,B,C,D..... Therefore, it is difficult on their part to –

- Segregate students groups based on strengths / weaknesses
- It is even more difficult to address the weakness / shortcoming of heterogeneous groups as the students who already have grasped a concept which is not properly understood by many others will lack interest in learning those again and will feel that there time is being wasted.
- This practice is not prevailing in any school, so why we should take pain to do it.

Parent’s point of view

By this argument, parents were not satisfied because they fell that this way kids will move on having gaps in learning / understanding of concepts. This may have serious implications as there may be concepts which are used in subsequent topics/ classes, and if they are not learned well right in this class, then there will again be an issue of understanding the next level of things. Hence, these weaknesses which has been identified by assessment need to be addressed right now, else the purpose of assessment gets defeated. Though, it may be a matter of debate that weather those gaps shall be filled by parents by teaching there ward, or parent should arrange for some tuitions/coaching for there ward, or school should take care of that.

Class discussion

Problem (idea) reached to management. Teachers put forth there views

- Idea is good and will have a definite impact on students, but how to address it?
- Conducting of class test / exams involves
 - Suspension of class for the sake of conducting test
 - Preparing a question paper
 - Checking the answer sheets
 - Preparing the merit list

Above listed tasks are already exhaustive. Further work as per this idea don't seem practical for us to do.

Identification of strengths/weakness requires a microscopic observation of the marks obtained by students question by question, which is not possible for us to do so, and without doing so –

- It is not possible to prepare advisory note for parents
- With out doing this it is not effectively possible to address need for each and every students individual needs.
- In some school the answer sheet of highest marks student is circulated for others to know their weak & strong points.
- Using a software to analyse variation of each student from the best possible score for each question separately

Parents put forth there view as –

- We send our kids to school to learn
- We see assessment by school as an intermediate process.
- Gaps in learning will always remain, but identifying those and filling up those gaps at right point of time is the responsibility of the school.

Parents as well as teachers suggested to management that a system/mechanism needs to evolved to address this need. Information & Communication Technology and use of new age gadgets (like tablets, smartphones, netbook etc.) need to be harvested in evolving the system.

Teacher’s current role :

- Preparing test/question paper
- Conducting test
- Checking answer sheets
- Preparing merit
- Showing copies to students / parents
- Gaps – Question paper – each question be tagged with
 - Difficulty level (difficult / easy / very easy)
 - Concept(s) involved

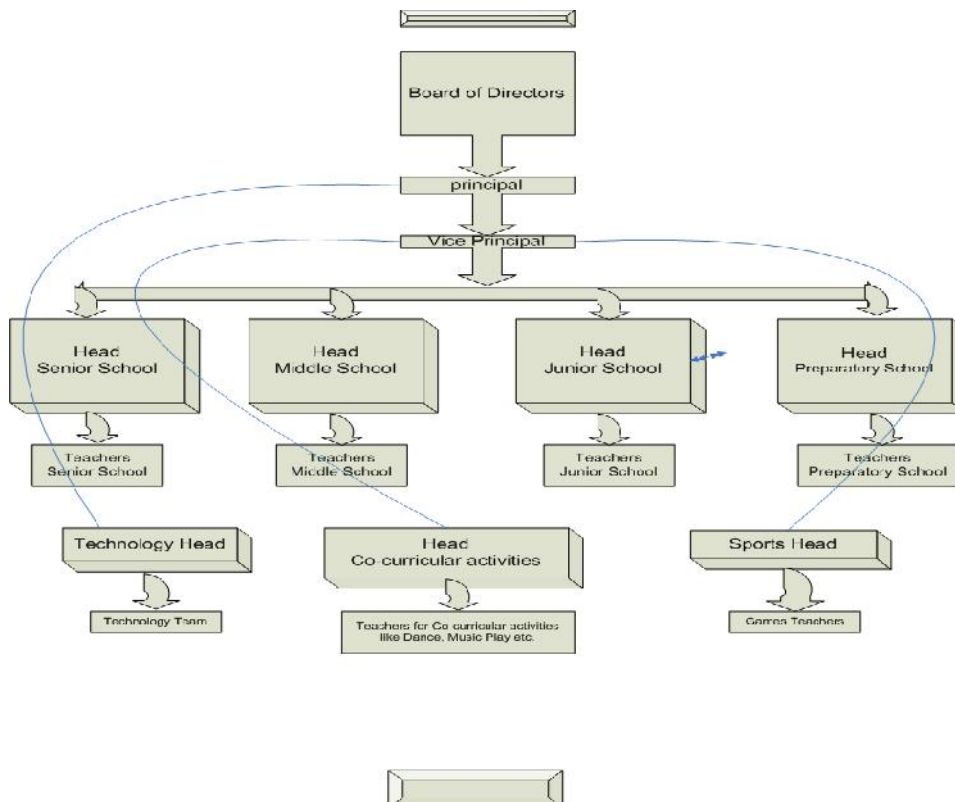
Therefore, class tests should be followed by remedial measures.

- For any remedial measures to be taken, it requires to identify the need.
- This need cannot in-general be identified by viewing the merit list and segregating students according to percentage of marks obtained.
- Many students attaining the same percentage of marks may or may not have same need as one of them may have performed good in questions involving concept P while performed bad in questions involving concept Q but same is not true for other student who share the same percentage of marks.
- Therefore need to repeat/reinforce learning involving different concepts for both the students are different.

The question paper need to be planned like this

QNo	Marks	Question Type	Subjective / Objective	Concept(s) involved	Multiple option	Is Numerical? Yes / No	Difficulty level Scale 1 to 5
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Identify the role of each i.e. teacher/student/management/parent



Therefore, following need to be done

1. Preparation of question paper carefully so that all the concepts taught are covered and represented adequately.
2. Every question is tagged with the concept(s) involved.
3. Every question is tagged as per difficulty level – Difficult/Easy
4. Test result/report should be prepared based on
 - a. Overall marks
 - b. Marks & percentage of marks for each concept/topic for each student.
 - c. Percentage of Marks for difficult/easy questions as a group

Report based on above parameter will help identify shortcoming/learning re-enforcement need for individual students and will also help create based on same type of need on a broader basis.

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