

# Holistic Assessment for Meaningful Learning: Transforming Evaluation in the NEP 2020 Era

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## Abstract

In recent years, there has been a growing shift from traditional examination-focused assessment towards more holistic and competency-based approaches in education. The National Education Policy 2020 emphasises the need to redesign assessment practices so that they support continuous, learner-centred, and meaningful learning instead of rote memorisation. In this context, the present study explores the concept, significance, and implementation of holistic assessment, with particular attention to the Holistic Progress Card in PM SHRI schools of Odisha. The study follows a qualitative and descriptive approach and is based on an analysis of policy documents, reports, and academic literature from national and international bodies such as the OECD and UNESCO. The review highlights several limitations of traditional assessment systems, including their heavy reliance on memorisation, the pressure created by high-stakes examinations, and their limited ability to assess higher-order thinking skills. The findings suggest that holistic assessment, as envisioned in NEP 2020, promotes a more comprehensive evaluation of learners by addressing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions of development. The study also examines how the Holistic Progress Card is being implemented in PM SHRI schools of Odisha, identifying key practices such as the use of standardised formats, teacher orientation programmes, inclusion of self and peer assessment, and ongoing monitoring processes. At the same time, the study acknowledges several challenges in implementation, including increased teacher workload, limited training opportunities, subjectivity in assessment, infrastructural constraints, and resistance to change among stakeholders. Overall, the study offers a contextualised perspective on how assessment reforms are being translated into practice at the state level and helps bridge the gap between policy ideals and classroom realities.

**Keywords:** Holistic Assessment, 360-Degree assessment, Holistic Report Card, Meaningful Learning, NEP 2020, PM SHRI School

## Introduction

Assessment is one of the most influential components of the educational process because it shapes both teaching strategies and student learning behaviours (Black and Wiliam, 1998). In many traditional educational systems, including India's, assessment has been largely examination-oriented, with significant emphasis placed on written tests and numerical grades (Ministry of Education, 2020). Such systems tend to evaluate students primarily on their ability to memorise and reproduce information rather than on their understanding, analytical abilities, or practical skills (NCERT, 2005). Over time, educators and policymakers have recognised that this exam-centric approach has several limitations. It often encourages rote learning, creates excessive stress among students, and fails to recognise the diverse abilities and talents that learners possess (OECD, 2013). As a result, there has been a growing demand for assessment practices that are more comprehensive, learner-centred, and reflective of the broader goals of education (UNESCO, 2015).

The National Education Policy 2020 represents a major reform initiative aimed at transforming India's education system (Ministry of Education, 2020). One of its key objectives is to redesign the assessment framework so that it supports meaningful learning rather than rote memorisation. The policy emphasises competency-based evaluation, continuous assessment, and the holistic development of learners (Ministry of Education, 2020). A major innovation proposed under NEP 2020 is the Holistic Progress Card (HPC), which replaces traditional report cards with a multidimensional assessment framework. The HPC aims to capture a learner's development across various domains, including academic performance, social-emotional growth, creativity, and physical well-being (CBSE, 2022). Unlike conventional report cards that focus mainly on marks and grades, the Holistic Progress Card provides descriptive feedback and encourages the participation of students in the assessment process through self-evaluation and peer assessment (PARAKH, 2023).

This shift reflects a broader educational philosophy that views assessment as a tool for learning and development rather than merely a method of ranking students (Black and Wiliam, 1998).

### Review of Literature

Assessment has long been recognised as a central component of the teaching–learning process. Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam (1998) emphasised that formative assessment significantly enhances student learning by providing continuous feedback and guiding instructional practices. Their work established assessment as a tool for learning rather than merely a mechanism for evaluation.

The OECD (2013) highlighted that traditional examination systems often fail to assess higher-order thinking skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving. It advocated for competency-based assessment systems that focus on learners' ability to apply knowledge in real-life situations. Similarly, UNESCO (2015) stressed the importance of holistic and inclusive assessment practices that address cognitive, social-emotional, and ethical dimensions of learning.

In the Indian context, the National Curriculum Framework 2005 proposed a shift from rote learning to understanding-based education and recommended continuous and comprehensive evaluation. Building on this vision, the National Education Policy 2020 introduced significant reforms in assessment, emphasising competency-based evaluation, flexibility in examinations, and the development of the Holistic Progress Card (HPC).

Studies by Kumar (2021) and Rao (2022) indicate that assessment reforms in India are gradually moving towards learner-centred approaches, though challenges such as teacher preparedness and infrastructural limitations persist. Sharma and Gupta (2022) further highlighted the importance of integrating life skills and interdisciplinary learning into assessment practices.

Recent guidelines by Central Board of Secondary Education (2022) and National Council of Educational Research and Training (2022) provide a structured framework for implementing the Holistic Progress Card, focusing on multidimensional evaluation and continuous feedback mechanisms. However, these studies and policy documents primarily address the conceptual and structural aspects, with limited focus on field-level implementation.

### Research Gap

Despite the growing emphasis on assessment reforms in the National Education Policy 2020, existing literature largely focuses on the theoretical foundations of competency-based and holistic assessment. Studies by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam (1998) highlight the importance of formative assessment, while global organisations such as OECD and UNESCO emphasise the need for learner-centred and multidimensional evaluation systems. However, there is limited research that examines the practical

implementation of holistic assessment frameworks within the Indian school context, particularly at the state level. While policy documents and national guidelines provide a broad framework for reforms, empirical and descriptive studies focusing on how these reforms are being operationalised in real school settings remain inadequate. Specifically, in the context of Odisha, very few studies have explored the implementation of the Holistic Progress Card (HPC) in PM SHRI schools, including the processes, challenges, and institutional mechanisms involved. Moreover, there is a lack of integrated analysis that connects theoretical perspectives of holistic assessment with actual practices in schools. Therefore, the present study attempts to bridge this gap by analysing assessment reforms under NEP 2020 and examining how holistic assessment practices are being operationalised in PM SHRI schools of Odisha. It contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing a contextualised understanding of policy implementation and its implications for meaningful learning.

### Objectives of the Study

- I. To analyse the need for reform in the traditional assessment system.
- II. To reveal the assessment reforms in NEP 2020
- III. To reveal the steps undertaken by the PM SHRI Schools of Odisha to operationalise the targets of holistic assessment

### Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research design to analyse the concept and implementation of holistic assessment in the context of NEP 2020. The study is primarily based on secondary data sources, making use of policy documents, reports, and academic literature.

### Data sources

The data for the study have been collected from:

- Policy documents such as the National Education Policy 2020
- Reports and guidelines published by National Council of Educational Research and Training and Central Board of Secondary Education
- Publications and reports from international organisations such as OECD and UNESCO
- Research articles, journals, and government reports related to assessment reforms and holistic education
- Official documents related to PM SHRI schools in Odisha

### Method of Analysis

The study employs document analysis as the primary method for data interpretation. Relevant documents were systematically reviewed to:

- Identify key themes related to holistic assessment
- Analyse assessment reforms proposed under NEP 2020
- Examine the framework and implementation strategies of the Holistic Progress Card

The information was organised into thematic categories such as:

- Concept of holistic assessment
- Need for reform in the traditional assessment system
- Assessment reforms in NEP 2020
- Establishment of PARAKH
- Holistic Progress Card (HPC) under NEP 2020

- Components of Holistic Assessment
- Holistic Report Card in the PM SHRI Schools of Odisha
- Justification and Outcomes of the Holistic Report Card
- Advantages and challenges in holistic assessment

### Concept of Holistic Assessment

Holistic assessment refers to an evaluation approach that considers the overall development of learners rather than focusing exclusively on academic achievement (UNESCO, 2015). It recognises that education involves multiple dimensions of growth, including intellectual, emotional, social, and physical development (NCERT, 2005). In holistic assessment, students are evaluated through diverse methods such as classroom observation, project work, group activities, reflective journals, portfolios, and presentations (CBSE, 2022). These methods allow teachers to gain a deeper understanding of how students learn and apply knowledge in different contexts (Black and Wiliam, 1998).

The holistic approach is generally based on three major domains of learning. The cognitive domain involves intellectual abilities such as understanding concepts, analysing information, and solving problems (Benjamin Bloom, 1956). Assessment in this domain focuses on conceptual clarity and the ability to apply knowledge in real-life situations. The affective domain includes emotional and social aspects of development, such as empathy, cooperation, and respect for others (David Krathwohl et al., 1964). The psychomotor domain refers to physical skills and practical abilities developed through activities such as sports, arts, and hands-on learning (Anita Harrow, 1972).

Holistic assessment integrates these domains to provide a comprehensive understanding of a student's growth and development (National Education Policy 2020, 2020).

### Need for reform in the traditional assessment system

For many years, the Indian education system relied heavily on summative examinations conducted at the end of academic terms. While such examinations provided standardised measures of achievement, they also had several limitations (Ministry of Education, 2020). Overemphasis on memorisation implies that traditional examinations often require students to reproduce information from textbooks without demonstrating conceptual understanding (NCERT, 2005). In traditional assessment strategies, only limited skills are evaluated. Skills such as creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking are rarely assessed through conventional written examinations (OECD, 2013).

Examination stress is another major challenge in traditional assessment systems. High-stakes examinations create intense pressure on students, leading to anxiety and unhealthy competition (UNESCO, 2015). Lack of comprehensive feedback is also a significant limitation. Traditional report cards provide limited insights into students' strengths, interests, and areas for improvement (CBSE, 2022). These limitations highlight the need for a more comprehensive and meaningful assessment system.

The present system of secondary school examinations, including Board exams and entrance tests, has created several challenges in the education system. Many students spend a considerable amount of time in coaching centres and focus primarily on test preparation rather than meaningful learning (National Education Policy 2020, 2020). This exam-oriented approach reduces opportunities for deep conceptual understanding and the development of essential skills. Another issue is that these examinations often encourage students to study within a narrow range of subjects, limiting their freedom to explore diverse areas of interest. However, the future vision of education emphasises flexibility, multidisciplinary learning, and student choice. Therefore, the current examination system needs to be reformed to support broader

learning and holistic development rather than narrow exam preparation (National Education Policy 2020, 2020).

### **Assessment reforms in NEP 2020**

The goal of assessment in schools is expected to shift from a primary focus on final examinations and memorisation to a more continuous and meaningful process of evaluating learning (National Education Policy 2020, 2020). Instead of merely assessing how much information students can recall, assessments will be conducted regularly and will focus on students' competencies and overall development. This approach encourages deeper understanding by evaluating abilities such as analysis, critical thinking, and conceptual clarity (OECD, 2013).

The main purpose of assessment will be to support learning rather than simply judge performance. It will help teachers understand students' progress and learning needs, while also enabling students to reflect on their own learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998). In this way, assessment will guide improvements in teaching methods and learning strategies. Ultimately, the education system will use assessment as a tool to continuously enhance the teaching–learning process and ensure better learning outcomes for every student (UNESCO, 2015).

Board examinations for Grades 10 and 12 will continue, but the current examination system will be reformed to reduce excessive dependence on coaching classes (National Education Policy 2020, 2020). The redesigned Board exams will aim to support the holistic development of students. Learners will be given greater flexibility to choose subjects according to their interests. The exams will become more competency-based, focusing on core understanding rather than rote memorisation or prolonged exam coaching. Students who regularly attend classes and engage sincerely with their studies should be able to perform well without external coaching (National Education Policy 2020, 2020).

To reduce the pressure associated with high-stakes examinations, students will be allowed to take Board exams twice a year—once as the main examination and again as an improvement attempt if desired (National Education Policy 2020, 2020). Further reforms aim to create a more flexible and balanced assessment system. These may include annual, semester, or modular examinations covering smaller portions of the syllabus, thereby distributing exam pressure across the academic year. Subjects such as mathematics may be offered at different levels of difficulty, allowing students to choose based on their abilities and interests.

In addition, Board examinations may be redesigned to include both objective and descriptive components, ensuring a balanced evaluation of knowledge and understanding. These reforms collectively aim to reduce examination stress and the coaching culture while promoting meaningful and holistic learning (National Education Policy 2020, 2020).

### **Establishment of PARAKH**

The policy proposes establishing a National Assessment Centre called PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development). This centre will act as a national body responsible for setting standards and guidelines for student assessment across all recognised school boards in India (National Education Policy 2020, 2020). Its main aim is to improve the quality and consistency of evaluation practices in the school education system.

PARAKH will guide national and state-level assessments such as the National Achievement Survey (NAS) and the State Achievement Survey (SAS) to monitor students' learning outcomes across the country (Ministry of Education, 2021). It will also support school boards in redesigning their assessment systems to focus on 21st-century skills rather than rote memorisation (National Education Policy 2020, 2020).

In addition, the centre will guide school boards on modern assessment practices and recent developments in evaluation research (NCERT, 2022). It will promote collaboration among different boards and facilitate the sharing of best practices. Another important role of PARAKH will be to ensure comparability of academic standards across boards, thereby ensuring fairness and consistency in student assessment nationwide (National Education Policy 2020, 2020).

### **Holistic Progress Card (HPC) under NEP 2020**

The policy introduces the Holistic Progress Card (HPC) to provide a multidimensional record of student progress across different aspects of learning and development (National Education Policy 2020, 2020). The progress card used in schools to inform parents about their children's learning will be redesigned by States and Union Territories with guidance from national and state education bodies. Instead of only showing marks, the new progress card will present a comprehensive picture of a child's development (CBSE, 2022).

It will be a 360-degree report that highlights the individual strengths and growth of each learner in three key domains: cognitive (thinking and understanding), affective (attitudes and values), and psychomotor (skills and physical abilities) (Benjamin Bloom, 1956; David Krathwohl et al., 1964). The new progress card will include multiple forms of evaluation, such as self-assessment by students and peer feedback, along with teacher assessment (Black and Wiliam, 1998). It will also reflect students' participation and progress in activities such as project work, inquiry-based learning, quizzes, role-plays, group tasks, and portfolios, thereby capturing the overall learning experience rather than focusing solely on examination scores (NCERT, 2005).

This holistic progress report will strengthen the connection between home and school. Schools will discuss the report with parents during parent-teacher meetings so that they can actively support their children's development. The information in the report will guide both teachers and parents in supporting students' learning inside and outside the classroom (UNESCO, 2015).

In addition, technology may be used to support this system. AI-based tools can help track students' learning progress over time by analysing data and feedback from students, parents, and teachers, providing insights into strengths, interests, and areas for improvement (OECD, 2021).

Overall, the Holistic Progress Card is a comprehensive assessment framework designed to capture the multidimensional development of learners. It tracks progress across cognitive, socio-emotional, and psychomotor domains and replaces the traditional one-dimensional report card system (National Education Policy 2020, 2020). It includes evaluation based on competency-based learning, interdisciplinary activities, and continuous observation. Furthermore, the HPC promotes collaboration among teachers, parents, and students by incorporating self-assessment and peer assessment as essential components of evaluation, thereby encouraging learners to take responsibility for their own development (Black and Wiliam, 1998).

### **Components of Holistic Assessment**

Holistic assessment under the National Education Policy 2020 includes several key components that reflect the comprehensive development of learners (National Education Policy 2020, 2020).

#### **Academic competencies**

Academic competencies involve conceptual understanding, analytical thinking, and the application of knowledge across subjects (NCERT, 2005). This aligns with competency-based education, which emphasises higher-order thinking skills rather than rote memorisation (OECD, 2013).

#### **Life skills**

Life skills include communication, teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving abilities, which are essential for functioning effectively in real-life situations (UNESCO, 2015). These skills are increasingly recognised as critical for 21st-century learning (OECD, 2018).

#### Social and emotional development

Assessment also focuses on social and emotional aspects such as empathy, respect for diversity, and the ability to collaborate with others (CASEL, 2020). These competencies contribute to the overall well-being and interpersonal effectiveness of learners.

#### Creativity and innovation

Students are encouraged to express creativity through activities such as arts, storytelling, design thinking, and innovation (NCERT, 2005). Promoting creativity is essential for fostering critical thinking and problem-solving in complex situations (UNESCO, 2015).

#### Physical development

Participation in sports and physical activities is recognised as an integral part of holistic development, contributing to physical fitness, discipline, and teamwork (National Education Policy 2020, 2020).

### **Holistic Report Card in the PM SHRI Schools of Odisha**

The Holistic Report Card (HRC), also referred to as the Holistic Progress Card (HPC), has been introduced under the PM SHRI Schools initiative to promote a more comprehensive approach to student assessment. It aligns with the vision of the National Education Policy 2020 and the guidelines of NCERT, which emphasise evaluating the overall development of learners rather than focusing solely on examination scores (National Education Policy 2020, 2020; NCERT, 2022).

Unlike traditional report cards that primarily highlight marks and grades, the HRC provides a broader and more meaningful representation of a student's development by capturing multiple dimensions of learning and personal growth. It includes academic achievement across subjects as well as participation in co-curricular activities such as sports, arts, cultural programmes, and creative expression (CBSE, 2022). Furthermore, the report card reflects the development of essential life skills and key competencies, including critical thinking, communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership abilities, which are considered crucial for 21st-century learning (OECD, 2018). In addition, it incorporates values and behavioural attributes such as respect for diversity, discipline, responsibility, and emotional well-being, thereby presenting a comprehensive profile of each learner (UNESCO, 2015).

In the Indian context, particularly in Odisha, the Holistic Progress Card initiative has been implemented across all 449 PM SHRI schools approved in the state. This initiative aims to ensure fairness, uniformity, and a child-centred approach in assessment practices while promoting holistic development (Ministry of Education, 2023). To operationalise this initiative, a customised HPC template was developed for PM SHRI schools in Odisha based on the framework provided by NCERT. This template integrates both quantitative indicators (such as marks, grades, and participation levels) and qualitative inputs (including student self-assessment, teacher feedback, and parental observations) (NCERT, 2022).

The standardised template was disseminated across all participating schools to ensure consistency in implementation. Teachers were provided with orientation and training to understand the principles of holistic assessment and the effective use of the progress card. During implementation, the HPCs were distributed to students and used to document both scholastic and co-scholastic development. Schools also integrated the process with parent-teacher meetings to strengthen parental engagement in the learning process (CBSE, 2022).

To ensure effective execution, monitoring mechanisms have been established at district and block levels, and continuous feedback is being collected from teachers and schools. This feedback-driven approach is

expected to refine and improve the assessment framework in subsequent cycles. Overall, the initiative supports continuous and comprehensive tracking of students' learning and development, thereby contributing to a more meaningful and equitable education system (PM SHRI Odisha, 2024–2025).

### **Justification and Outcomes of the Holistic Report Card**

The Holistic Report Card represents a shift from traditional examination-based evaluation to a more comprehensive and competency-based system of assessment (National Education Policy 2020, 2020). Instead of focusing only on memorisation and marks, it evaluates the overall development of students through continuous and meaningful assessment (CBSE, 2022).

The report card provides a 360-degree view of each learner by considering academic performance along with life skills, creativity, social values, and participation in co-curricular activities (NCERT, 2005). This approach is child-centred, as it highlights the strengths, interests, and potential of every student, enabling teachers and parents to provide more personalised support (UNESCO, 2015).

It also aligns with the vision of the National Education Policy 2020, which promotes conceptual understanding, skill development, and holistic learning (National Education Policy 2020, 2020). By regularly monitoring student progress, teachers can identify learning gaps early and provide timely support (Black and Wiliam, 1998).

Furthermore, the Holistic Report Card encourages active communication and collaboration among teachers, parents, and students, strengthening their engagement in the learning process (OECD, 2013). The use of a common format across all PM SHRI schools in Odisha also promotes uniformity and fairness in assessment practices (Ministry of Education, 2023).

Overall, the system supports the creation of comprehensive learner profiles and promotes balanced development beyond academic achievement (National Education Policy 2020, 2020).

### **Advantages of Holistic Assessment**

Holistic assessment offers several significant advantages for both students and educators by promoting a more comprehensive and learner-centred approach to evaluation (National Education Policy 2020, 2020). Holistic assessment encourages students to focus on understanding concepts and applying knowledge rather than relying on rote memorisation (NCERT, 2005). This approach supports deeper learning and the development of higher-order thinking skills (OECD, 2013). The system acknowledges that learners possess diverse abilities, interests, and learning styles, thereby promoting inclusive and equitable education (UNESCO, 2015). It enables teachers to cater to individual needs and support personalised learning pathways. Continuous and formative assessment reduces the pressure associated with high-stakes examinations, helping to minimise student anxiety and unhealthy competition (OECD, 2013). Holistic assessment promotes active student involvement through self-assessment and peer feedback, fostering reflective thinking and learner autonomy (Black and Wiliam, 1998). It offers detailed and continuous feedback, enabling teachers and parents to gain deeper insights into students' strengths, progress, and areas for improvement (CBSE, 2022). This facilitates timely support and enhances the overall teaching–learning process.

### **Challenges of Holistic Assessment**

While holistic assessment offers many benefits, its implementation in real classroom settings is not without challenges. One of the primary concerns is the increased workload for teachers. Since holistic assessment involves continuous observation, detailed feedback, and the use of multiple evaluation methods, it requires

significant time and effort from teachers (OECD, 2013). Many teachers already manage large class sizes, making it difficult to carry out such comprehensive assessments effectively.

Another major challenge is the lack of proper training and orientation. Teachers may not always be adequately prepared to design competency-based assessments or to evaluate socio-emotional and psychomotor domains (NCERT, 2005). Without sufficient professional development, the implementation of holistic assessment may remain superficial or inconsistent.

Subjectivity in evaluation is also a concern. Unlike traditional examinations with fixed answers, holistic assessment often involves qualitative judgments. This can lead to variations in grading and may raise questions about fairness and reliability (UNESCO, 2015). Ensuring standardisation across different schools and teachers becomes a complex task.

In addition, there are infrastructural and resource constraints, particularly in many government schools. Limited access to teaching–learning materials, digital tools, and supportive environments can hinder the effective implementation of diverse assessment methods (National Education Policy 2020, 2020).

Another practical difficulty is the resistance to change among stakeholders. Parents and even some educators are accustomed to traditional marks-based systems and may find it difficult to understand or trust descriptive and competency-based evaluations (CBSE, 2022). This mindset can slow down the adoption of new assessment practices.

Finally, maintaining proper documentation and record-keeping for continuous assessment can be challenging. Teachers need to systematically record observations, student progress, and feedback, which can become overwhelming without adequate support systems or technological tools (OECD, 2013).

Overall, while holistic assessment aligns well with the vision of the National Education Policy 2020, its success depends on addressing these challenges through teacher training, institutional support, and a gradual shift in educational practices.

## Conclusion

Holistic assessment marks a meaningful shift in the way we understand learning and evaluate students. Moving beyond the narrow focus on marks and examinations, it recognises that every learner is unique, with different strengths, interests, and ways of growing. By giving equal importance to cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development, this approach makes assessment more humane, inclusive, and relevant to real life (National Education Policy 2020, 2020). It transforms assessment from a one-time judgment into a continuous process that supports learning, builds confidence, and nurtures the overall personality of students.

At the same time, the success of holistic assessment depends on how effectively it is implemented in schools. Teachers need adequate training, time, and institutional support to design meaningful assessments and provide constructive feedback. Similarly, parents and students must also understand and accept this shift from marks to meaningful learning (UNESCO, 2015). Without collective effort and awareness, the true potential of this system may not be fully realised.

Despite these challenges, the long-term benefits of holistic assessment are significant. It promotes deeper understanding, reduces exam-related stress, and prepares learners with essential life skills needed for the 21st century (OECD, 2013). More importantly, it places the learner at the centre of the educational process, encouraging self-reflection, responsibility, and active participation in learning.

In essence, holistic assessment is not just a reform in evaluation practices but a step towards transforming the culture of education itself. It aligns with the broader vision of developing well-rounded individuals who are not only academically competent but also socially responsible, emotionally balanced, and capable

of lifelong learning. If implemented thoughtfully and consistently, it has the potential to make education more meaningful, equitable, and truly empowering for every learner.

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