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From scores to skills: Shifting the focus in student assessment

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Abstract

The conventional education system has historically used score-based evaluations to measure student performance, with a focus on memorization and rote learning at the expense of practical application. In today's fast-paced global environment, the method is increasingly being viewed as insufficient. As business and the labor market require critical thinking, creativity, teamwork, and problem-solving skills, there is a strong requirement to shift assessment strategies towards a greater emphasis on developing skills over academic scores. This research paper investigates the shift from marks-based assessments towards skill-based ones, focusing on the limits of traditional testing mechanisms. It identifies the ways in which such tests tend to fail to capture key competencies like emotional intelligence, communication skills, leadership, and adaptability all of which are critical for success in the real world. Taking cues from educational reforms such as India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and successful international models in nations such as Finland and Singapore, the study highlights the applicability and importance of implementing skill-based assessment systems. In addition, the paper analyzes the challenges of implementation in the Indian education system, such as training teachers, redesigning the curriculum, and incorporating digital instruments. It also makes suggestions for developing a more comprehensive, inclusive, and future-oriented assessment structure. By breaking free from scores and embracing a skill-based paradigm, instructors can guarantee that students are both academically proficient and personally and professionally equipped to address the challenges of the 21st century. This shift is not a reform, though; it is an evolution in modern schooling that the time demands.

Keywords: Skill-based assessment, holistic education, student evaluation, skills, educational reform

Introduction

Assessment is an essential part of education, used as more than a tool to measure academic performance but also to encourage future learning and student involvement in learning, while providing information to teachers. Traditionally, student assessments have been characterized by standardized testing, quizzes, and numerical grades a structure that favors memorization and theoretical understanding over practical application and conceptual learning (Tanner, 2021) ^[15]. While these strategies have a level of measurability, they fall short of encompassing a wide range of skills and abilities required in a fast-paced, constantly evolving, technology-reliant world. The global need for workforces is much different now in the 21st century. Qualities such as critical thinking, creativity, emotional intelligence, communication, collaboration, adaptability and problem-solving are highly sought after in candidates beyond mere academic idealism (World Economic Forum, 2020) ^[16]. Sadly, the old score-based measures cannot adequately assess these qualities. Consequently, a lot of students who are gifted with great interpersonal, analytical, or practical abilities go unnoticed under the traditional academic systems (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2017) ^[4].

This growing gap between education and employment has prompted a global focus on skill-based education and assessment. Skill based assessment is the degree to which students can apply their theoretical knowledge to practice, demonstrate critical competencies, and engage in authentic activities. Such form of assessment may include different forms such as project work, group work, portfolio, presentation and peer/self-assessment and would yield a holistic and personalized view into student abilities (Guskey, 2003) ^[8]. This change is being increasingly recognized by governments and education policy makers. India's recently announced National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, for example, stresses

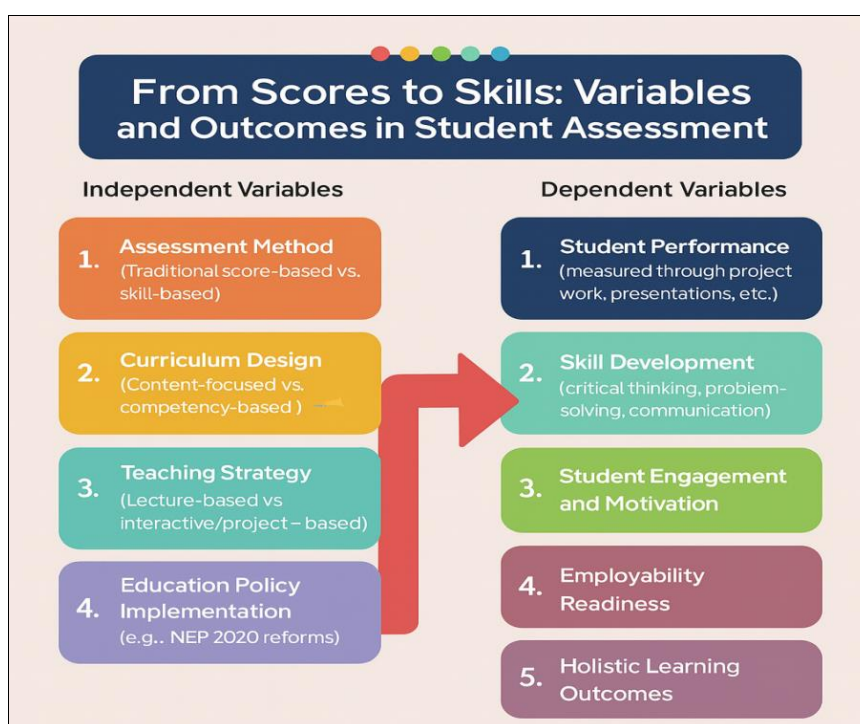
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"competency-based learning" and suggests reducing high-stakes testing in preference for wider, continuous, and formative assessment. Likewise, education curricula promoting creativity, autonomy, and lifelong learning, establishing best practices in successful education reform (OECD, 2019) ^[12]. The aim of this paper is to explore the necessity of transitioning the education system from a focus on grades to one centered on skills. It will examine the shortcomings of score-based assessments, analyze theoretical frameworks that support skill-based evaluation, investigate exemplary international models, and offer recommendations for integrating skill-focused assessments in Indian classrooms. The transition from scores to skills represents more than just a pedagogical change; it signifies a profound transformation that aligns education with the requirements of a rapidly evolving world. Many countries are leading this change effectively. For instance, Finland postpones standardized testing until secondary school and prioritizes formative, competency-based learning. Singapore has moved towards holistic development frameworks, reducing the emphasis on grades while highlighting 21st-century skills. Similarly, India, through its National

Education Policy 2020, has made significant strides by promoting competency-based education and moving away from rote learning methods. This policy strongly advocates for formative assessments, experiential learning, and the integration of skills, a move that has garnered widespread approval from educators and employers (Government of India, 2020) ^[7]. The transition from scores to skills is not simply a passing trend but a practical response to the demands of a swiftly changing environment. Education must prepare learners not only to pass exams but also to navigate complexities, address real-world problems, and function effectively in diverse cultural contexts. This research paper aims to examine the reasons behind the global shift towards skill-based evaluation, highlight the disadvantages of score-based assessments, analyze successful case studies, and suggest actionable strategies for implementing this transition, especially within the Indian educational framework. By shifting the focus from grades to meaningful learning, educators and policymakers can ensure that students graduate not only with high marks but also with the skills and confidence necessary for their future endeavors.



Literature Review

Fastré *et al.* (2010) ^[6] A study was conducted to compare performance-based assessment criteria with competence-based assessment criteria among vocational students. The results indicated that performance-based assessment not only enhanced the quality of task completion but also improved students' ability to self-assess accurately. This implies that an emphasis on demonstrable skills results in superior learning outcomes and more accurately reflects actual capabilities compared to conventional scoring methods.

Andrade and Valtcheva (2009) ^[2] Investigated the impact of self-assessment on improving student learning. The findings indicated that self-assessment enhances met cognitive awareness and motivates students to assume more responsibility for their academic development. This reflective method is in harmony with skill-based assessment

frameworks, which focus on promoting deeper learning instead of merely accumulating scores.

Aladini, Bayat, and Abdellatif (2024) ^[1] the study investigated performance-based assessments in both virtual and traditional classroom settings. The results indicated that these assessment methods greatly improve motivation, academic resilience, and student engagement. These conclusions strengthen the notion that skill-based learning is effective in various educational environments, highlighting its adaptability and significance in contemporary education systems.

Ozan and Kınca (2018) ^[13] investigated the effects of formative assessment on student achievement, attitudes, and self-regulation. Their results demonstrated a significant improvement in all these areas when skill-based, formative approaches were employed. This research highlights the transformative impact of continuous, feedback-driven

assessment strategies over rigid, traditional exam formats. Panahi and Aslrasouli (2022) ^[14] A study was conducted on learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to evaluate the impact of performance-based reading assessments. The findings revealed that these assessments boosted student motivation, enhanced self-efficacy, and reduced test anxiety. These outcomes reinforce the perspective that evaluations centered on skills not only improve academic performance but also contribute positively to emotional and psychological well-being.

In 2024, Mouti and Al-Chalabi ^[11] created an AI-driven intelligent assessment system based on Bloom’s Taxonomy. Their framework successfully assessed both theoretical understanding and the application of practical skills. This technology-oriented method demonstrates how artificial intelligence can be utilized to develop dynamic, tailored assessments that correspond with competency-based educational objectives

De Lera (2024) ^[5] A systematic review was conducted on authentic assessment practices in higher education institutions worldwide. The findings indicated that project-based, real-world tasks greatly enhance critical thinking, collaboration, and communication skills. In contrast to standardized exams, these approaches offer a more comprehensive and relevant evaluation of a student's preparedness for real-world challenges.

Islam, Ahmadi, and Yousaf (2017) ^[9] the study examined the effects of various assessment formats on learning within undergraduate education. It revealed that interactive, skills-oriented tasks fostered a deeper comprehension and better retention of concepts. This finding aligns with the increasing demand to substitute traditional, memory-focused testing with more adaptable and practical assessment methods.

Messer *et al.* (2023) ^[10] reviewed the use of automated grading tools in programming education. They discovered that these tools not only reduce grading time but also provide immediate, meaningful feedback to students, thereby improving their coding skills. This integration of technology into assessment reinforces the effectiveness of tech-supported skill development.

Finally, Combéfis and de Moffarts (2019) ^[3] explored the implementation of automated, unit test-based programming

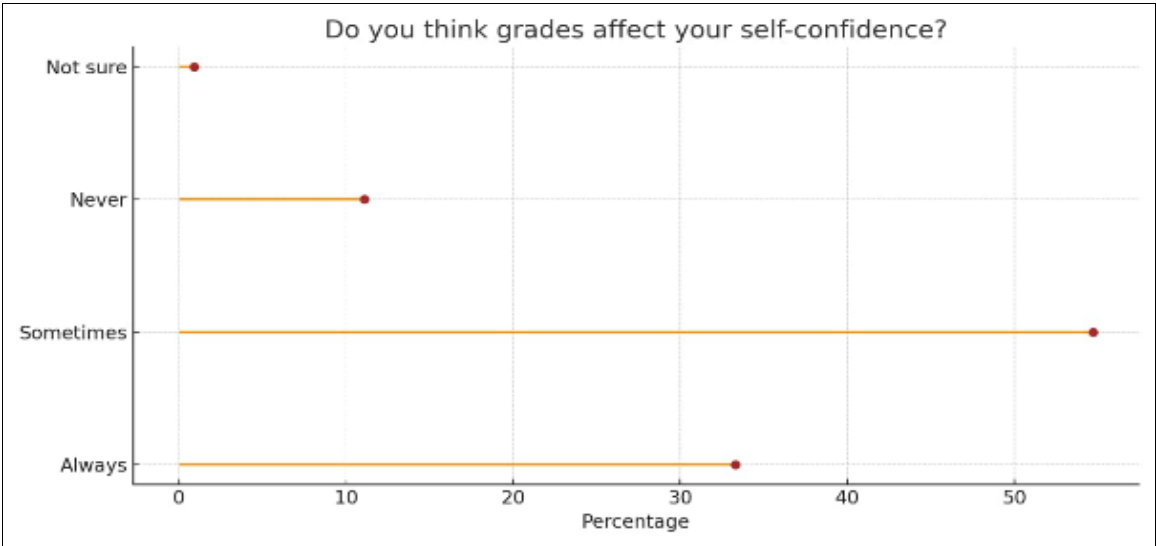
assessments. Their findings showed that such assessments allow for scalable, objective grading while still ensuring the demonstration of core competencies. This research strengthens the argument for replacing traditional grading systems with tools that accurately evaluate real skills.

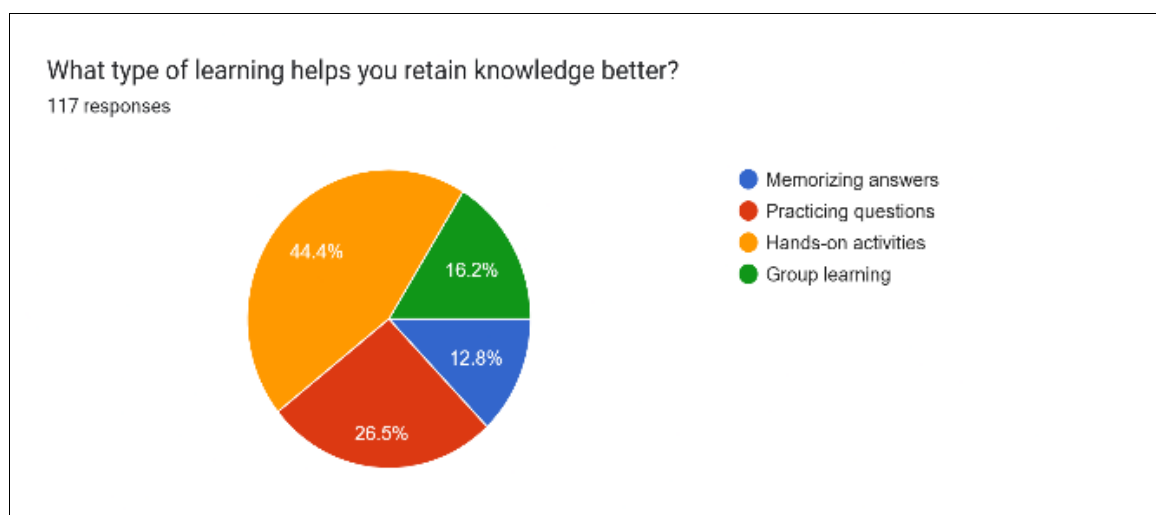
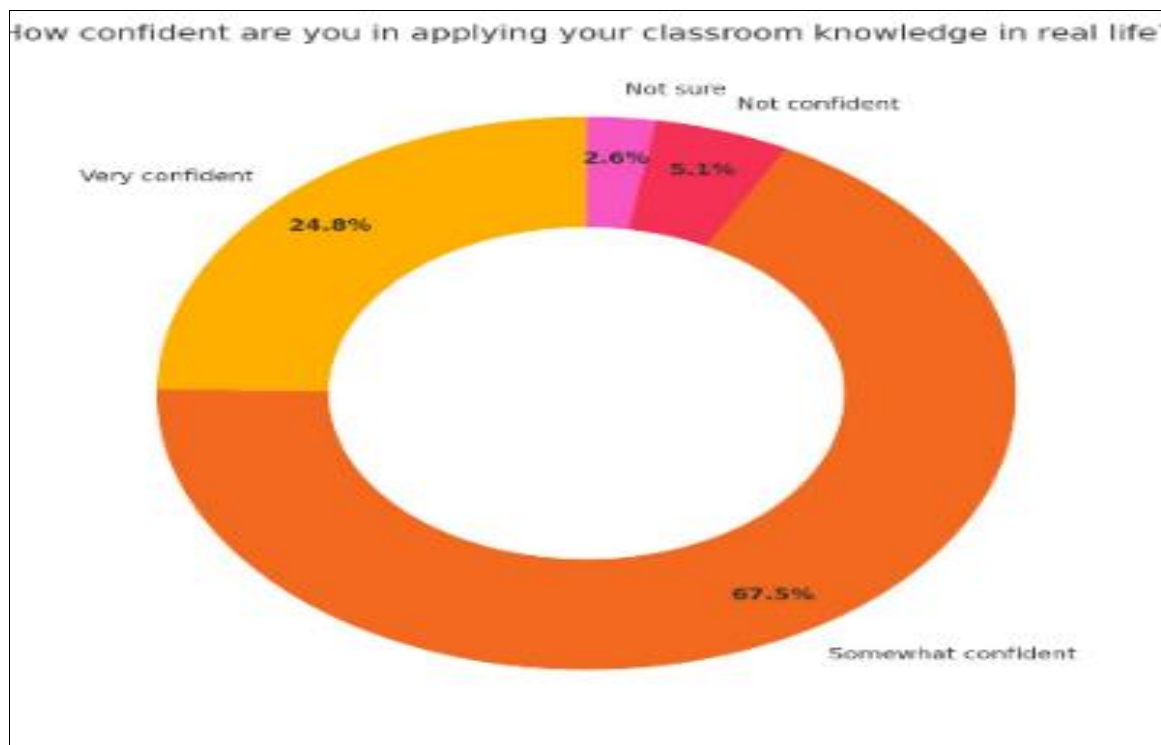
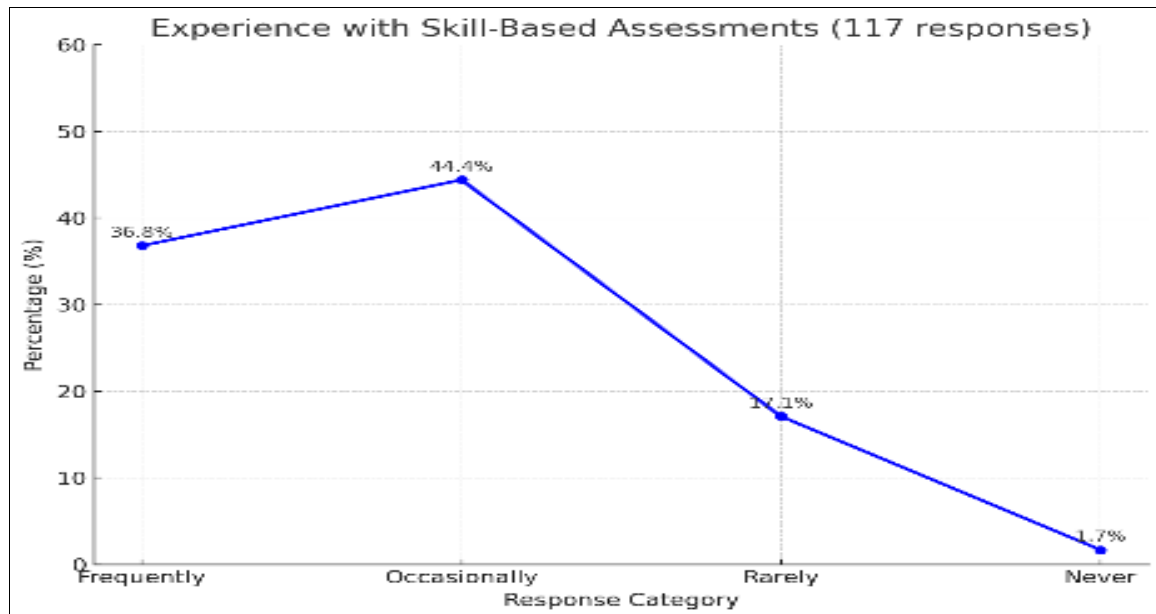
Objectives

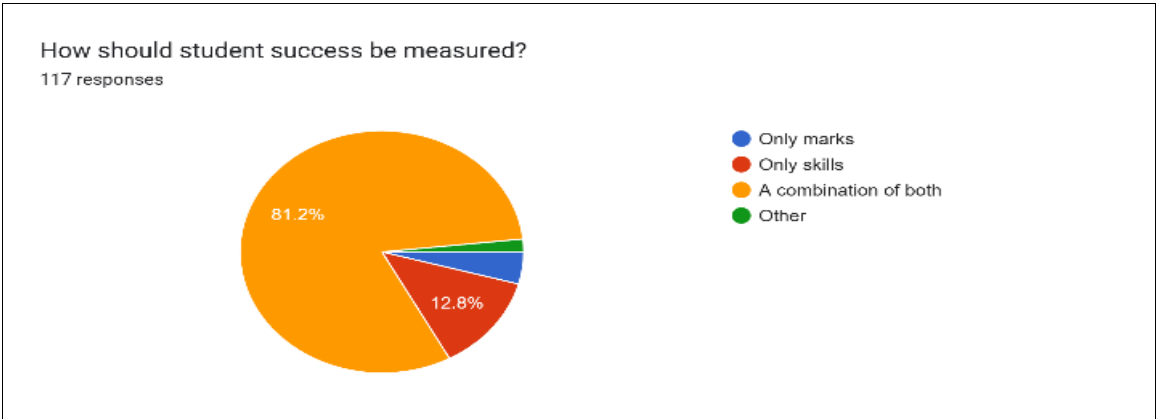
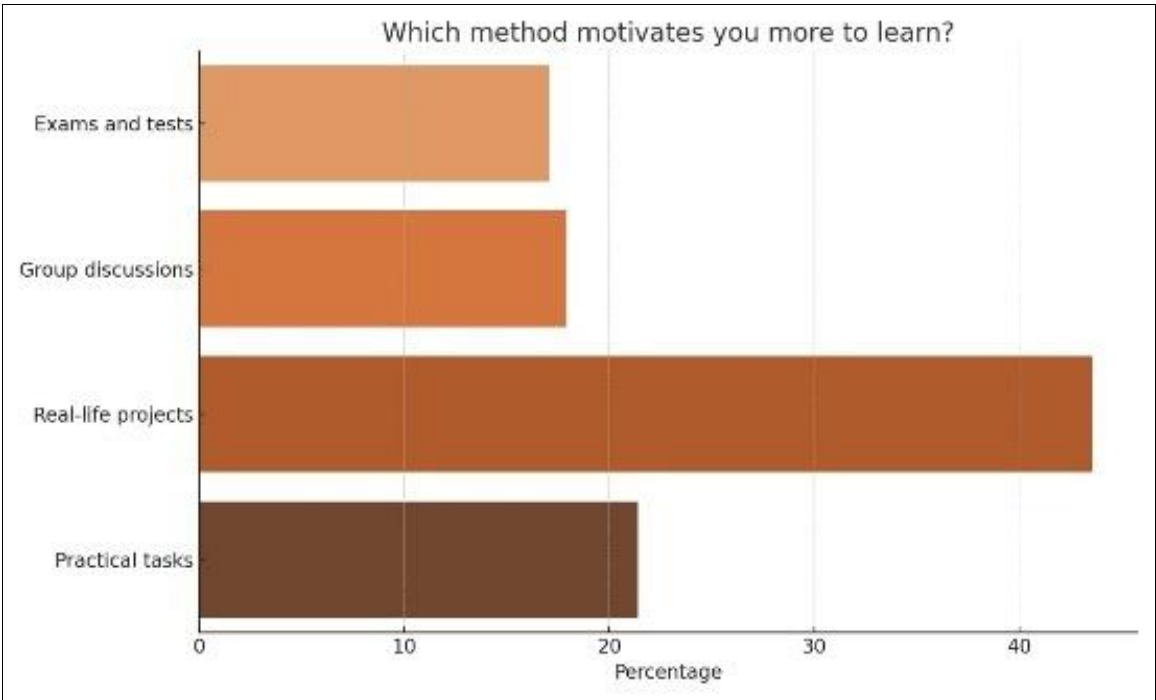
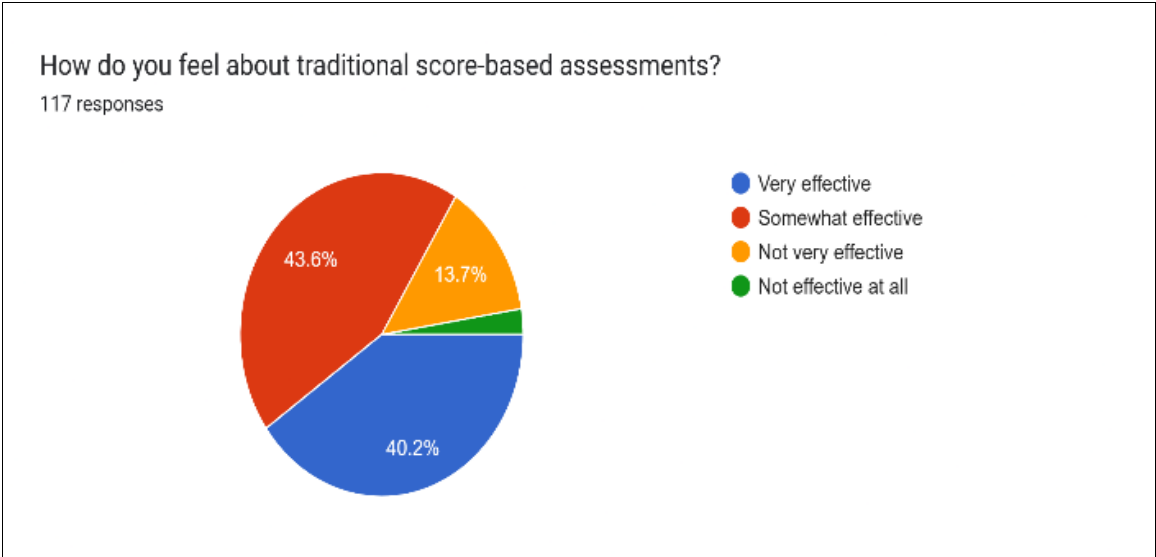
- To analyze the limitations of traditional score-based student assessment systems.
- To explore the effectiveness of skill-based assessment in enhancing student learning outcomes.
- To evaluate the role of formative and performance-based assessments in developing 21st-century skills.
- To identify the best global practices in implementing skill-based education models.
- To recommend strategies for integrating skill-focused assessments into the Indian education system.

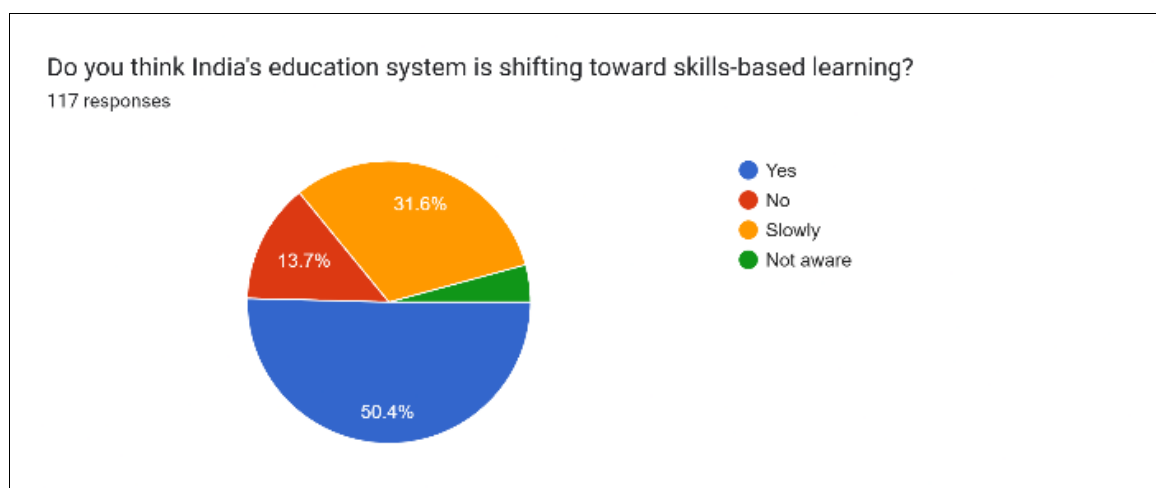
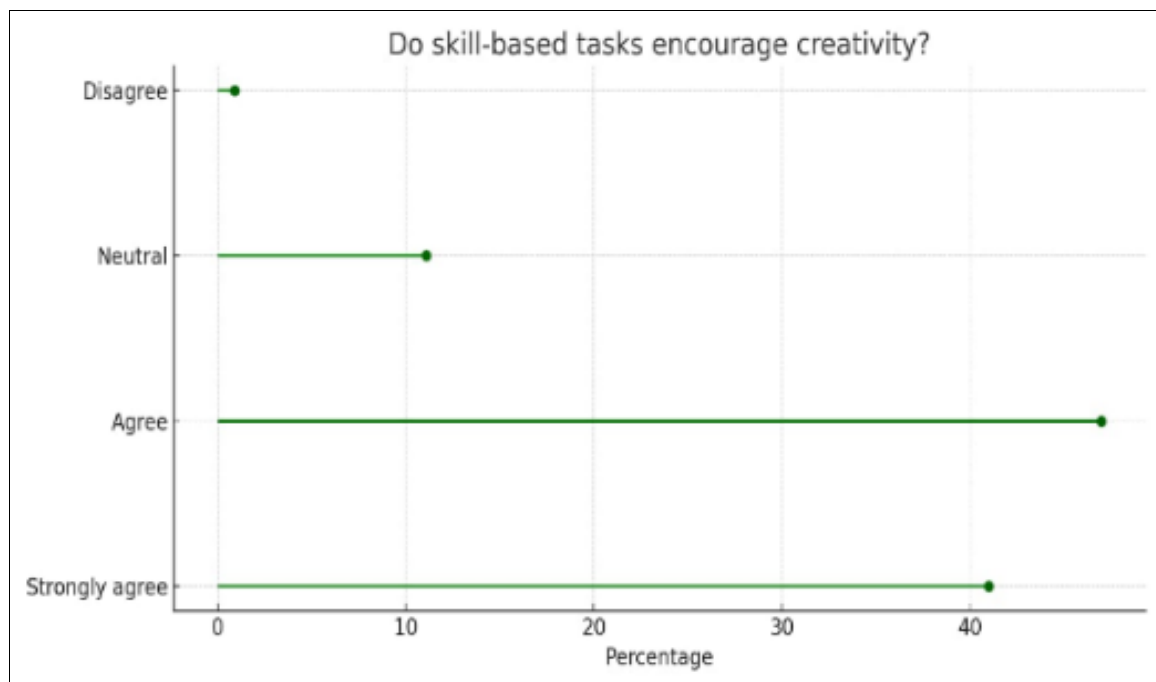
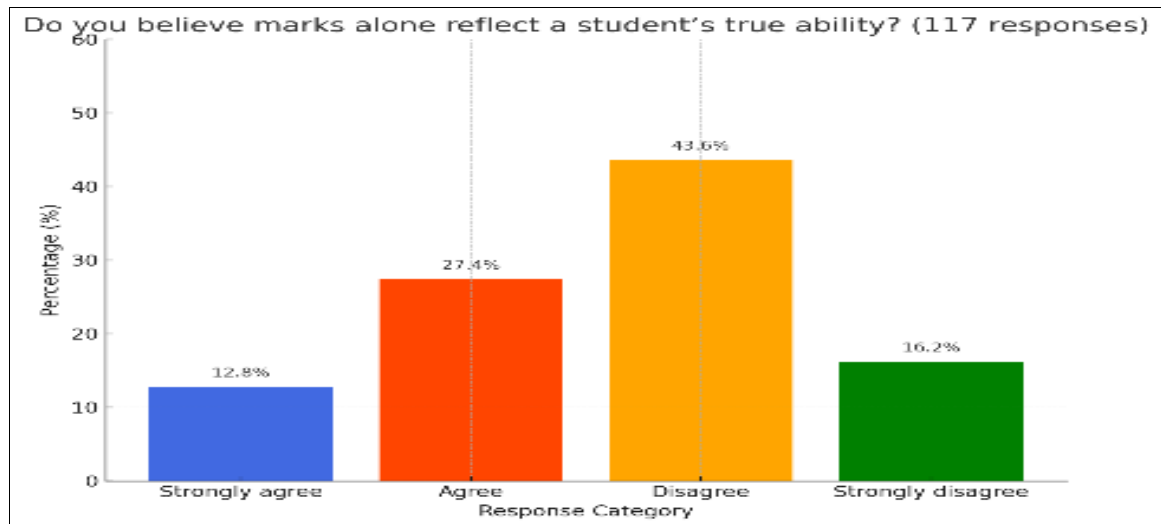
Research Methodology

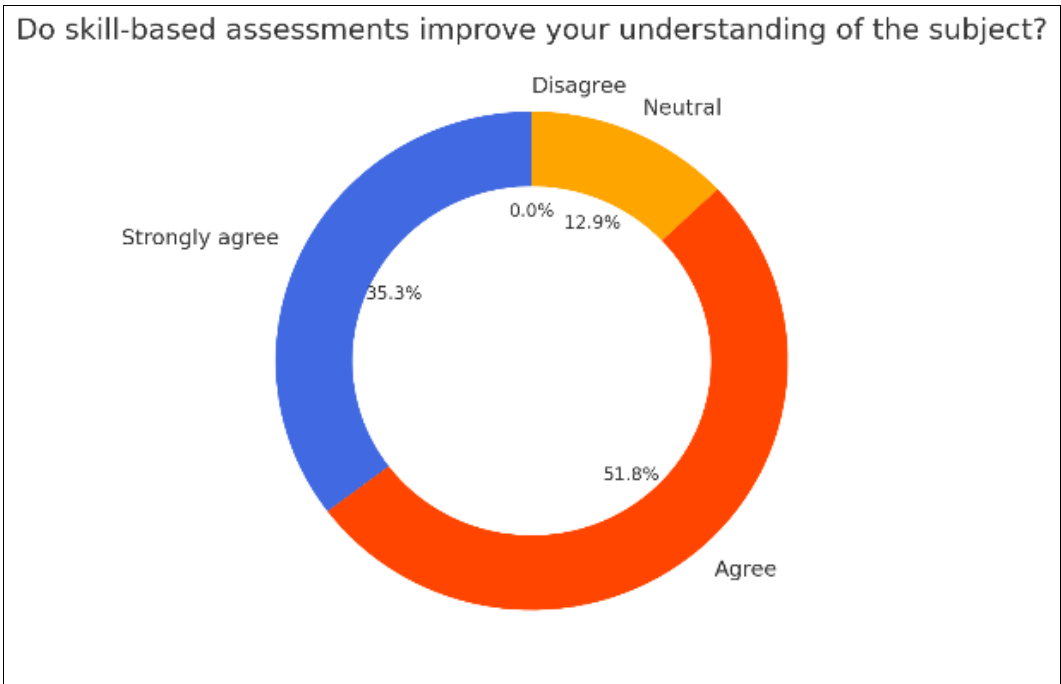
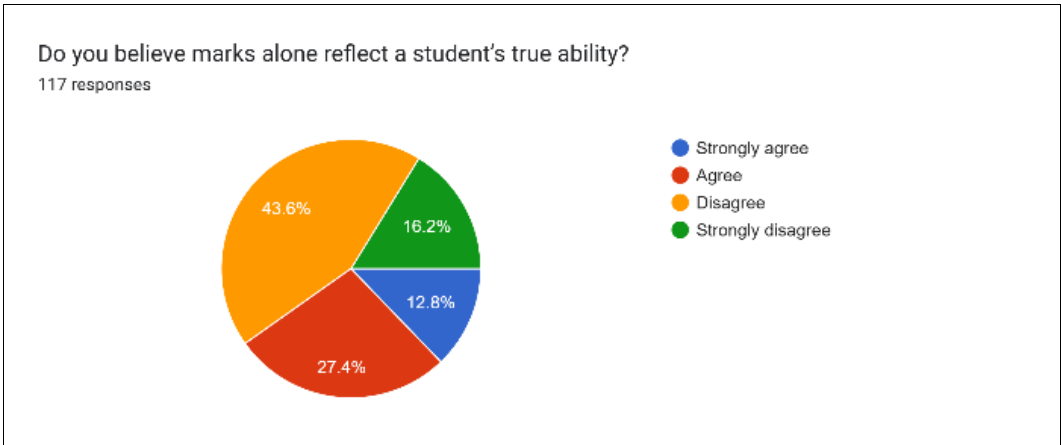
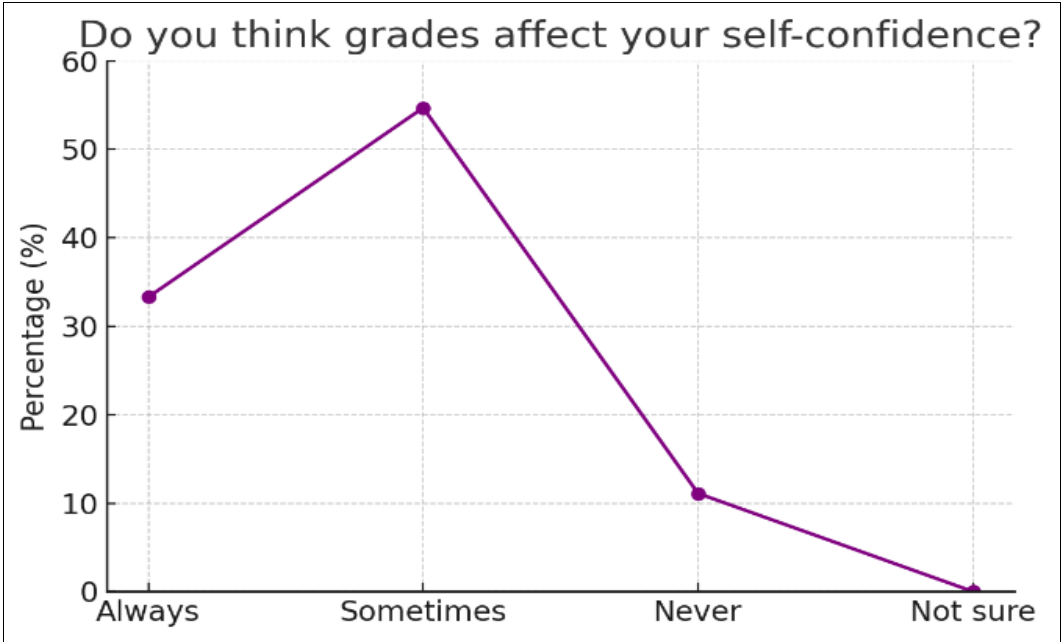
The research methodology for the study titled "From Scores to Skills: Shifting the Focus in Student Assessment" outlines the systematic approach used to examine the transition of educational assessment practices from traditional score-based models to skill-focused evaluation systems. This methodology includes the design, data collection methods, tools, and analytical strategies employed to investigate the perceptions of educators and students, the challenges of implementation, and the effectiveness of skill-based assessments across different academic settings. Depending on the objectives of the research, a mixed-methods approach may be utilized integrating quantitative techniques (such as surveys, academic performance metrics, and statistical analysis) to assess the impact of skill-based assessments, alongside qualitative methods (including interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations) to obtain deeper insights into the experiences and attitudes of stakeholders. This thorough methodology facilitates a detailed understanding of the changes in assessment paradigms and underpins evidence-based recommendations for educational reform.

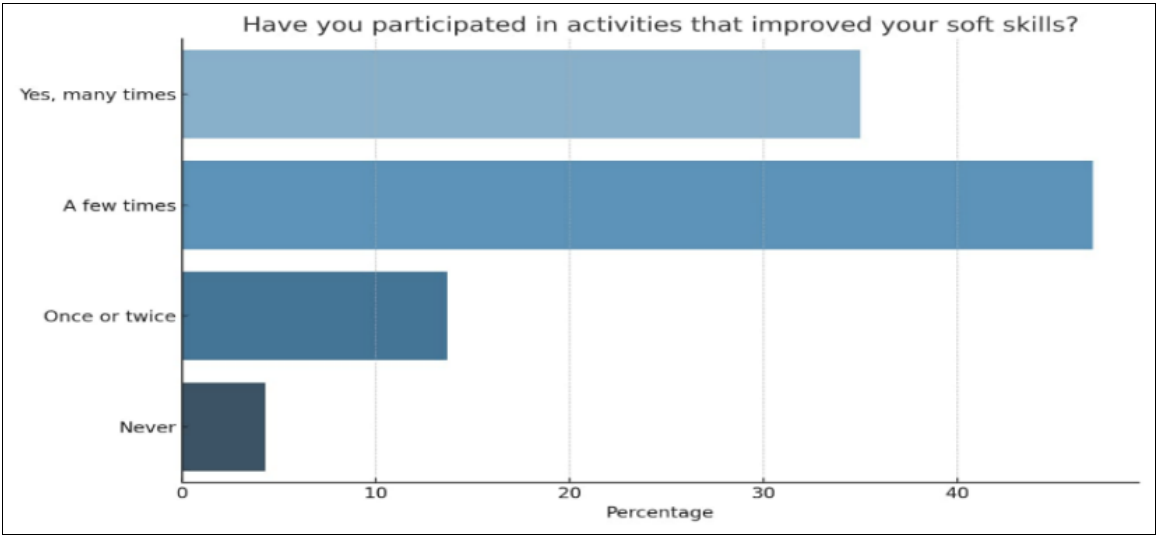
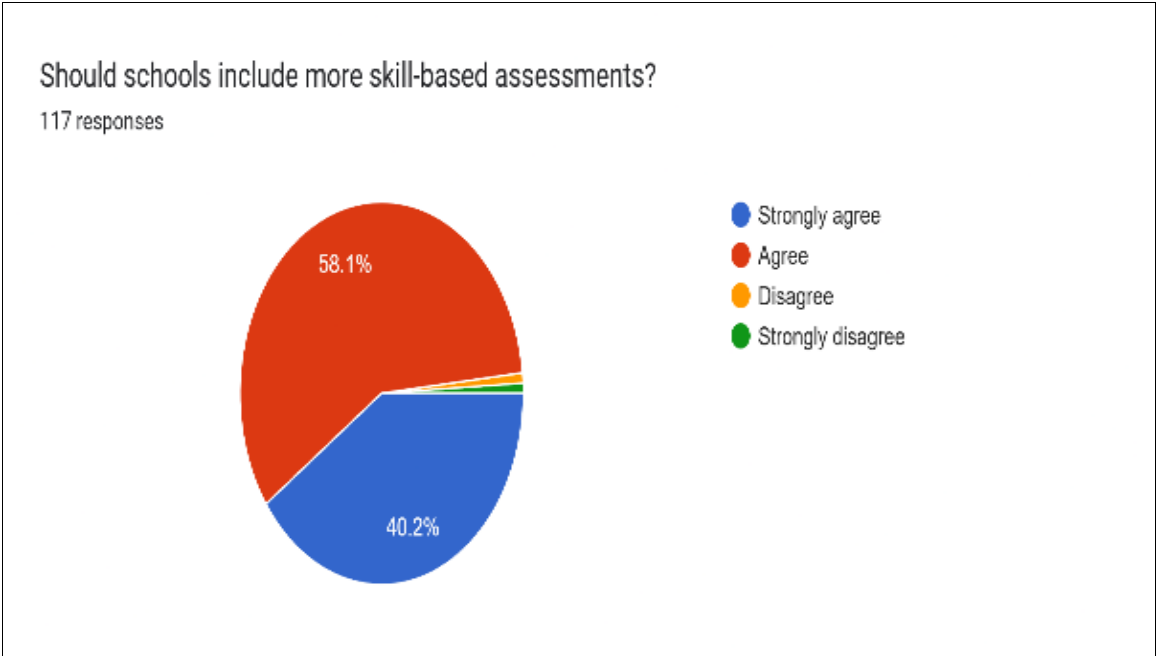
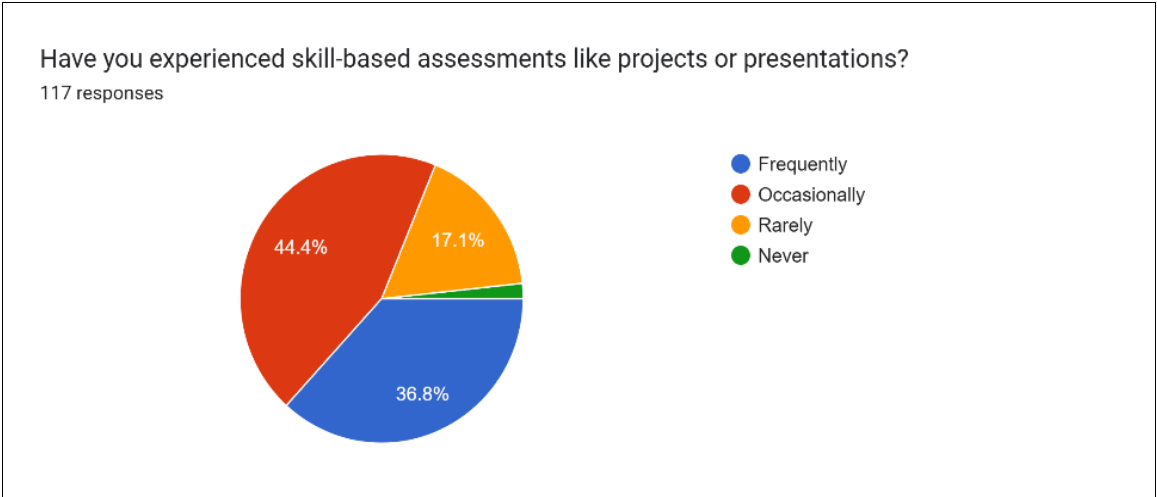


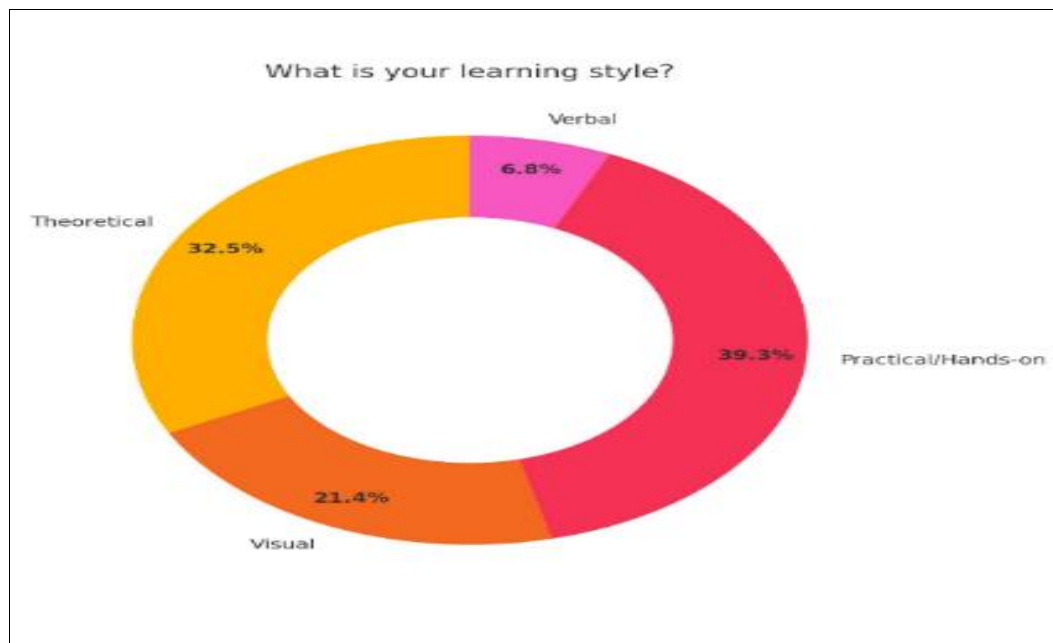












The survey carried out among 117 students from various academic years (FY, SY, and TY) yielded valuable insights into the changing attitudes towards student assessment. Gender representation was relatively balanced, with 53% of respondents being female and 47% male. A notable percentage of responses originated from first-year students (45%), suggesting an early interest and engagement with new assessment methods. Approximately 70% of participants were already acquainted with skill-based assessments, indicating a positive change in awareness. Furthermore, when questioned about their preferences, 75% either agreed or strongly agreed that skill-based assessments are more effective than traditional exams, demonstrating a clear inclination towards a practical and competency-focused approach.

Hypothesis

- **H1:** Assessments focused on skills greatly improve students' comprehension and retention of academic material when compared to conventional score-based evaluations.
- **H2:** A positive relationship exists between skill-based assessment methods and the enhancement of students' 21st-century competencies (such as critical thinking, communication, and collaboration).
- **H3:** Students who participate in skill-based assessments indicate greater levels of motivation and engagement in their learning compared to those evaluated through traditional approaches.
- **H4:** Educators who adopt skill-based assessments view them as more effective in accurately gauging students' true capabilities than traditional exam scores.

Scope for future research

1. **Impact Assessment:** Analyze the long-term effects of skill-based evaluations on academic and career outcomes across various educational levels.
2. **Urban vs. Rural Analysis:** Investigate the effectiveness and challenges of implementing skill-based assessments in urban and rural educational settings.
3. **Educator Readiness:** Examine the impact of teacher

training on the quality and uniformity of skill-based assessment practices.

4. **Integration of Technology:** Assess the contribution of AI and digital resources in facilitating personalized, skill-oriented evaluations
5. **International Comparisons:** Contrast global educational models (such as those in Finland and Singapore) with the Indian framework to pinpoint effective practices.
6. **Psychological and Emotional Impact:** Explore how skill-based assessments affect student motivation, anxiety levels, and self-esteem.

Results

The results revealed a strong inclination among students toward learning methods that enhance real-life applicability. Most respondents believed that skill-based assessments make learning more practical (50%), foster creativity (20%), and better prepare them for careers (30%). However, the shift is not without its challenges 35% cited lack of resources, 40% mentioned unclear guidelines, and 25% found the approach time-consuming. In terms of faculty involvement, 60% rated the support as satisfactory, while 30% felt it needed improvement. Additionally, 55% observed the effective use of technology in their assessments, though a sizable number still reported minimal or no integration. The findings suggest a clear transformation in student expectations from educational institutions. There is a growing demand for assessment systems that measure understanding, creativity, and application rather than rote memorization. While the enthusiasm for skill-based learning is evident, the success of this approach depends on institutional readiness, structured frameworks, and adequate training for faculty members. The use of digital tools is emerging but needs to be more widespread. Overall, the study highlights that to truly shift from "scores to skills," systemic changes, resource allocation, and continuous support from educators are essential for a sustainable and effective transition

Conclusion: In summary, the shift from traditional score-based evaluations to skill-focused assessments is not just a

passing educational trend it represents a vital progression in the field of education. In a world that is becoming increasingly intricate and dynamic, students need to move beyond rote memorization and instead showcase their capacity to apply knowledge, engage in critical thinking, solve problems, and adapt to new challenges. Skill-oriented assessments motivate learners to take charge of their education through practical tasks, self-evaluation, and ongoing feedback, which ultimately fosters greater involvement and long-lasting knowledge retention. Furthermore, this transition enhances equity and inclusivity by recognizing various learning styles and abilities instead of depending solely on standardized measures. Educational systems that emphasize skill acquisition equip students more effectively for both academic and professional achievements, aligning with the competencies required in the 21st century and global frameworks like the OECD Learning Compass and the NEP 2020 ^[12]. As educational institutions reconsider their assessment methods, it is essential for them to invest in teacher development, adaptable curriculum design, and genuine assessment tools to guarantee that the transition from scores to skills is both impactful and sustainable.

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