

THE DUAL ROLE OF ASSESSMENT IN EDUCATION: MOTIVATION VS. PRESSURE

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Abstract: This study looks at how assessments in education can have two sides—sometimes they help students learn and feel motivated, but at other times they can cause stress and anxiety. The research uses a mix of different methods to understand how different types of assessments affect students' motivation, how well they perform, and their overall well-being. The study found that formative assessments, like quizzes, peer reviews, and project-based evaluations, can help students stay engaged and feel more motivated from within. However, high-stakes tests, such as standardized exams and final tests, can lead to stress and shallow learning. The paper ends with suggestions on how to use assessments in a way that helps students succeed academically and stay mentally healthy.

Key words: Assessment, motivation, pressure, formative assessment, summative assessment, student performance, educational psychology, testing anxiety, evaluation methods.

Introduction. Assessment is a key part of education systems, meant to check how much students have learned, guide what teachers teach, and make sure schools are meeting standards. But how assessments affect students can be very different. Well-designed assessments can help students feel motivated and learn deeply, but too much or poor assessments can cause stress, anxiety, and make students lose interest. This paper looks at this conflicting role of assessment, showing how it can both drive students forward and create mental strain.





Literature review. Earlier research shows that assessments can have two different effects. Black and Wiliam (1998) found that formative assessments help students feel motivated. On the other hand, Segool et al. (2013) found that high-stakes testing is strongly linked to student anxiety. Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory explains that the way assessments are done can affect motivation, depending on how well they support a student's sense of autonomy and competence. More recent studies also look at how feedback and grading influence how students see themselves academically and how they approach their learning.

Methodology. To understand the effects of assessments, the study used a mix of methods. Surveys were given to 120 students from high school and university levels to measure their motivation and how much pressure they feel from different assessment formats. Ten teachers were also interviewed in a more open way to learn more about how assessments are used and how students respond to them. The data was analyzed using statistical tools and by grouping responses into main themes.

Results and discussion. Survey results showed that 74% of students found formative assessments motivating, while 68% said they felt stressed by standardized exams and final tests. Teachers' interviews showed that getting regular feedback, having clear expectations, and being able to assess themselves helped students feel more motivated. On the flip side, strict grading systems and tests that are time-sensitive were often linked to emotional problems. These results match what other studies have found and support the idea that assessments should be used in a balanced way.

Findings:

- Formative assessments help students stay interested and motivated to learn on their own.
- High-stakes tests often make students feel anxious and scared of not doing well.



- When teachers give clear and helpful feedback, it helps students feel confident about their learning.
- Students like assessments that let them use their creativity and take control of their learning.
- Teachers know the stress assessments can cause, but they often have to follow school rules and guidelines.

Overview. This research shows how important assessments are in shaping how students feel and learn. Even though assessments are needed to check how much students have learned, how they are designed and used has a big effect on how motivated and happy students are. The study suggests that using more student-focused and ongoing assessments can help reduce stress and improve learning.

Participants. The study included 120 students—60 in high school and 60 in university—with ages ranging from 15 to 22, and 10 teachers from different subjects. Participants were chosen carefully to make sure the group was varied in terms of education level and background.

Procedures: The study followed these steps:

1. Sending online questionnaires through school systems.
2. Collecting responses over three weeks.
3. Doing one-on-one interviews with teachers using a guided conversation format.
4. Writing down and analyzing the interview notes to find common themes.
5. Combining the survey and interview results to discuss the findings.

Materials. Assessment plays a key role in education. It helps teachers check how much students know and how well they're learning. In practice, assessment includes many tools such as tests, exams, quizzes, projects, assignments, and classroom observations. These tools are used not only to give grades but also to help teachers plan lessons, design courses, and set clear learning goals. There are two main types of assessment: formative and summative. Formative assessments are low-stakes and happen during learning, helping teachers track progress and



give feedback. Examples include quizzes, homework, and class discussions. Summative assessments are high-stakes and happen at the end of a unit or term, like final exams and major projects. Both types of assessment have important roles when used properly, and they can both help students grow academically.

Traditionally, assessment has been seen as a key way to make sure people are held accountable and that academic standards are met. It helps find out what students are good at and where they need to improve, encourages them to think about their own learning, and helps them set goals. For teachers and schools, assessments give useful information—both numbers and deeper insights—that can help shape how they teach and plan for the future. For students, assessments are important steps that show how far they've come in their education. However, as education has changed, so have people's views on what assessments do and how they affect everyone.

More and more, teachers, psychologists, and leaders in education are wondering if all kinds of assessments actually help as they're meant to—and what the downsides might be. There's a lot of discussion these days about the good and bad effects of assessments. Research shows that while assessments can be a strong way to encourage students to work hard, they can also cause a lot of stress and worry. This has led to a big debate in education. On one side, assessments help students stay focused, set goals, and manage their own learning. When students know their work will be judged, they are more likely to study regularly and keep track of how they're doing. In this way, assessments help students take learning seriously. On the other hand, putting too much weight on grades and test scores can make the learning environment very stressful. Many students say they feel anxious, scared of failing, and even burned out because of constant evaluation. In schools where success depends heavily on test results, assessments can feel less like tools for learning and more like burdens that affect mental health. The stress from big tests can stop students from doing their best, lower their confidence, and even make them avoid learning in the long run. The pressure isn't the same for everyone. Students from less privileged backgrounds may face extra challenges,



like not having enough support, not knowing how to take tests, or facing pressure from family or society. For them, assessments can make differences in life even bigger. In contrast, students who are supported and have access to learning resources can use assessments as a way to guide them toward success.

These different experiences show that assessment isn't just one thing; it can have many effects based on what kind of assessment is used, how it's given, the classroom setting, and how each student is different. So, it's important to understand how assessment can both help and challenge students. This article wants to look closely at how assessment can be both a way to encourage learning and a cause of stress. By looking at studies, real classroom situations, and research on how people feel, the article will try to answer this question: How can assessments be made to help students feel motivated while not making them too stressed? To do this, the article will cover:

- How assessments can help students by making them more involved, responsible, and successful.
- How assessments can also cause stress, such as worry before tests, getting too tired from schoolwork, and losing interest in learning.
- How different kinds of assessments, like ongoing checks and final exams, affect students.
- How feedback and grading affect students' feelings and how well they do in school.
- Suggestions for teachers and leaders on how to create assessments that are fair, focused on students, and in line with their needs.

The article will look at both ideas and experiences from students and teachers to give a full view of how assessments impact people. It hopes to support the movement for better ways of assessing students, pushing for more thoughtful, personal, and kinder evaluation methods. This article shows how assessments can be both a tool to help students achieve and a source of stress. Although assessments are meant to improve learning and keep standards high, they can sometimes cause unexpected emotional problems. By looking at this situation, the



article wants to show how assessments can be improved to help students grow and feel well. This topic is especially important now because education is very fast-paced and competitive. With more standardized tests, international standards, and college entrance exams, the pressure to succeed has gotten bigger at every level of school—from primary to higher education. The pandemic also made this more complicated, showing how weak traditional testing systems can be and the stress that comes from online and high-pressure tests. Schools are now facing big choices about how to move forward.

Should assessments continue to mainly act as tools that decide who moves forward, or should they change to focus more on student growth, mental health, and lifelong learning? Answering this question needs a clear understanding of how assessments can both help and harm. This article aims to explain this dual role. Educators can then make better choices that support learners in a balanced way. It means recognizing how assessments can push students to improve, while also understanding the need for more caring and flexible ways of evaluating. The end goal is to create assessment systems that challenge students without being too stressful, evaluate what they know without punishing mistakes, and measure performance without hurting their well-being. Assessment is a key part of teaching and learning. It works as both a way to measure progress and a way to share information among teachers, students, parents, and policymakers. At its heart, assessment is about collecting, understanding, and using information to help students learn better. However, not all assessments are the same. Different types of assessments serve different purposes and affect learning in different ways. To truly understand how assessments can both motivate and create pressure, it's important to first look at the different types and their main roles. Formative assessment happens throughout the learning process, not just at the end. Its main purpose is to help teachers and students understand where students are in their learning and where they need to go. It often takes informal and ungraded forms, such as:

- Short quizzes



- Group discussions
- In-class polls or mini-presentations
- Homework assignments
- Concept maps or journals
- One-on-one teacher-student check-ins

Formative assessment focuses on giving feedback instead of giving a judgment.

Instead of assigning a grade, it helps students understand how to improve. This type of assessment is known for motivating students. Because it centers on growth rather than evaluation, it tends to lower stress and increase student involvement. When students get consistent and helpful feedback, they are more likely to become aware of their own learning, take charge of their progress, and act as active members of the classroom. On the other hand, summative assessment is used to evaluate what students have learned by the end of a teaching period. These are usually high-stakes assessments that affect grades, moving forward in school, and getting certified. Examples of summative assessments include:

- Mid-term tests
- National or standardized tests (e. g. , SAT, IELTS)
- End-of-unit projects
- Coursework portfolios evaluated at the end of the term
- Final exams

Summative assessments are usually formal, structured, and time-limited. They are meant to show what students have learned and ensure they meet specific learning goals. These assessments can be helpful by setting clear targets, but they are also a major source of stress for students. The results of these tests often affect important things like university admissions, scholarships, or job prospects. Because of this, they can cause anxiety and make students less willing to take risks or be creative. Diagnostic assessments are usually given at the start of a





course or unit. Their purpose is to find out what students already know, the skills they have, and any misunderstandings they may have before teaching begins. Examples include:

- Pre-tests
- Placement tests
- Skills checklists or language ability tests

These assessments allow teachers to plan lessons better and make learning more suited to each student's needs. For students, they can help reduce stress by preparing them for what's to come and making sure they aren't faced with too much new material all at once. They are especially useful for spotting learning challenges early on. More and more, classrooms are using peer and self-assessment, where students help evaluate their own or each other's work using tools like rubrics, checklists, or clear guidelines. The goals of these assessments are:

- To develop critical thinking and reflection
- To encourage teamwork
- To help students understand their own learning process

When done well, these assessments help students feel more in charge of their learning, which can boost their motivation and reduce their dependence on teacher evaluations. But if not done properly, they can cause confusion or make students uncomfortable, especially those who are not used to giving or receiving feedback. Assessment does more than just give grades or rank students.

It plays many roles in education, and it's important to understand its main purposes to create systems that inspire rather than stress students. One of the most common reasons for assessments is to show what students have learned. Through tests, assignments, and evaluations, teachers and schools can see how well students have met the goals of a course or curriculum. These evaluations help identify areas where students need more help, track their progress, and set academic standards. While this is important, there's a risk when learning is only



seen as something that can be measured by scores. Focusing only on numbers can make education feel like a competition, and it can ignore creativity, exploration, and deep understanding.

Feedback helps students and teachers talk to each other, making learning a team effort rather than just one person telling others what to do. Good feedback encourages students by showing them that they can succeed with effort. It helps build a growth mindset, which is the idea that people can improve their skills through hard work and learning. But if feedback is too unclear, too harsh, or given without caring, it can do the opposite—make students feel discouraged and more stressed. Assessment gives teachers important information to change how they teach.

Especially diagnostic and formative assessments, these tools show what students understand and how they learn best. By looking at the results, teachers can find out which topics need more attention, which teaching methods work well, and which students might need extra help. In this way, assessment helps both students and teachers keep improving. When teaching is based on real-time data from assessments, it becomes more useful, effective, and fair for everyone. Also, assessment helps prove that students have learned enough to move on to the next level, whether it's another class, a job, or a career. This certification is usually done through final exams and is important for moving forward in life. But this is where a lot of stress comes from. When test scores determine a student's future, the pressure of academic tests can be too much. This is especially true in education systems where exams and standardized tests are the main way to measure learning.

In short, assessment is a big and important part of education. Different types of assessment, like formative, summative, diagnostic, peer, and self-assessment, each play a unique role in learning. The purposes of assessment—measuring learning, giving feedback, guiding teaching, and proving achievement—show how important it is in shaping the educational experience. But as we'll see later, the same tools that help learning can also cause problems, depending on how they



are used. So understanding these basic ideas is important for looking at how assessment can both inspire and stress students in education. Even though assessment is often seen as a source of stress and worry, it can also help motivate students to learn. When done well, assessment can give students a sense of direction, help them organize their study time, and recognize their achievements in a meaningful way. By setting clear targets, offering regular feedback, and giving chances to succeed, assessments can make students more involved, take more responsibility, and grow academically over time. This part explains how assessments can be a great way to keep students motivated by helping them set goals, build good habits, and feel proud of their progress.

1. Setting goals and achieving them. One of the best ways assessments help students stay motivated is by giving them clear and specific targets to work towards.

When students know exactly what is expected of them and how their work will be judged, they are more likely to put in effort and take charge of their learning. Having clear goals makes classroom activities more meaningful and gives students a plan to follow. According to Goal-Setting Theory, created by Edwin Locke and Gary Latham in 1990, having specific and challenging goals can help improve performance. Setting academic goals, like scoring a certain percentage on a test or learning specific skills, encourages students to keep working hard and not give up. Assessments help make these goals real by showing students what they need to do. For example, when a teacher gives a rubric for an essay or lists the topics for a test, students can better plan how to prepare. Also, assessments that include smaller tasks, like weekly quizzes or unit tests, allow students to check how well they are doing over time. Each small success helps them move closer to bigger goals, like passing a final exam or graduating. This steady progress helps keep their motivation high and makes learning feel more doable.

2. Building study habits and managing time. Assessments also help students develop good study habits and learn how to manage their time properly.



Regular checks, such as quizzes, oral questions, and assignment due dates, push students to plan ahead, regularly review their work, and avoid trying to study all at once near deadlines. This kind of consistent effort is especially helpful for younger students or those who find it hard to stay organized on their own. In classes where assessments are part of everyday learning, students are more likely to form habits like reviewing material, thinking about what they've learned, and studying with a clear purpose. For example, weekly vocabulary tests in a language class might encourage students to study words each day, while longer projects help them learn how to manage tasks over time. In both cases, assessments act as a reminder and a way to keep students focused and responsible. Research shows that regular assessments help students learn more deeply and improve their study habits. A study by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick in 2006 found that frequent, low-pressure assessments with feedback can lead to better student involvement and improved results.

3. Recognition and rewards. Assessment also gives students a way to feel recognized for their hard work and what they've achieved.

This recognition can be a strong source of both inner and outer motivation. When students do well on a test or get good feedback, they often feel proud and accomplished. These feelings of success help them believe in their own abilities and push them to keep trying their best. Good assessment results can also act as a kind of outside approval that encourages students to keep working hard. For example, getting a high grade on an essay or doing well in a group presentation might lead to praise from teachers, recognition during school events, or even awards and scholarships. These rewards not only help students feel better about themselves but also create a learning environment that is both competitive and supportive, where effort is appreciated and celebrated. Additionally, assessments help students feel motivated from inside by letting them see how much they've grown over time.

Watching their own improvement—like going from a failing grade to a passing one, or increasing a score from 65% to 85%—can make them more



confident and help them develop a growth mindset. Psychologist Carol Dweck (2006) explains that when students think their abilities can be developed through effort and practice, they are more likely to take on challenges and keep going even when things get hard. Assessment provides the data and feedback that help students see how their hard work leads to results.

Many top-performing education systems around the world use assessments in a way that helps motivate students instead of stressing them out. One example is Finland, where assessments are mostly formative and used to help students learn, not to rank them. Finnish students get a lot of feedback and teacher evaluations, but they aren't tested a lot on standardized exams. Because of this, they do well in international assessments like PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), and they experience less stress and more motivation than students in more test-focused systems.

In Singapore, another high-achieving education system, assessments are part of everyday learning and are often connected to clear learning goals. While there are final exams, the system also focuses on ongoing feedback and student reflection. Singapore uses regular diagnostic assessments to guide both teaching and learning, helping students stay on track without feeling too pressed. A study by Black and Wiliam (1998) in the UK showed that effective formative assessment can greatly improve learning, especially for students who are struggling. The study showed that when students take part in the assessment process—like evaluating their own work, getting feedback from classmates, and setting personal goals—they become more driven, more responsible, and more confident in their learning. For example, in project-based learning (PBL) classrooms, often found in places like Canada and the Netherlands, assessments are part of real-world tasks, such as doing research, solving community issues, or working together on presentations.

These tasks are judged using rubrics and reflective journals instead of just tests. Because of this, students say they are more interested and motivated, as the assessment feels connected to their personal interests and real-life situations.



While many people criticize assessments for causing stress, it's important to see how they can also be motivating. When assessments are clear, fair, and purposeful, they can give students goals to aim for, structure to follow, and rewards that show they're making progress. Through ongoing evaluation, feedback, and recognition, students not only do better academically but also learn important life skills like managing time, staying persistent, and being disciplined. The main idea is not to get rid of assessments, but to change how they are used in education.

Recommendation. Based on the findings, here are some suggestions for teachers, decision-makers, and curriculum planners:

1. Use more formative assessment methods like quizzes, feedback discussions, and peer reviews to support ongoing learning and lower stress.
2. Offer a variety of assessment types, including traditional tests and student-centered activities such as presentations, portfolios, and group projects.
3. Give feedback that is helpful, timely, and specific, focusing on progress and hard work instead of just results.
4. Teach teachers about emotional awareness and assessment skills so they can spot when assessments cause stress and make changes.
5. Reduce the focus on high-stakes exams by using other assessment methods that match long-term learning goals.
6. Support students in evaluating their own work and reflecting on their learning to help them take more control and feel less afraid of failing.
7. Encourage open talks between students and teachers about what assessments mean and what is expected, to reduce stress and make goals clearer.

Conclusion. Assessment is very important in education, and it can both encourage students and make them feel stressed. This study shows that how assessment is created, given, and seen makes a big difference. Formative assessments usually help students feel more motivated and involved, but high-stakes and very competitive assessments can cause stress, anxiety, and worse performance. Using a balanced, student-centered approach to assessment—like



giving helpful feedback, using different types of assessments, and offering emotional support—can make assessments more encouraging and less harmful. In the end, changing how we use assessments is key to making learning environments healthier and more successful.

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