



Academic Curriculum and Assessment Practices on Adolescents Mental Health

Shabnam Jamil¹, Ansar Ahmad²

¹Research Scholar, Department of Teacher Training & NFE (IASE), Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.

²Assistant Professor, Department of Teacher Training & NFE (IASE), Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Published Online: 16 May 2025	Adolescents today deal with great academic expectations thanks to ever strict courses and high-stakes testing policies. Among schoolchildren, the great emphasis on standardised learning objectives and performance measures sometimes causes stress, worry, and mental health issues. The lack of adaptation in educational systems, which gives academic success top priority over student welfare, aggravates the issue. Furthermore, worsening mental health problems is the competitive character of tests, which promotes a culture of stress and failure anxiety. Academic curriculum and evaluation methods present difficulties include too much work, unrealistic expectations, and inadequate support systems to handle students' psychological and emotional well-being. Standardised testing and other conventional evaluation techniques sometimes fail to fit different learning styles and individual demands, which causes more stress and disengagement from the course of instruction. Teachers also regularly battle to create a healthy and encouraging classroom while juggling course requirements. Theoretical viewpoints from psychology and education are synthesised in this work to investigate the complex interaction of academic curriculum, assessment strategies, and adolescent mental health. Researching the consequences of academic curriculum design and evaluation techniques emphasises how urgently reforms including mental health issues into educational systems are needed. By means of a comprehensive approach to curriculum and assessment reform, academic performance and student well-being can be guaranteed to be complimentary rather than mutually exclusive features of a good education system.
Corresponding Author: Shabnam Jamil	
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INTRODUCTION

A crucial stage of development characterised by fast cognitive, emotional, and social changes is adolescence. Academic demands become more intense during this time as adolescents negotiate the regimented framework of school education, where curriculum design and assessment strategies mostly define their educational encounters. Although academic success is sometimes stressed as a road to future possibilities, increased pressure to meet curriculum requirements and perform in tests has prompted questions regarding its effect on adolescent mental health.

High stakes assessments combined with a too strict and content-heavy curriculum can cause children to feel inadequate, stressed, and anxious. Often overlooking the psychological well-being of students, many educational institutions concentrate on standardised learning objectives and competitive assessment systems. The growing frequency of academic burnout, sadness, and test-related anxiety

emphasises how urgently curriculum structures and assessment methods affect teenage mental health.

Adolescence Mental Health

Mental health is a condition of well-being in which a person realises their capabilities, can manage regular life stresses, can work productively, and can help their community (WHO). Not just general well-being but also academic performance and personal development depend on good mental health. Poor mental health teenagers could find difficult controlling their emotions, performing academically, and socialising.

A crucial stage of emotional, intellectual, and social growth is adolescence. People undergo major changes in this stage that could compromise their mental health. Increased anxiety and emotional turmoil are caused in part by academic stress, peer pressure, and personal aspirations. Because of their continuous neurological and psychological growth, teenagers

are especially sensitive to mental health problems. Depression, anxiety, and burnout are among the several mental health problems that prolonged exposure to high academic standards, strict courses, and pressure to perform well on tests could cause.

Usually, one of the most often occurring elements influencing adolescents mental health is school-related stress. Often aggravating these problems in schools are insufficient coping strategies and inadequate mental health support available there. Furthermore, the stigma around mental health issues keeps many students from getting therapy. Schools can significantly help to promote adolescents' general well-being and guarantee a balance between academic success and emotional health by combining mental health awareness campaigns and supportive assessment procedures.

Impact of Academic Curriculum on Adolescents' Mental Health

Students' cognitive, emotional, and psychological well-being is much shaped by their academic course of study. Exam-oriented, too rigorous, and unduly demanding academic courses sometimes put great pressure on students, which results in higher stress and anxiety. Along with high academic expectations, the heavy effort can cause emotional tiredness, burnout, and lower drive to learn. Moreover, a lack of attention on creativity, critical thinking, and social-emotional learning in the academic program could lead to a limited concentration on rote memorisation, therefore restricting pupils' capacity to acquire fundamental life skill adolescents the organisation and expectations of the academic curriculum much shape mental health.

Curriculum are the methodically organised set of instructional experiences given to students that includes disciplines, learning goals, teaching strategies, and learning results. It shapes what and how pupils acquire knowledge, therefore forming the basis of the educational process.

Emphasising knowledge acquisition, skill development, and intellectual progress,

Academic curriculum especially target the substance and organisation of the topics taught at educational institutions. It covers recommended syllabi, texts, and teaching strategies that together help define the academic path. Beyond its purview, academic curricula often set the speed of learning, therefore encouraging intellectual development but occasionally at the sacrifice of creativity and personal needs. Many courses lack flexibility, which can cause more stress for students who believe they cannot satisfy accepted criteria. Studies point to an overburdened academic curriculum with little adaptability contributing to exhaustion, lower interest, and even student depression. Some courses' fast-paced structure gives little opportunity for individualised learning, creative inquiry, and mental health awareness, therefore aggravating students' stress. Moreover, many courses lack focus on socio-emotional learning, which leaves students often unprepared to properly manage academic expectations.

The study underlines even more the important link between curriculum design and teenage mental health. For instance, among high school students, Lee and Larson (2019) discovered that anxiety is mostly predicted by academic stress. Emphasising the importance of curriculum change that strikes a mix between academic rigour and student well-being, Smith and Jones (2021) Miller (2019) similarly argued for including mental health education and life skills into courses to foster resilience and general well-being. Education systems can promote psychological resilience in addition to academic brilliance by using a more flexible, balanced, and student-centered academic program. Including stress management techniques, individualised learning paths, and mental health education into the course will help to reduce unnecessary academic pressure and encourage better learning surroundings.

Impact of Assessment Techniques on Adolescents Mental Health

Methods used to assess and gauge students' academic performance and learning outcomes are known as assessment practices. While formative assessments, project-based evaluations, and peer assessments are common practices, standardised testing, quizzes, assignments, and examinations are also common.

Fundamental to the learning process, these techniques provide means of assessing student knowledge, tracking development, and assessing academic performance. But for adolescents mental health, the growing focus on high-stakes testing, standardised exams, and strict grading systems has serious ramifications. Exam pressure to do well combined with dread of failing can cause students great stress, anxiety, and even melancholy.

Particularly high-stakes testing, these behaviours have been attacked extensively for their detrimental effects on teenage mental health. Often stressing rote memorisation over critical thinking and creativity, standardised tests have been related to higher anxiety, fear of failure, and a lower feeling of self-worth (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). Students who felt tests were dangerous reported more test anxiety, which in turn harmed their academic performance and mental health (Putwain 2008).

Regular tests and the pressure to perform well can also cause unhealthy rivalry among students, therefore aggravating tension and anxiety (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Lower stress levels and better mental health outcomes have been linked, on the other hand, to formative tests that offer constructive feedback and emphasise learning over grades (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Still, the predominance of high-stakes testing in many educational systems presents major difficulties for teenage mental health.

An essential part of the educational process, assessment strategies help to assess student learning results by means of tools. Still, the type of these techniques affects adolescents mental health greatly. Among the prevalent evaluation techniques and their related effects are:

1. Psychological Pressure and Performance Anxiety:

High-stakes tests set the scene whereby kids view their academic performance as determining their value. Anxiety brought on by parental expectations, bad grades, and peer competitiveness often results from the dread of which affects cognitive ability, memory retention, and general academic performance. Studies have indicated that teenagers under too much academic pressure are more prone to suffer from persistent stress, which causes burnout and disengagement from education.

2. Standardized Testing: Standardized assessments give uniformity and comparability first priority, sometimes finds it difficult to fit different learning environments and particular student demands. Test-taking difficulties in teenagers could cause feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness, therefore aggravating their mental health problems. Moreover, the shrinking of the curriculum to concentrate on test preparation limits chances for creative and exploratory learning, which are crucial for cognitive and emotional growth.

3: Rigid Grading Systems and Self-Esteem: Often resulting in unhealthy competitiveness and student stress, traditional grading systems give numerical or letter grades great weight. Students are discouraged from seeing failures as teaching moments by the dearth of formative feedback and comprehensive evaluation strategies. Rather, a culture of perfectionism develops, which can aggravate poor self-esteem and self-doubt especially among teenagers who suffer academically.

4. Alternative Assessment Approaches and Mental Well-being: Recent studies on alternate assessment approaches—such as project-based evaluations, portfolio assessments, and ongoing formative assessments—showcase their advantages for mental well-being. These approaches provide pupils several chances to show their knowledge free from the extreme pressure of one high-stakes test. Incorporating more flexible, student-centered assessment methods would assist educational institutions lessen the negative psychological consequences connected with conventional assessment systems.

Schools should implement assessment changes giving student well-being top priority in order to establish a more balanced and psychologically friendly learning environment. Reducing the focus on punitive grading, including mental health awareness into assessment procedures, and promoting self-reflective learning would help teenagers have a better connection with academic success and personal development.

Relationship between Assessments Practices and Academic Curriculum

Since assessments serves as a means to evaluate student learning results and the efficacy of curriculum implementation, academic curriculum and assessment procedures are naturally linked. While curriculum design controls the material and skills assessments evaluate, the

nature of assessments directly determines how curricula are taught. Students' educational experiences and, thus, their mental health are greatly shaped by the interaction of their academic curriculum and assessment strategies.

1. Alignment of Assessment Techniques and Learning Objectives

An orderly curriculum lists particular learning goals that direct training and assessment. Tests then are meant to gauge whether pupils have met these goals. Many educational systems, meanwhile, have a misalignment whereby tests mostly emphasise memorisation rather than intellectual knowledge. This causes students, who might find it difficult to show their knowledge using strict testing structures, unnecessary anxiety.

2. How Assessment Affects Teaching and Learning

Curriculum is taught in schools in great part by assessment techniques. Both teaching strategies and student learning experiences are greatly shaped by assessment techniques. When tests and rote memorisation take front stage in evaluations, teaching sometimes becomes test-centric, therefore restricting the range of creativity and deep knowledge. Teachers could be driven to give exam-related material top priority over more general conceptual learning, therefore reducing critical thinking and chances for student problem-solving.

Washback Effect

The washback effect is the effect on teaching and learning of testing and assessment strategies. Depending on how tests are developed and carried out, it may be either positive or negative.

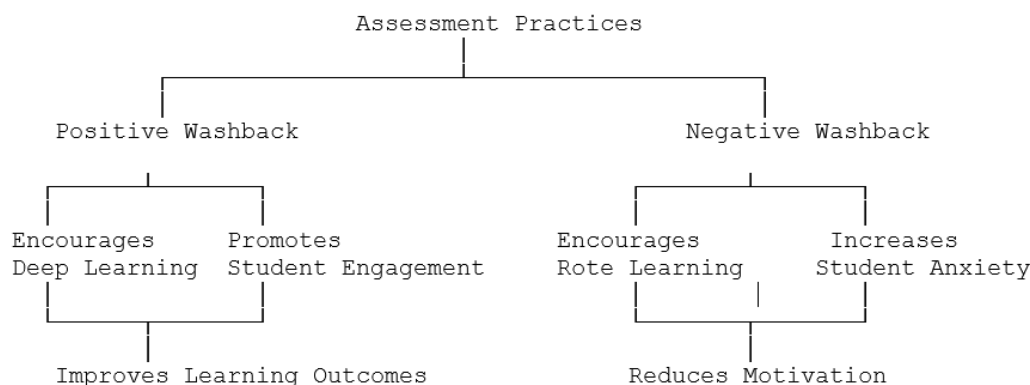
Positive Washback Effect:

- Promotes thorough education by matching assessments to significant learning goals.
- Drives pupils to actively interact with course content and raise their cognitive ability.
- Encourages the growth in critical thinking, imagination, and practical problem-solving ability.
- Motives teachers to use creative, student-centered approaches.
- Guarantees that curricular objectives are in line by means of alignment between assessments and teaching materials.

Negative Effects of Washback:

- Results in teaching to the test, in which case teachers ignore more general educational goals and concentrate just on exam-related materials.
- Under high-stakes testing conditions, causes pupils great stress and pressure.
- Lessens natural drive, hence pupils give grades top priority over important learning.
- Promotes rote memorising above conceptual learning and thorough understanding.
- Restraints curricular coverage since non-tested topics or skills get less attention.

Flowchart Representing Positive and Negative Washback Effect:



Student experiences and instructional strategies both greatly depend on the washback effect. Designing balanced, meaningful tests that give knowledge acquisition top priority along with student well-being can help teachers reduce negative washback and foster a favourable learning environment.

3. Curriculum Rigidity: Effects on Assessment Practices

Rigid courses can mandate uniform evaluation techniques that give little space for variation in assessing students' different aptitudes. Curricula that stress set syllabi and consistent teaching strategies can help to support the same standardised approach used in examinations. This rigidity adds to the academic pressure since students feel driven to match a one-size-fits-all paradigm instead of investigate other approaches of proving competency.

4. Role of Assessment in Affecting Anxiety and Academic Stress

Direct consequences for student mental health follow from the design and integration of tests into the curriculum:

- **Frequent High-Stakes Testing:** Curricula that give summative assessments—final tests, standardised tests—top priority raise stress levels, frequently resulting in test anxiety, fear of failure, and burnout.
- **Competitive Grading Systems:** Assessments that evaluate pupils against their peers instead of emphasising on individual development encourage unhealthy competition, self-doubt, and lower self-esteem.
- **Lack of Formative Feedback:** Curricula emphasising only end-term assessments without ongoing feedback deny students of opportunities for growth-oriented learning, therefore aggravating their frustration and disengagement.

5. Demand a well-balanced strategy.

Academic curriculum and assessment strategies must be balanced in order to encourage student well-being as well as academic success:

- **Holistic approach:** Including life skills, emotional intelligence, and flexible learning paths within the curriculum helps to reduce stress and improve student involvement via holistically curricular design

- **Diverse Assessment Practices:** Including formative assessments, peer reviews, and alternate grading systems helps to lower pressure and offer significant learning opportunities.

- **Student-Centric Learning Environments:** By moving the emphasis from performance-based tests to competency-based learning, one may encourage long-term academic success and intrinsic drive.

Teachers can establish a more encouraging and rich academic environment by encouraging a symbiotic relationship between academic curriculum and evaluation that gives student well-being first priority.

Theories related to Mental Health, Assessment, and Academic Curriculum

1. Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (2000)

According to SDT, people have three fundamental psychological needs—autonomy, competency, and relatedness—that must be met for best functioning and well-being.

- **Academic Environment:** High-stakes tests and a too strict curriculum might erode students' sense of competence and autonomy in the framework of education, therefore aggravating their stress and anxiety. Students' mental health and natural drive may suffer when they feel under control by outside demands instead than self-driven.

- **Implication:** Schools should provide surroundings that support students' autonomy, mastery-oriented goals, and friendly interactions with peers and teachers.

2. Lazarus & Folkman, 1984: Cognitive Appraisal Theory

According to Lazarus and Folkman's transactional model of stress and coping, a person's assessment of a circumstance as either dangerous or demanding and their perceived capacity to cope define their level of stress.

- **Academic Stressors:** Particularly if students believe they have little control or support, high-stakes tests and a rigorous curriculum can be seen as major stressors.

- Good coping mechanisms help to reduce the harmful consequences of academic stress by means of problem-oriented coping and social support seeking. Maladaptive coping strategies, such avoidance or drug use, however, can aggravate mental health problems.

- **Implications:** Schools should equip their pupils with tools and instruction so they may establish a conducive environment that lessens the impression of academic pressures as unbearable and build good coping mechanisms.

3. Early 1980s Carole Ames, Carol Dweck, Martin and John's achievement goal theory

This idea separates performance goals—which centre on surpassing others—from mastery goals—which centre on learning and self-improvement.

- Emphasising performance goals in a curriculum and assessment system helps to affect mental health by increasing anxiety, fear of failure, and unhealthy rivalry. On the other hand, emphasising mastery objectives fosters resilience and a development attitude.

- **Implications:** Instead of just aiming for high marks, educational strategies can inspire mastery-oriented aims and give chances for students to participate in deep learning and introspection.

4. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory 1979

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory stresses the interdependence of several environmental systems that affect development by microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem.

- **Academic demands:** Although academic demands often come from both home and school environments, the microsystem—that of a family, a school—directly affects teenagers. Interactions among these microsystems—such as parent-teacher relationships—that could either aggravate or reduce academic stress constitute the mesosystem.

- More general influences on the academic environment and, hence, adolescent mental health also come from the exosystem—e.g., educational policies—and macrosystem—e.g., cultural values.

- **Implications:** Interventions should take into account the several layers of effect on teenagers, therefore targeting not just personal and school-level elements but also more general policy and cultural setting.

Problem Faced by Adolescents Students

1. Academic Overload: Many students battle an excessive load of homework, quizzes, and extracurricular activities that fuels burnout and ongoing stress. Often lacking balance between personal and academic life, this leaves little opportunity for social contacts and self-care.

2. Anxiety and Performance Pressure: Rigid grading systems and high stakes testing produce a performance pressure that causes anxiety and dread of failure. During important transitional times like final tests or college admissions, this is especially negative.

3 Restricted Access to Support: In schools, students routinely find insufficient access to helpful connections and mental health resources. Further aggravating the situation are teachers' lack of knowledge in spotting and treating mental health problems.

4. High-stakes testing: Tests like standardised exams, which have major ramifications for students such college admissions or grade progression.

Effect on Mental Health: These tests sometimes generate great performance pressure, which increases anxiety and dread of failing. Because they believe that one test defines their academic and career path, students could suffer with persistent stress.

5. Fixed grading systems: which centre on numerical or letter grades as the only markers of achievement, **Impact on Mental Health:** Particularly among students who find it difficult to reach set criteria, rigid systems support self-esteem problems and too intense rivalry.

6. Overwhelming focus on summative assessments: such as final tests—evaluates learning at the end of a semester or course.

Effect on Mental Health: Students that rely mostly on summative exams can turn to rote memorising, therefore ignoring more thorough learning. The pressure to do well in a constrained period increases stress and lowers participation.

7. Lack of Formative Assessments: Formative assessments centre on constant feedback and progressive development. **Effect on Mental Health:** Lack of such strategies deprives pupils of chances to monitor their development, which causes confusion about their capacity and results of inadequacy.

8. Cultural Expectations in Assessment: Unrealistic performance expectations resulting from cultural focus on academic success might result from

Effect on Mental Health: Parental and society pressures increase stress, especially for teenagers negotiating demanding surroundings where academic performance takes precedence over personal development.

Suggestions for Enhancement of Academic Curriculum and Assessment Practices Regarding Adolescent Mental Health

Reforming Academic Curriculum

- Give student-centered learning first priority; then, choose a curriculum that lets kids learn according to their aptitudes and interests at their own speed. This strategy can lower academic pressure and increase drive.

- Incorporate planned courses on mental health awareness, coping mechanisms, and emotional well-being to provide students the means to properly control their stress.

- Add creative and multidisciplinary disciplines such arts, music, and physical education to complement academic courses in a harmonic and interesting classroom.

- Instead of rote memorising, concentrate on critical thinking, problem-solving, and experiential learning. This can help to promote a better knowledge and lower the tension related to cramming.

- Design flexible curricula whereby students may select optional courses depending on their interests while nevertheless fulfilling fundamental academic requirements using modular systems.

- Promote collaborative learning by include peer-to-peer projects and group projects to foster a feeling of community and lower the often stressed-inducing competitiveness.
- Review the curriculum often to make sure it fits the evolving requirements of students, mental health insights, and society expectations.
- Emphasise life skills including financial literacy, computer skills, and communication in your curriculum to equip kids for the demands of the real world and help to lower existential concern about future preparation.

Suggestion to enhance assessment practices

- Replace high-stakes testing with low-stakes, ongoing evaluations tracking student development and offering helpful comments.
- Promote the use of project-based, open-book, and portfolio examinations stressing creativity, critical thinking, and pragmatic uses.
- Customise tests to honour unique strengths and limitations, therefore fostering academic evaluation equality.
- Limit the amount of tests and make sure evaluations are spaced out to give enough time for preparation, therefore reducing overall stress.

Teacher empowerment

- Train educators in mental health literacy, empathic communication, and inclusive pedagogy to better assist students overcoming academic and emotional obstacles.
- Use co-teaching techniques so that teachers might distribute tasks and provide each student more individualised attention.
- Reward and acknowledge educators who use creative approaches to lower academic stress and create a dynamic classroom.

Improving Educational Support Structures

- Make sure every institution has qualified mental health experts ready to help students and serve as a link between their families and the classroom.
- Create student-led peer support groups whereby teenagers may discuss techniques for controlling academic stress and experiences.
- Share with them the effects of academic pressure and help them to create a conducive home atmosphere that fits their attempts at education.

Policy and Community Interventions

- Promote at policy levels educational changes giving mental health top priority alongside academic success.
- Work with NGOs and professionals in mental health to provide schools extra resources, seminars, and interventions.
- Start projects to inform local populations about the need of mental health in education, therefore lowering stigma and supporting preventative actions.

CONCLUSION

Adolescent mental health is greatly and in many different ways influenced by academic curriculum and assessment practices. For many adolescents students, rigorous academic

expectations, high-stakes tests, and competitive settings cause increased stress, anxiety, and fear of failure. Theoretical models include Stress and Coping Theory, Ecological Systems Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Achievement Goal Theory offer insightful analysis of the processes by which scholastic pressures compromise mental health. These theories highlights the need of encouraging mastery goals, autonomy, competency, relatedness, and good coping mechanisms to support resilience and well-being. Schools have to take a whole approach that strikes a mix between academic rigour and emotional well-being in order to meet these difficulties. This includes changing to formative assessments, stressing deep learning and social-emotional skills in curriculum reform, including mental health education, and offering strong support networks. Creating a supportive atmosphere that values both academic success and mental wellness depends also on teacher training and parental commitment.

By redefining success in education—not just as good grades or test scores but as the growth of resilient, creative, and well-rounded individuals—we can build a better future for adolescents. By means of structural reforms and a dedication to holistic development, we can guarantee that students flourish both intellectually and emotionally, therefore arming them for the challenges of adulthood. The moment has come to see education as a voyage of development and discovery where mental well-being is equally prized as academic achievement.

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