

# Comparison of higher Education Assessment Systems in Mainland China and Hong Kong

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**Abstract.** Higher assessment is necessary for students' personal development, and the student assessment system is an important part of education. There is a big difference between the standards of the system in Mainland China and Hong Kong, and students and educators in mainland China and Hong Kong have different opinions about the assessment system. Therefore, whether these differences can adapt to students' innovation ability and future development has become a key part of attention. This paper aims to compare the higher education assessment systems of the two regions. Firstly, the assessment problem is discussed. The original assessment system mainly consists of formative and summative, with the participation of educators and even administrative forces. The single thinking paradigm makes it difficult to realize the fairness of the assessment. Based on the above situation, this paper puts forward some suggestions. First, implement a variety of assessment forms, will be in addition to the examination methods, such as scientific research and social practice; Second, include students as the participants and listen to students' opinions on the assessment; Third, reduce the influence of administrative power to ensure fairness in the process of students being assessed.

**Keywords:** Assessment System, Higher Education, China, Hong Kong.

## 1. Introduction

The educational assessment of Mainland China is complex due to the inherent tradition of education. The development of educational assessment in Mainland China experiences three stages. The first is the educational assessment system in ancient China, followed by the educational assessment system during the cold war. The third is the educational assessment system in the New China period [1]. Nowadays, ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all" [1]. Under the influence of the World Education Forum, China began to formulate a medium - and long-term plan for education development.

In mainland China, the higher education assignment method is formulated and implemented by the government. A large number of government actions are involved in the actual assignment process, which affects the prestige of other assignment subjects. Therefore, the assignment system of higher education is rigid and conservative, and even outdated. Besides, in mainland China, this method hinders the individuality development of colleges and universities.

On the other hand, the educational assessment in Hong Kong shows distinctive characteristics of the British education system inherited during colonial periods in the 20th century. What makes Hong Kong is that it also takes into consideration students' classroom and extracurricular activities in the assessment. Under these two modes of assessment, students will have different feelings and gains.

Previous studies only looked at higher education in Mainland China or Hong Kong but lacked comparisons between the two. Many studies focus on teaching quality assessment, educational policy assessment, or just teaching methods. Researchers mentioned the low efficiency of education quality in the assessment of undergraduate education quality in China, which demands a high-quality assessment model, as an effective external mechanism to support the reform of higher education institutions [2]. But assessments of students in teaching are rare. First of all, assessment is crucial to what students learn. Learning content refers to what students learn and how they learn it. Second, the assessment process can inform the teacher know the status of students' learning activities and preparation time. The assessment is designed to examine whether higher education is achieving its

intended goals and meeting the learning needs of students. Traditionally, examinations have been the main assessment method in China [1]. However, in the exploration of assessment methods, researchers realize that assessment should adopt a variety of assessment models, namely formative assessment and result-based assessment. Educators believed that there was a wide range of methods for selecting test questions, but students' creativity could not be evaluated, and comprehensive methods should be adopted to evaluate students [3]. The researchers argue that students need a fair and comprehensive assessment and active debate. Therefore, this article aims to compare the higher teaching assessment in Mainland China and Hong Kong and the defects in the assessment.

## 2. Assessment System

### 2.1. Definition

Assessment is a process of interaction and cooperation between teachers and students [1]. The diversity of students' opinions determines that teacher's design of the assessment system should be adjusted accordingly. Educators believe that the student assessment system should conform to the following principles: (a) deal with the depth and breadth of curriculum standards; (b) involve students in the design process, meet their needs, and encourage students to demonstrate their abilities; (c) students need regular help, guidance, and feedback; (d) adopt formative assessment and summative assessment; (e) have common assessment goals.

Student assessment systems can meet the goals and requirements of students, parents, and teachers. First of all, students can understand the learning results of the previous stage and the direction of improvement in the next stage through assessment. Secondly, parents can understand the expectations of students' learning and further support their children's progress. Finally, teachers can skillfully use assessment criteria to make standardized judgments based on the needs of students [4]. Therefore, student assessment is an indispensable link in educational activities.

### 2.2. Formative Assessment and Summative Assessment

The assessment contains formative and summative assessments. Formative assessment activities provide feedback to students so that they can learn from their mistakes and improve their performance. Summative assessment is based on exams and is the main form of assessment [5]. Summative assessment is centered on examinations, teaching materials, and teachers [6]. The design of certain measures in higher education is always both formative and summative. The significant difference between the two assessments is that they are not only used at different times but also serve different purposes and have different impacts on students' progress [7]. But the results of student assessment are usually summative, which is the most direct criterion for admission and scholarship. However, student assessment is also diagnostic and formative, aiming to provide abundant student information for teachers' teaching work [6].

In a comparative study of educational assessment in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, educators have pointed out that the assessment model was traditional and still examination-oriented until 20 years ago, the call-in education worldwide for a change of assessment culture, from treating assessment as the means of making final judgments of performance to using assessment to support learning [1]. There is a significant distinction between these two sorts of assessments, and both are not only employed at different times but also have different purposes and have different effects on students' progress [7].

Educators consider examinations as a tool to judge students' mastery of theoretical knowledge, which can be the most standard assessment method, and is also the best assessment tool to show the staged achievements of students. Moreover, mastering individual student strengths and weaknesses can be very challenging for teachers [8]. And the assessment methods require students to master skills such as timing, understanding, and expanding their thinking in the learning process. Researchers have shown that using exams as the primary method of assessment leads to significant improvements in

students' grades [9]. Therefore, most schools still choose large-scale examinations as an important tool to select outstanding students [5].

In addition to using summative assessment, namely the examination model, to judge students' learning results, researchers in Hong Kong institutions of higher learning also advocate incorporating the formative assessment model into the student assessment system [10]. The reason why they argue that many of the methods educators traditionally use to assess students are largely ignored in the classroom, including tests, attitudes, student participation, and attendance, while completely ignoring knowledge or skills in the curriculum [11]. Educators believed that western universities always emphasized that students should acquire knowledge, strengthen their understanding of learning content, and cultivate students' critical thinking ability, reasoning ability, and information analysis ability [12]. In Hong Kong's assessment system, inquiry-based learning highlights schools' tasks.

### **2.3. Assessment Methods Based on Two Thinking Paradigms**

There are mainly two ways of thinking (i.e., behaviorism and constructivism) that determine student assessment. Behaviorism believes that behavioral outcome change is produced by the system responding to the behavioral outcome of the stimulus [11]. It ensures that students can get the maximum amount of content so that they can cope with exams and thus achieve higher assessment results [2]. In other words, it aims to "guide students how, when and what to learn" [13].

Educators believe that most teachers use teacher-centered assessment methods [11]. This approach is usually based on practical cases, attention to student practice, and exploration of the nature of assessment, and has a significant impact on schools, society, and students [11]. This teacher-centered evaluation method has also become an important part of the education evaluation system in mainland China. This method determines what happens in the classroom, including some unexpected events for both teachers and students, as well as materials and assessment methods. Therefore, the teacher-centered teaching assessment method in the past has been the best choice for improving student performance [14], but this assessment method affects students' performance in society and education. The reason why is the teacher-centered assessment method concentrates all the power on the teacher, thus holding a high expectation for students [11].

On the other hand, constructivism purports that the traditional assessment method is regarded as the independent participation of teachers. However, under this assessment model, students can hardly participate in the assessment process. Therefore, student-centered assessment is popular in Hong Kong. In the assessment process, teachers will adopt informal assessment practices and develop student-centered assessment practices [15]. Many teachers point out that with the implementation of this assessment model, individual characteristics become the core of developing students' thinking mode and communication ability [16]. And student assessment results are improved in many ways [9]. Educators showed in their study that it is very important to evaluate students in different ways. They believed that having students as participants in the assessment process is more likely to help students form their cognitive development ability and improve their independence than letting teachers conduct the evaluation alone. Therefore, this method has been widely used in higher education assessment in Hong Kong. Every student is an individual in class, and every individual will encounter all kinds of unexpected situations in personal activities.

### **2.4. Assessing Fairness**

Fairness is the core requirement of the whole assessment process, which can show respect for students' character, moral concepts, ability cultivation, and future development [17]. Therefore, the healthy development of students' personalities can be promoted by the assessment of fairness. The assessment policy should take students' interests as the primary goal, and stimulate students' personalities through the implementation of a scientific and reasonable assessment policy to promote students' overall development [17].

But in Mainland China, the fairness of assessment is affected by organizational factors. It affects the formulation of assessment policy, the selection of assessment personnel, and assessment results.

Evaluators often face a dilemma between ensuring fairness in student assessments and social relations. This dilemma requires teachers to have high ethical standards to ensure fairness in student assessment [6]. They believed that objective assessment of achievement would be influenced by personal bias and a halo of excellence. When students are aware of the difference between their expectations and the actual assessment results, they develop negative perceptions about the fairness of assessment results and the fairness of the assessment process [18]. Besides, the fairness of assessment is also influenced by scientific means. It is highly unfair to students with high creative ability and thinking mode if the assessment means only choosing the examination method of memorization and recitation. Therefore, student assessment needs to accurately reflect students' mastery of knowledge, but irrelevant personal feelings are integrated into the assessment, which reduces the accuracy and usefulness of grades [3]. As a result, educators need to devote greater attention to students' concerns about the fairness of assessment processes and outcomes [18]. Fairness in evaluation is also affected by the scientificity of evaluation methods. For example, it would be unfair to students with innovative and practical abilities if the assessment model only relies on memorization and recitation.

Evaluators in Hong Kong have been exploring how to ensure that every student can benefit from student assessment. Student assessment has become an important part of the education system in Hong Kong [10]. The curriculum guide states that the learning assessment (AFL) in Hong Kong is very similar to the formative assessment of education in the United Kingdom, as well as the classroom assessment model in the United States [19].

The assessment system in Hong Kong has always mainly included some open projects, which will integrate the thesis and problem solution, as well as applied knowledge and writing ability into the assessment system of Hong Kong education [4]. The situation of students is diverse, so the assessment method should be suitable for the development of students. Other aspects of students' teaching activities should also be considered, such as activities and practices in and out of class. Not only are tests considered as a part of educational assessment, but other assessment factors are also taken into account. Therefore, in the exploration of the methods, researchers realized that multiple assessment models should be used for assessment [20]. Educators believed that the method of selecting test questions covered a wide range, but it could not evaluate students' creativity, so a comprehensive method should be used to evaluate students [3]. In the assessment, teachers should communicate well with students about the test content and assessment criteria [5]. In addition, Hong Kong has added school-based assessment (SBA) into the examination system, with the main purpose of improving the effectiveness and fairness of assessment to solve the problem that the public examination cannot accurately express the actual ability of candidates. SBA evaluates individual activities such as a portfolio, laboratory work, or completion of a design project. This approach has received great attention from educators and the government by helping students acquire important skills and knowledge [1]. This SBA approach fully meets the criteria that colleges and universities should prepare students "to go through a complex process of personal development." By reforming student assessment methods in many ways in the classroom, differences in student performance and fairness have been shown [1].

### **3. Suggestions for Assessment System in Mainland China**

The above analysis indicated that the evaluation methods in mainland Chinese higher education are one-sided. The only form of assessment is by examination, and students are not able to participate in the assessment process. They are only the ones being assessed. A lack of comprehensive assessment would impede students' development. Thus, it is imperative for the mainland assessment system to carry on a scientific and objective student assessment system. Improvements can be made in the following aspects. First, the examination can be chosen as the main assessment method with the addition of other assessment modes, such as students' scientific research and practical activities. The reason is that the assessment mode in Mainland China is class-based, considering a large number of students to be assessed. Second, the focus of evaluators should lay more emphasis on students'

participation. To bring students into the assessment work, encourage students to put forward their own opinions and actively adopt the assessment work, to cultivate students' creative ability and thinking development ability. Third, the involvement of administrative power should be reduced in the evaluation of students to ensure the fairness of the evaluation of their creative ability.

The above three suggestions can transform the mainland higher education assessment system from a single method to a complete method, which is an essential assessment standard in the education system. A variety of assessment content can effectively improve students' extracurricular activities, such as practice. By adding the assessment method of extracurricular activities, the class assessment method based on examination improves the students' independent innovation consciousness. As students are included in the assessment participants, they can understand the assessment steps and thus realize what needs to be paid attention to in their learning process so that they can focus on this step and study hard. In the assessment process, when the administrative force is no longer involved, students will be more motivated and oriented to learn, and they will realize that they can achieve success through their efforts. Therefore, students have reasonable expectations for their prospects. In a word, whether students can get a more comprehensive development needs to be assisted by assessment. Through the assessment results, students can be aware of their shortcomings in the learning process, to improve and perfect themselves to achieve a perfect stage in the learning process and growth process. At the same time, the participation of educators is inevitable. They are teachers with a rich teaching career and have a good understanding of the needs of students. Therefore, the assessment of teachers is an important part of the group. When teachers and students participate in the assessment process and learn from each other's suggestions, the evaluation system will be more and more perfect. Therefore, Educators need to pay attention to this critical part, and these suggestions need to be advocated and implemented by the government and school educators to perfect the higher assessment evaluation system.

#### **4. Conclusion**

By comparing learning assessments in higher education in Mainland China and Hong Kong, the results of this study show that the educational assessment methods in mainland China are quite different from those in Hong Kong. First of all, from the perspective of assessment criteria, educators in mainland China and Hong Kong have very different choices for formative assessment and outcome assessment. At issue is whether students' activities other than test scores should be included in the assessment system. Hong Kong supports the practice, but educators in mainland China still evaluate students on merit. Researchers in Hong Kong lay more emphasis on the development of students' subjective motivation and creative ability, and they advocate the cultivation of students' all-around development ability. Secondly, from the perspective of the subjects involved in the assessment, only teachers or educators usually participate in the assessment of students in mainland China. Students' opinions are not taken into account, and students are not allowed to communicate with their teachers. Therefore, students can only get the evaluation results passively. However, educators in Hong Kong believe that although students are the subject of evaluation, teachers should refer to students' opinions and ideas on evaluation methods and provide students with communication and exchange during evaluation. Thirdly, from the perspective of the fairness of student evaluation, it has become a great challenge for educational evaluation workers to ensure the fairness of student evaluation in mainland China due to the significant participation of administrative forces. But educators in Hong Kong believe that the single examination-only assessment is no longer suitable for the overall development of students, and the problem of student equity can be effectively solved by adding a variety of assessment elements. Overall, these differences need to be addressed and improved by educators and the government to develop an assessment model suitable for the overall development of students.

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