



Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport

Student Assessment Policy

New Generation School
System - Cambodia



January 2023

STUDENT ASSESSMENT POLICY

New Generation School System - Cambodia

Summary

The present document has been designed by the New Generation School System of Cambodia to help define the organizational structure of student assessments within the curricular program used by each member school. This assessment policy also describes the criteria that are utilized to make decisions regarding students' academic progress

New Generation School Central Office

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Present Document

The present document has been developed to provide guidance to education officials, school managers, and teachers working within the New Generation School System with regards to how students are evaluated. Although New Generation Schools (NGS) generally follow the official curricular program of the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS) and participate in both the *Diplome* Examination (Grade 9) and the *Bac II* Examination (Grade 12), schools within the NGS system are allowed to alter the curriculum and examination content in ways that empower students such that what they learn is more relevant to a 21st Century Society, both in its social and economic aspects. Sometimes, this goal is difficult to achieve in actual practice, particularly when national examinations do not assess key areas of the NGS curricular program such as practical lab skills, student research activities, and Information & Communication Technology skills (ICT). Nevertheless, the demands of universities and other post-secondary institutions to see measures of student performance that go beyond test results (e.g., portfolios, project work) are helping to offset the narrower focus of the national examination system.

The Student Assessment Policy presented here also seeks to advise schools about the risks associated with student assessment, which if allowed to dominate the learning process will undermine innovative teaching and learning practices. While this document, of course, recognizes the need for student assessment in its many forms, it also advises schools to be aware of what are known as negative ‘wash-back effects’ in which an overemphasis on the importance of test results leads teachers to ‘teach to the test¹,’ particularly in cases where teacher accountability is based entirely or largely on student test performance. In such cases, teachers are likely to abandon any commitment to ‘real’ learning or innovative teaching and focus only on helping students pass centrally set tests to avoid blame by their superiors. Such practices are common in ‘exam-driven’ education systems such as Cambodia where there has historically been a heavy focus on examination results and student academic ranking. Because one of the most important mandates of the New Generation School System is to promote educational innovation and new practices of teaching, a situation where teachers are only focusing on ‘teaching to the test’ will very much undermine this mandate, requiring clear measures to prevent such practices from occurring.

1.2 The Evolving Nature of Student Assessment Policies

The implementation environment within the New Generation School System is dynamic and constantly changing. This means that Assessment Policies should not be considered ‘static’ but rather susceptible to change with the changing learning context. For example, MoEYS has expressed a need to modify national leaving examinations in such a way that they better accommodate what students enrolled in the New Generation School System are learning, perhaps leading to the development of a special NGS Bac II Examination. Should such changes occur, this document must also be regularly updated to reflect these changes. Thus, the Student Assessment Policy of the NGS System should be considered to be an ‘evolving’ document that will be periodically updated.

1.3 Contents and Organization of this Document

The NGS Student Assessment Policy is organized into four discrete sections that provide

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Washback_effect

school managers and teachers with a better understanding of the evaluation structure in a school as a whole in juxtaposition to a fragmented view in which school stakeholders are not aware of how different aspects of the evaluation process relate to one another (e.g., project work activities and student marking). The document is, therefore, organized into the following sections:

- Philosophies and Principles of Student Assessment
- Recommended Assessment Practices
- Linkages between Assessment Policy and Other Key Policies
- Roles and Responsibilities of School Stakeholders in Implementing the Assessment Policy

2. PHILOSOPHY & PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE ASSESSMENT PRACTICE

2.1 General Philosophical Viewpoint in the NGS System Regarding Assessment

The goal of the MoEYS in establishing the New Generation School System was to accelerate the process of moving the Cambodian education system into the 21st Century. Education systems of the new century place a great deal more emphasis on enabling students to apply what they learn in practical settings rather than memorizing what they read in the textbook. The table below helps to summarize some of the key differences between a 20th and 21st Century Education System and how this impacts the NGS Philosophy of Assessment.

Table 2.1: Comparing Modalities of Organization between 20th and 21st Century Education Systems

Parameter	20 th Century	21 st Century
<i>Concept of Learning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information Transfer • Passive Learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning to Learn • Active Learning
<i>Curriculum</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standardized • Textbook-driven 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individualized • Research-driven
<i>Assessment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test-driven • Focus on lower-order thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project or Portfolio-driven • Focus on higher-order thinking
<i>Educational Philosophy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compliance • Conformity • Uniform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dynamic • Non-conformist • Creative

From this table, it is easy to see that conventional student testing, as it is usually thought of, is not a very efficient tool through which to promote active learning or higher-order thinking simply because it is difficult to formulate test questions that can capture the higher order thinking skills such as Synthesis and Evaluation. Thus, the philosophy of assessment within the NGS System places much more focus on using a diverse range of assessment tools (i.e., differentiated assessment) such as portfolios, project work, exhibitions, debates, club work, and the use of other creative products to complement the more traditional use of paper and pencil tests.

2.2 Key Beliefs of NGS Educators regarding Student Assessment

The assessment philosophy of the New Generation School System has been formulated as a series of key statements that reflect the underlying beliefs of how we help students to learn. These statements include the following:

Statement 1: Using Differentiated Assessment

NGS Educators believe in differentiated assessment in which there is a proper balance between formative and summative evaluation as well as the various techniques used to gather assessment data about a student’s learning (e.g., objective questions, subjective questions like

essays, project work, portfolios, etc.).

Statement 2: The Importance of Mistakes

NGS Educators believe that mistakes are essential for learning. That is, human beings learn by making mistakes. Thus, students should not be humiliated or berated for making mistakes but rather teachers should use mistakes as an ‘opportunity’ to improve learning.

Statement 3: The Role of Constructive Feedback

NGS Educators believe that constructive feedback is more important than a “mark.” Whatever form an assessment takes, teachers should always use the assessment process as an opportunity to provide constructive feedback to students that goes beyond just a point score written into the Student Marking Book. Teachers should never be too critical of under-performing students and always provide encouragement and praise where students have performed well.

Statement 4: Assessment Is a ‘Means’ to an ‘End’

NGS Educators believe that ‘assessment’ is a means to an end where that ‘end’ is defined as better teacher understanding of how much students have learned and where there is a need for additional improvement. Teachers should never see tests as an ‘end’ in and of themselves and above all teachers should NEVER engage in practices where they are ‘teaching to the test.’

Statement 5: Minimize the Competitive Nature of Assessment

NGS Educators believe that efforts should be made to humanize the assessment process wherever possible. Student Assessment is often seen as an inherently competitive process where students compare themselves to others. For the lower-achieving students, this can often be a devaluing process that leads to discouragement and disengagement from the learning process. In extreme cases, students may become ‘labelled’ as underperformers, which leads to what is known as a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy.’ Teachers should, therefore, find ways to ensure that one student’s success does not come at the expense of another student. Provide rewards and praise to high-achievers and encouragement and constructive feedback to those who are under-performing. The NGS System, therefore, discourages the practice of student ‘labeling’ and ‘ranking.’

Once again, we note that the beliefs elaborated above are not static but may change as the NGS System evolves, which may lead to the expansion/modification of each statement as well as the addition of new statements.

3. RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

3.1 The Use of Formative & Summative Evaluation and Knowing the Difference

The NGS System expects all schools to have a balance between Formative and Summative Evaluation and understand the key differences and purposes of these two types of evaluation. These two types of assessment are defined as follows:

Formative assessment represents the process of gathering, analyzing, interpreting and using the evidence to improve student learning and to help students to achieve their potential. Formative assessments frequently use question types that allow teachers to understand the processes that students use to solve problems so that they can use remedial techniques accordingly. Formative assessment is an essential component of classroom practice and needs to be integrated into the curriculum. The assessment policy will make clear to the whole community what the expectations and practices relating to formative assessment in the school are. Above all, formative assessments should NEVER be recorded in a way where these marks are used in the final determination of pass-fail decision.² Formative Assessment should take the form of continuous and frequent administrations of testing that are carefully reviewed by teachers and reflected in re-teaching plans.

Summative assessment is concerned with measuring ‘terminal’ student performance against curricular assessment criteria to judge levels of attainment and whether a student can be promoted to the next grade. Teachers must be aware of the principles and practices that the education system uses to conduct summative assessment (e.g., the weighting of monthly tests, semester tests, etc.). Summative assessments typically rely heavily on objective, product-oriented questions (e.g., multiple choice questions) and stand in sharp contrast to formative assessments that focus more on understanding the processes that students use to solve problems, as noted above.³

3.2 Grading and Marking

Scoring Systems: The marking system in New Generation Schools should use criterion-referenced marking systems using a point scale of 1 to 10, as per MoEYS guidelines where ‘5’ is considered the cut-off point for passing. Norm-referenced marking systems and student ranking are discouraged in the NGS system except in cases where a teacher feels that test marks need to be re-graded on a ‘curve’. Guidelines on how to mark on a curve are provided in the *NGS Student Assessment Manual*.⁴

Using Rubrics: It is recommended that teachers develop rubrics to judge activities such as debates, presentations, contests, and creative products to strengthen the reliability of marking between teachers and judges who are making evaluative judgments.

Flexibility in Grading and Marking: Individual schools in the NGS System should have considerable freedom in terms of how they apply the evaluation guidelines and principles laid out in this document. For example, teachers may place the highest value on the most accurate demonstration of student performance, rather than just averaging attainment grades over a reporting period. In cases of extreme variation, teachers should discuss such cases with their immediate superiors (e.g., a mentor or vice director). Teachers may also replace monthly tests with non-test forms of assessment (see below).

² Adapted from:

<http://mics.edu.gh/Guidelines%20for%20developing%20a%20school%20assessment%20policy%20in%20the%20Diploma%20Programme.pdf>

³ Ibid

⁴ http://www.kapekh.org/files/report_file/350-en.pdf (cf. p. 16).

3.3 Assessment Instrumentation

The Use of Written Tests: The limitations of written tests should be recognized, particularly as this concerns evaluating the higher-order thinking skills. Therefore, the use of written tests should be limited to only those cases where their employ is unavoidable (e.g., School-wide Semester Tests). When developing tests, the proper principles of test development should be observed as laid out in the *NGS Student Assessment Manual*.⁵ In particular, objective test questions (e.g., multiple choice) should be used to assess lower-order thinking skills (e.g., Remembering, Understanding, and Application) while the use of essays and other open-ended questions should be limited to higher order thinking skills (e.g., Analysis, Evaluation, etc.). Such practices will increase the Content and Construct Validity of written tests. A suitable breakdown of objective and subjective questions in a test is recommended at 80-20 in terms of the allocation of points for each.

Take-home Tests: In order to encourage research activities and creative thinking during the evaluation process, teachers are also encouraged to use ‘Take-home Tests’⁶ in which students are allowed apply learned principles in combination with outside research to answer test questions ‘outside’ of the classroom. Take-home Tests help to promote student research, which is so essential to the NGS philosophy of teaching and learning.

The Use of Non-test Forms of Assessment: The use of non-test forms of assessment such as projects, lab work checklists, exhibitions, club work, debate performances, video presentations, and other forms of evaluation are highly encouraged. When used, such modes of assessment may also be graded using the 10-point system described above. In the case of Project Work, which is considered the most important form on non-test assessment, teachers should consider guidelines provided in the *NGS Constructivist Learning Manual* for applying the best approach to evaluating projects.⁷

3.4 Using Question Banks

Test Questions should be regarded by schools as an asset on which to build and develop more ‘functional’ questions. In contrast to most schools, used test questions should not be regarded as something to be discarded in the NGS System. Test questions should be subject to *item analysis* and retained by the NGS System in a revised (and hopefully improved) form for future use. The vehicle to retain and store revised test questions should be the NGS Question Bank, which is available to schools to access on the NGS website.

3.5 Recording and Reporting Assessment Results

Recording Student Assessment: MoEYS has provided schools with standardized Marking Books for recording student assessment. These record templates should be used by all schools. However, schools are advised to maintain separate records for recording marks generated by Formative Evaluation so that these are not confused with Summative Evaluation marks that are used for promotion decisions.

Reporting Student Assessment: Student performance should be reported to parents on a monthly basis using standardized reporting forms approved by MoEYS. Discussions with parents on the performance of their children should be organized periodically by schools at least twice a year and preferably in the form of ‘both’ group and individualized meetings, the latter being particularly important in the case of struggling students.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ <https://www.trentu.ca/academicskills/how-guides/how-study/prepare-and-write-exams/preparing-and-writing-take-home-exam>

⁷ http://www.kapekh.org/files/report_file/99-en.pdf (cf. p. 24).

3.6 Student Preparation for High-stakes Examinations

The NGS System does not allow teachers to organize private classes for students to prepare them for upcoming tests whether these are internal to the school or external tests administered by MoEYS (e.g., the Bac II Examination). Nevertheless, this prohibition should not prevent a school from identifying students in need of preparation for test-taking and providing them with specialized tutoring. In such cases, teachers or outside tutors may be engaged by the school and the costs for paying them should be absorbed by the school using internal resources generated by general parental fees. The costs of student test preparation should never be passed on directly to students, especially those from the poorer classes.

3.7 The Use of Electronic Testing

New Generation Schools are incrementally transitioning to electronic forms of management using the *Cambodia Mobile* school management platform. This platform has functionalities that also facilitate electronic testing. Such testing has numerous advantages including the following:

- **Environmentally friendly.** One of the biggest, yet indirect advantages of online examinations is the impact it has on the environment, because it reduces the use of paper for test production.
- **Saves money.** Online examinations also save money by helping schools to reduce outlays for the purchase of paper and ink as well as the engagement of invigilators.
- **Saves time.** Online examinations save the time needed for correction and score tabulation.
- **More secure and reduces cheating:** By randomizing the appearance of questions on a testing instrument, online examinations reduce opportunities for cheating, thereby increasing a test's overall reliability.
- **Convenience.** Online examinations are easy to organize and save considerable resources in the allocation of man/womanpower for test administration.

In view of the above, New Generation Schools are expected to transition to the use of Electronic Testing wherever possible.

3.8 Entrance Examinations

Because of the high standards of governance exhibited by New Generation Schools, there is an increasingly high demand by students for enrollment in those places where such schools exist. This high demand often creates significant challenges for New Generation Schools because they are required to maintain Pupil Class Ratios (PCR) of 36 to 1 or less to meet requirements for accreditation. In addition, functional illiteracy continues to be a common problem at key transition points within the education system (i.e., from primary to lower secondary and from lower to upper secondary school). Functionally illiterate and non-numerate students cannot effectively benefit from the high-quality facilities placed in a New Generation School because basic literacy and numeracy are pre-requisites for enrollment. In view of the above reasons, unlimited access to New Generation Schools cannot be allowed.

In order to address the challenges described above, New Generation Schools are allowed to develop Entrance Examinations that focus on ensuring that applying students are both functionally literate and numerate and that student enrollment does not overwhelm PCR standards. Entrance Examinations should focus primarily on 'Khmer Language' and 'Mathematics' while additional subject areas (e.g., English competency, science, etc.) are optional and dependent on a school's preferences.

3.9 The Use of Non-binding Tests to Monitor Student Performance

General Uses of Non-binding Tests: New Generation Schools are committed to monitoring the degree to which its educational program promotes critical thinking and proficiency in a

number of other areas that are not necessarily specific to the national curriculum. Therefore, New Generation Schools are expected to work with the NGS Central Office in organizing tests in specific areas such as *critical thinking* to monitor the degree to which students are able to solve critical thinking tasks that are non-curriculum specific in nature. The results of non-binding tests should be shared with individual schools and MoEYS (in the form of annual reports) that provide feedback to stakeholders at all levels so that they can take appropriate action.

Critical Thinking: Critical thinking tests are organized as longitudinal monitoring exercises to better track the development of critical thinking skills, which are non-curriculum specific. These tests look at some of the following sub-skills that are considered to define critical thinking:

- Detecting Patterns (Prediction)
- Logical Sequencing
- Classification
- Analogic Thinking Skills
- Problem Solving Skills
- Textual/Graphic Analysis

Critical thinking tests are administered mainly at secondary school level by the NGS Central Office. These tests are organized as non-binding assessment exercises (i.e., they have no bearing on promotion decisions) so that teachers do not feel any pressures to teach to the test.

International Standards of Literacy and Numeracy: Non-binding tests are also administered at primary level in the form of *Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRA)* and *Early Grade Mathematics Assessments (EGMA)* to monitor progress in basic literacy and numeracy in Grades 1 to 3. These tests use international templates; are non-curriculum specific; use individualized formats; and employ a software program known as Tangerine⁸ to ensure high levels of test reliability. EGRA and EGMA testing use international standards of reading and math proficiency and facilitate interschool comparisons to monitor academic performance. These tests are administered directly by Kampuchea Action to Promote Education (KAPE) in collaboration with the NGS Central Office.

International Tests: On occasion, New Generation Schools also participate in international tests of proficiency in Native Language Ability, Mathematics, and Science. Such tests are administered directly by MoEYS and the results are tabulated by external agents for purposes of international comparisons. The NGS Central Office is not directly engaged in such test administrations.

⁸ <https://www.tangerinecentral.org/about>

4. LINKAGES BETWEEN THE NGS STUDENT ASSESSMENT POLICY & OTHER KEY POLICIES AND DOCUMENTS

The Student Assessment Policy outlined in this document has implicit linkages with several other key policies and manuals that have already been referred to several times in the narrative above. These documents and their linkages with the School Assessment Policy described here include the following:

New Generation School Policy⁹: This policy document outlines the commitment of New Generation Schools to innovations in education (that could be undermined by ‘teaching to the test’ practices); the need for annual accreditation linked to such criteria as PCR levels of less than 36:1; and the use of software programs that facilitate electronic assessment.

New Generation School Operational Guidelines¹⁰: This policy document outlines the suggested guidelines for organizing: Entrance Examinations and affirms their need to maintain standards; accreditation procedures; and the use of technology in the educational process including electronic assessment.

NGS Student Assessment Manual¹¹: This manual provides guidance to teachers on how to develop written tests that exhibit both content and construct validity; employ formative and summative evaluation in a way that ensures compliance with the purpose of each; use criterion-referenced scoring; grade tests on a curve; and undertake item analysis.

NGS Constructivist Learning Manual¹²: This manual provides guidance on how to assess academic products that use constructivist learning principles.

21st Century Pedagogy Framework for Cambodia¹³: This technical document discusses the dangers posed to new pedagogies of ‘teaching to the test’ practices and advocates for the use of product-based learning implied by constructivist learning over the use of more traditional types of assessment such as written tests.

⁹ <http://119.82.251.165:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/791/New%20Generation%20School%20Policy%20Guidelines.pdf?sequence=1>

¹⁰ http://www.kapekh.org/files/report_file/353-en.pdf

¹¹ Op. Cit. (cf. Footnote 4)

¹² Op. Cit. (cf. Footnote 6)

¹³ http://www.kapekh.org/files/report_file/179-en.pdf

5. ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF SCHOOL STAKEHOLDERS IN IMPLEMENTING THE ASSESSMENT POLICY

5.1 General Implementation Observations

New Generation Schools use School-based Management (SBM) principles that devolve a considerable amount of decision-making to local stakeholders, including those relating to student assessment. That is why New Generation Schools are known as ‘autonomous public schools.’ Thus, most of the assessment guidelines discussed in this document fall primarily on school-level stakeholders to implement. As such, schools have considerable autonomy and flexibility in their interpretation of these guidelines and how they apply them to their individual schools.

5.2 Central Level Stakeholders

Although most of the policy guidelines discussed in this document fall on local stakeholders to implement, there are some functions that still involve the input of central level stakeholders, mainly those in the NGS Central Office. Some of the most important responsibilities of central level stakeholders adhere to the following areas:

- **Development and Administration of Non-binding Tests:** Critical Thinking Tests, EGRA, and EGMA are generally the responsibility of the central NGS Office to develop, administer, and tabulate. Dissemination of the results is also the responsibility of the NGS Central Office.
- **Question Bank Operation:** The NGS Central Office is also responsible for maintaining and organizing all revised questions received from schools in a Question Bank. The central office ensures access to the Bank on the website to all authorized stakeholders.
- **Capacity-building in Student Assessment:** The NGS Central Office is fully responsible to providing training to both school managers and teachers in basic principles of student assessment using the manuals and documentation discussed in Section 4 above.
- **Procurement of Software for Electronic Testing:** Electronic testing usually requires the availability of specific software programs and platforms. The procurement of this software is the responsibility of the NGS Central Office, since it is in a better position to identify suppliers and negotiate discounts with high volume procurements. After procurement has been completed, the central office then organizes access to all member schools in the NGS System.

5.3 School Level Stakeholders

School-level stakeholders have the primary responsibility for the implementation of most of the guidelines outlined in this document. The distribution of these duties among stakeholders is described below:

- **School Managers:** Managers play a key role in organizing terminal (i.e., summative) assessments that occur on a semester and annual basis. This includes test development (based on tables of specification and questions received from teachers), production, administration, tabulation, and dissemination. Managers also have an advocacy role to play that ensures teachers are undertaking assessments that reflect differentiation in the use of assessment instruments as well as the use of both formative and summative assessment in the teaching-learning process. Finally, managers are expected to play the

role of an important intermediary between teachers and parents during the dissemination of assessment results and organize key, school-wide meetings between parents and teachers.

- **Teachers:** Teachers play the most important role in the implementation of the Assessment Policy as they are the ones interacting directly with students and making most of the formative planning and summative promotional decisions. As such, they are fully responsible for formative assessment in the classroom and the organization of monthly tests or other non-test assessments that may substitute for monthly tests. Individual teachers determine the kinds of assessment instrumentation that they will use with their students, and these should hopefully reflect a balance of test and non-test instrumentation. Teachers also maintain class-wide and individual student assessment records and report these to school managers for dissemination to parents. Teachers are expected to organize themselves into subject or grade groupings where they are led by a Technical Grade or Group Leader who can help coordinate the development of school-wide tests and advocacy for differentiated assessment.
- **School-based Mentors:** Mentors provide technical guidance to teachers at all levels in the development of assessment instruments (both test-based and non-test-based) that observe standard principles of student assessment. Mentors are also responsible for providing feedback to teachers about how well their students are doing academically (for example based on EGRA/EGMA results and other assessment data) and appropriate measures for improvement. Mentors must be sure to keep all such communications confidential so that they do not pressure teachers in ways that could be counterproductive (e.g., teaching to the test).
- **Parents:** Parents are expected to provide feedback to teachers on the student performance reports received from the school; attend school-wide meetings where they can better understand a school's assessment framework and policies; and confer with teachers about how they can better support their children's learning at home.