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(Тэгш байдал, багшийн стресс, хиймэл оюун ухаанд суурилсан
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**Reimagining Assessment in Mongolian Education:
(Equity, Teacher Stress, and AI-Powered Reform)**

Amar Purevdorj 

Mongolian National University of Education

Suvdaa Batsuuri 

National University of Mongolia

Zoljargal Munkhjargal 

National University of Mongolia

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Тэгш байдал, багшийн стресс, хиймэл оюун ухаанд суурилсан шинэчлэл**

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Холбоо барих зохиогч:

Пүрэвдоржийн Амар

Монгол Улсын Боловсролын Их Сургууль

Email: amar@msue.edu.mn

ХУРААНГУЙ

Монголын дээд боловсролын тогтолцоо нь олон улсын болон хөдөлмөр эрхлэлтийн гэсэн үндсэн хоёр шаардлагаас үүдэлтэй хурдацтай өөрчлөлтөд орж байна. Мөн Улаанбаатар хотод сургалтын төлбөр, орон сууц, хоолны үнийн өсөлтийн дүн шинжилгээ, гэр бүлийн тогтворгүй байдал зэрэг өргөн хүрээтэй нийгмийн дарамттай зэрэгцэн эдийн засгийн хүндрэл нь оюутны сайн сайхан байдалд хэрхэн нөлөөлж байгааг судалсан болно.

Боловсролын шударга байдал, итгэлийг сэргээхийн тулд нийтлэлд ил тод байдлыг нэмэгдүүлэх, хүнд нөхцөлд байгаа оюутнуудад шалгалтын бэлтгэлийн уян хатан хугацааг өгөх хиймэл оюун ухаанд суурилсан үнэлгээний хэрэгслийг ашиглахыг санал болгож байна.



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Reimagining Assessment in Mongolian Education:

Equity, Teacher Stress, and AI-Powered Reform

Amar Purevdorj, Suvdaa Batsuuri, Zoljargal Munkhjargal

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ABSTRACT

Mongolia's higher education system is undergoing rapid transformation, shaped by the dual imperatives of internationalization and employability. Yet, many students from middle-income herder families, single-parent households, and physically talented scholarship recipients face financial and structural challenges that undermine their academic success. The current university assessment system remains misaligned with the realities of this diverse student population.

Furthermore, it is widely believed that students experience heightened stress when term exams begin, but this study also investigates whether teachers themselves worry about their students' performance. This dual perspective highlights the relational pressures of assessment, in which both learners and educators are caught up in the demands of institutional expectations.

Drawing on analyses of rising tuition, housing, and food costs in Ulaanbaatar, alongside broader social pressures such as family instability, the paper examines how economic hardship intersects with academic stress to shape student well-being. It situates these challenges within the ethical responsibilities of teachers and institutions, critiquing deficit-based grading frameworks that fail to account for resilience and lived realities.

To restore fairness and credibility in education, the paper advocates for an AI-powered assessment tool that enhances transparency and provides flexible exam preparation periods for students facing sensitive circumstances.



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Corresponding author:

Purevdorj Amar

Mongolian National University of Education

Email: amar@msue.edu.mn

INTRODUCTION

Mongolia's higher education system stands at a critical juncture. Pressured by the dual imperatives of internationalization and employability, universities are expected to prepare graduates who can compete in global labor markets while remaining responsive to local social and cultural realities. Yet beneath this ambitious vision lie entrenched challenges: outdated exam practices and inequitable access to professional courses. These issues disproportionately affect students from middle-income herder families, single-parent households, and physically talented scholarship recipients who must balance athletic commitments with academic demands.

It is widely believed that students experience heightened stress when term exams begin, but this research also seeks to determine whether teachers themselves worry about their students' performance. This dual focus underscores the relational nature of assessment, in which both learners and educators can be caught up in the pressures of institutional expectations.

Rising tuition fees, escalating housing costs, and food inflation in Ulaanbaatar have intensified the financial burden on students, consuming a significant share of household income. At the same time, broader social pressures, such as rising divorce rates and family instability, compound the emotional and financial precarity of student life. Within this environment, traditional assessment frameworks not only fail to capture the diverse realities of learners but also risk exacerbating inequities by privileging those with stable financial and social support systems.

This paper argues that reforming exam assessment practices is essential to restoring fairness, transparency, and credibility in Mongolian higher education. By situating the analysis within both global debates on educational equity and the lived realities of Mongolian students, the study highlights the urgent need for culturally responsive and ethically grounded reforms. The proposed adoption of an AI-powered assessment tool offers a pathway toward greater transparency, flexibility, and trust, particularly for students facing sensitive circumstances that demand additional preparation time.

Drawing on institutional observation, policy documents, and peer-reviewed literature, the paper integrates an autoethnographic lens to illuminate the contradictions between normative grading frameworks and the lived experiences of students and educators. This dual academic and personal perspective underscores the ethical responsibility of institutions and teachers to design assessment systems that honor student resilience rather than reinforce deficit-based models. Ultimately, the study seeks to contribute to a broader vision of higher education reform in Mongolia: one that is equitable, transparent, and responsive to the complex realities of its diverse student population.

LITERATURE REVIEW

International organizations emphasize that equity and inclusion are central to educational transformation. UNESCO (2017, p. 12) frames equity around the principle that "*every learner matters and matters equally*," offering tools for countries to evaluate and improve fairness in assessment practices. Similarly, the *Global Education Monitoring Report* (2026) highlights persistent disparities in access and outcomes, noting that wealth, gender, ethnicity, and location continue to shape opportunities worldwide. These frameworks underscore the need for culturally responsive assessment systems that reflect diverse student realities rather than reinforcing systemic inequities.

Technological innovation offers new pathways for equitable assessment. Holmes, Bialik, and Fadel (2019/2021) emphasize that AI-powered grading and feedback systems can enhance efficiency, consistency, and personalization, while also reducing the ethical burden on teachers to adjust scores. Luckin, Holmes, Griffiths, and Forcier (2016/2022) extend this argument by highlighting AI's potential to support equity through adaptive feedback and flexible timelines, particularly for learners with diverse needs. Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019) and Sun et al. (2025) further demonstrate how AI tools can reduce grading bias and support learner autonomy, while the British Council (2023) underscores the importance of AI literacy among educators. Khasawneh et al. (2024) argue for emotionally attuned feedback mechanisms that enhance motivation and psychological well-being, and the American Psychological Association (2025) confirms the scalability of AI-enabled assessment while cautioning against algorithmic bias and limited interpretability. Collectively, these studies suggest that AI-assisted tools, when implemented within ethical frameworks, can restore transparency and fairness to Mongolian higher education assessment practices.

Mongolia's higher education sector has been the subject of reform initiatives aimed at improving quality and competitiveness. The Asian Development Bank (2024) reported that outcomes were “*less than successful*,” with persistent inequities in access and financing. The World Bank (2025) highlighted tuition costs, inefficiencies, and governance gaps as major barriers to equity in Mongolian education. Rising tuition fees, such as 238,700 MNT per credit at the National University of Mongolia, combined with housing costs (\$100–\$500 USD per month in Ulaanbaatar) and food price inflation (8–10% since 2024), create significant financial burdens for students.

Within this context, certain groups face disproportionate challenges. Single-parent households often struggle to balance caregiving responsibilities with academic demands, leaving students vulnerable to financial instability and emotional stress. Global studies confirm that students from single-parent families are more likely to experience financial hardship and lower persistence rates (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2023). Physically talented scholarship recipients, while celebrated for their athletic achievements, frequently encounter structural barriers: time spent in training and competition reduces opportunities to excel in professional courses, and scholarships tied to athletic performance can create precarious conditions if academic results falter.

At the same time, universities have begun to introduce limited equity-oriented practices. For example, the National University of Mongolia sends emails to lecturers containing information about disabled students, ensuring that faculty are aware of specific needs and can adapt teaching and assessment practices accordingly. While this represents a step toward inclusivity, such measures remain fragmented and insufficiently integrated into broader assessment reform.

Global research highlights the relational dimension of assessment. A systematic review in the *International Journal of Educational Research* (2021) found that teacher burnout and stress are linked to lower student achievement and reduced classroom engagement. A multilevel study in *Social Psychology of Education* (2023) demonstrated that schools with higher teacher well-being had significantly better student literacy and numeracy outcomes. Research in *Frontiers in Education* (2021) further shows that exam periods intensify stress for both students and teachers, creating a feedback loop where teacher anxiety about student performance amplifies student stress.

Additional studies reinforce these findings. For example, *Teacher Well-being and Its Relationship to Student Achievement and Classroom Climate* (International Journal of Teacher Education Research Studies [IJTERS], 2025) explores how teacher psychological well-being and burnout affect student performance. *Assessing Stress Levels Amongst Teachers* (Education Journal, 2025) identifies institutional pressures and coping strategies that shape teacher responses to exam performance. The *Handbook of Stress and Academic Anxiety* (Springer, 2022, p. 45) provides comprehensive coverage of stress in academic contexts, including teacher concerns about student outcomes. Finally, *Empowering Teachers by Integrating Attributional Perspectives* (Learning and Instruction, 2026) shows how teachers' beliefs about responsibility for student failure influence their emotions and classroom interventions. Together, these studies confirm that teachers' worry about student performance is not only widespread but also consequential, affecting both instructional quality and student achievement.

Taken together, global frameworks stress inclusion and equity, AI research highlights transparency and personalization, and Mongolian studies reveal systemic inequities in financing and governance. Yet, there is a clear gap: little research has examined how exam assessment practices in Mongolia specifically contribute to student stress and inequity, nor how teachers themselves experience worry about student performance. Addressing this gap requires integrating global insights with local realities and exploring AI-assisted tools as culturally responsive solutions to restore fairness and trust in Mongolian higher education.

Hypotheses

Grounded in the literature on assessment equity, institutional ethics, and AI-assisted pedagogy, this study advances the following hypotheses:

H1: An AI-powered assessment tool that integrates rubric-aligned scoring and socioeconomic sensitivity features will produce fairer and less biased outcomes than traditional grading practices in Mongolian higher education.

H2: Marginalized students will report greater perceived fairness and transparency when evaluated through AI-assisted assessment compared to conventional methods.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining autoethnographic reflection, institutional observation, policy analysis, and survey data to examine the intersection of exam assessment practices, student well-being, and teacher stress in Mongolian higher education.

As both a language educator and a student pursuing a second degree, I occupy a dual role that provides unique insight into the lived realities of higher education. This positionality enables a grounded critique of normative grading frameworks and institutional ethics, informed by direct engagement with students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, including herder families, single-parent households, young mothers, and physically talented scholarship recipients balancing athletic commitments with academic demands.

Classroom dynamics, grading practices, and student–teacher interactions were observed across both private and state universities. These observations provided qualitative insights into how assessment practices are implemented, how students respond to exam pressures, and how teachers navigate institutional expectations.

Secondary data was drawn from tuition fee schedules, housing and food cost reports, and education loan fund allocations. These sources contextualize the economic pressures faced by students, particularly those from single-parent households and scholarship recipients whose financial stability is precarious.

Global and Mongolian-specific studies on educational equity, AI-assisted assessment, and teacher well-being were reviewed to situate local findings within broader scholarly debates. This literature provided comparative frameworks and highlighted gaps in existing research.

To complement qualitative insights, a structured questionnaire comprising 11 questions was distributed via Google Forms to teachers at both private and state universities. The survey focused on three key areas:

- Whether teachers feel responsible for the failure of their students in exams.
- Whether teachers have ever adjusted scores upward after learning of a student’s sensitive life circumstances.
- Whether teachers experience pressure from their employers regarding exam outcomes.

Responses were analyzed to identify patterns of stress, ethical dilemmas, and institutional pressures faced by educators. This data stream adds a relational dimension to the study, revealing how teachers’ perceptions of responsibility intersect with students’ stress during exam periods.

By integrating autoethnographic reflection, institutional observation, policy analysis, peer-reviewed literature, and survey data, the study achieves interpretive validity through triangulation. This multi-layered methodology ensures that findings are not only theoretically grounded but also context-sensitive, reflecting the lived realities of both students and teachers in Mongolia’s evolving higher education system.

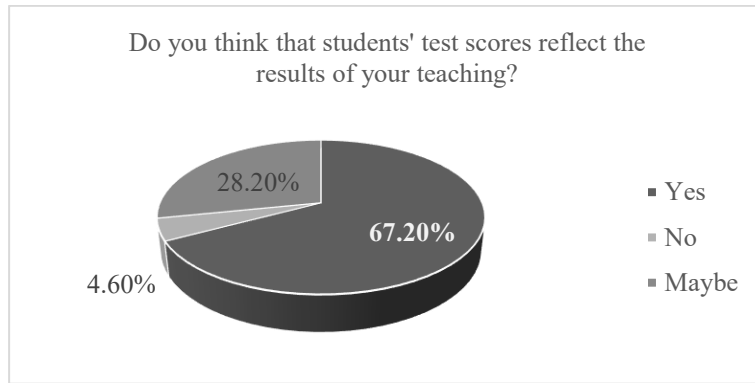
Survey Results

The survey was developed on the Google Forms platform and distributed online to teachers working in both private and state institutions. A total of 131 teachers, representing diverse academic majors, participated voluntarily and anonymously. The study aimed to collect both quantitative and qualitative insights into teachers’ perceptions of exam-related stress, responsibility, and institutional pressures. Of the participants, 38.9% were employed in private institutions and 61.1% in state institutions.

Key Findings

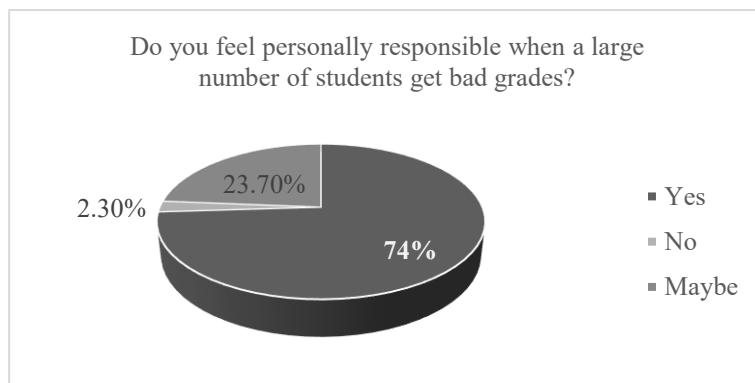
- Perceptions of Teaching and Student Scores

When asked whether students’ test scores reflect the results of their teaching, 67.2% responded “yes”, while 28.1% answered “maybe”.



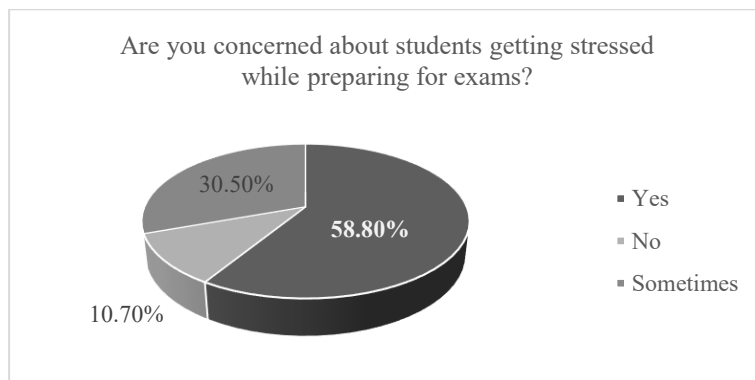
- Responsibility for Student Failure

To the question of whether teachers feel personally responsible when a large number of students receive poor grades, 74% answered “yes” and 23.7% answered “sometimes”.



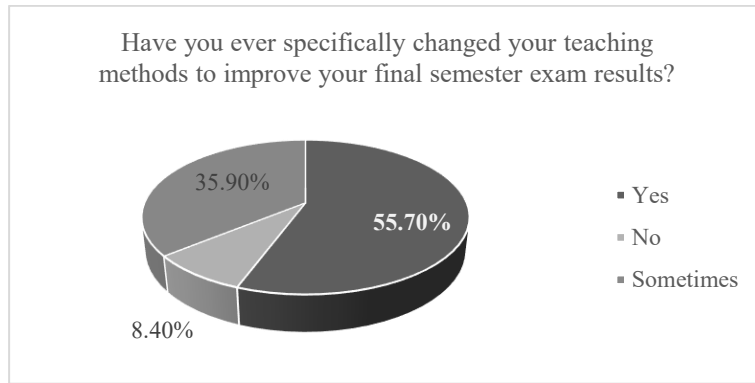
- Concern for Student Stress

Regarding concern about students becoming stressed while preparing for exams, 58.8% answered “yes” and 30.5% answered “sometimes”.



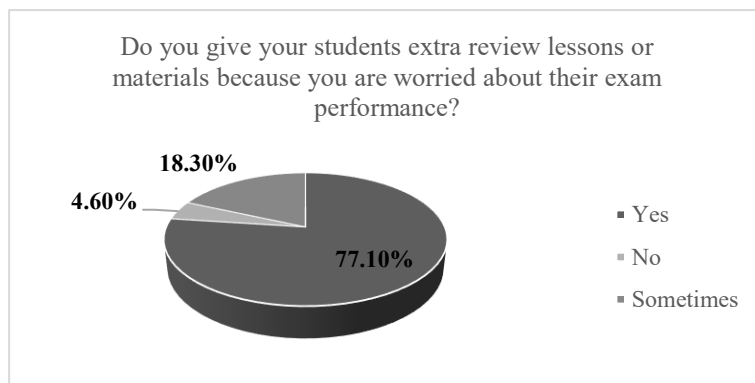
- Adaptation of Teaching Methods

When asked if they had specifically changed teaching methods to improve final semester exam results, 55.7% responded “yes,” and 35.9% answered “sometimes”.



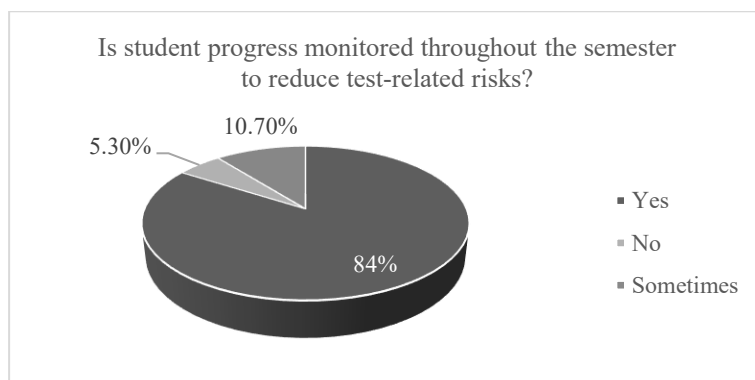
- Provision of Extra Support

A majority of teachers (77.1%) reported giving students extra review lessons or materials due to worry about exam performance, while 18.3% answered “sometimes”.



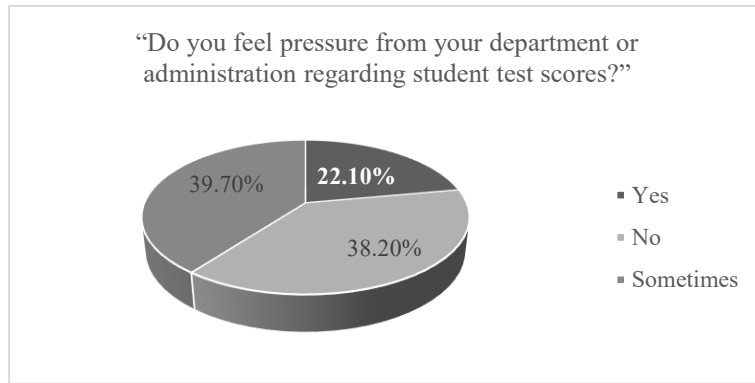
- Monitoring Student Progress

To the question of whether student progress is monitored throughout the semester to reduce test-related risks, 84% answered “yes” and 10.7% answered “sometimes”.



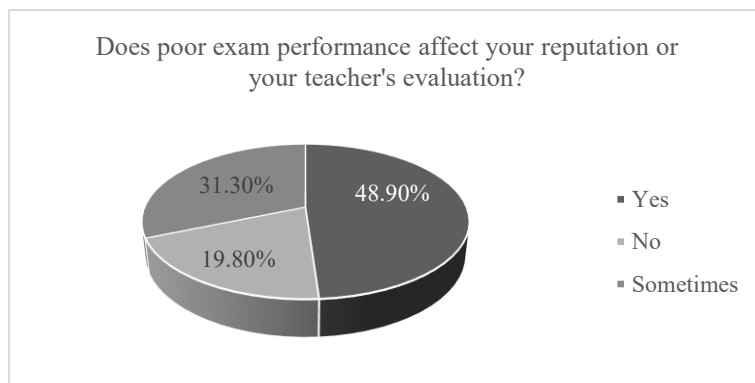
- Institutional Pressure

When asked if they feel pressure from their department or administration regarding student test scores, 38.2% answered “no,” 39.7% “sometimes,” and 22.1% “yes”.



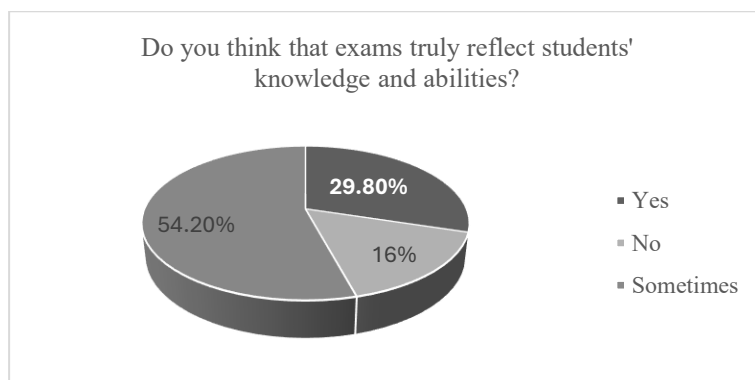
- Impact on Teacher Reputation

Regarding whether poor exam performance affects their reputation or evaluation, 48.9% answered “yes,” 31.3% “sometimes,” and 19.8% “no”.



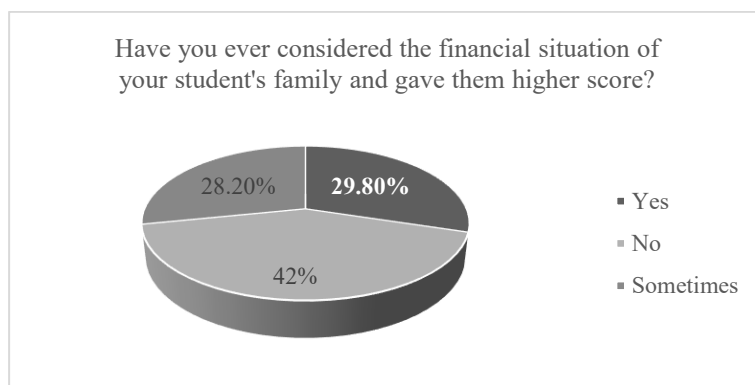
- Validity of Exams

On whether exams truly reflect students’ knowledge and abilities, 54.2% answered “sometimes,” 29.8% “yes,” and 16% “no”.



- Consideration of Students’ Financial Situations

When asked if they had ever considered a student’s financial situation and awarded a higher score, 29.8% answered “yes,” 28.2% “sometimes,” and 42% “no”.



INTERPRETATION

The findings reveal that teachers in Mongolia experience significant exam-related stress and perceive themselves as responsible for student outcomes. Many adapt their teaching methods, provide additional support, and monitor progress to mitigate exam risks. Importantly, nearly one-third acknowledged adjusting scores in response to students' sensitive financial circumstances, highlighting the ethical dilemmas teachers face in balancing fairness with compassion. While institutional pressure is not uniformly reported, a notable proportion of teachers feel that poor exam performance negatively impacts their professional reputation.

Socioeconomic Pressures on Students and Families

Tuition Burden

The cost of higher education in Mongolia has steadily risen. For example, undergraduate programs at the National University of Mongolia charge 238,700 MNT per credit, amounting to 7.16 million MNT annually. Meanwhile, the average Mongolian taxpayer earns approximately 6.48-54 million MNT per year, meaning that tuition alone can take up 10–84% of many families' annual income.

Here is a breakdown of tuition costs by program level:

Table 1: Tuition cost (National University of Mongolia

<https://www.num.edu.mn/admissions/undergraduate/fees-and-funding/>)

Program level	Credits per year	Cost per credit	Annual tuition
Undergr. (Bachelor)	30	184,000 ₮	5,502,000 ₮
Graduate (Master)	10	217,000 ₮	2,170,000 ₮
Graduate (Doctorate)	10	232,000 ₮	2,320,000 ₮

These figures reflect tuition at one of the country's top public universities and may vary slightly across other universities. However, they illustrate the significant financial burden on students and families, especially given the average monthly income of 3.0 million MNT (e-mongolia). And here is a snapshot of average household income:

Table 2: Average household income (<https://www.gov.mn/home>)

Household type	Estimated monthly income	Estimated annual income	Notes
Urban (Civil servant)	₮ 0.54-4.5 million	₮ 6.48-54 million	Higher due to more jobs in health, mining, and tech
Rural (Herder)	₮ 0.51 -3 million	₮ 6.12-36 million	Income varies seasonally; it often includes livestock sales

Students from herder families often face additional challenges, such as long travel distances and seasonal responsibilities that interfere with study. Compounding this is the housing crisis on university campuses, which lack sufficient dormitory space for students from the countryside. Typically, only first-year students, those with personal connections, or, in some cases, those who offer small bribes, secure dormitory beds. The majority are forced to rent rooms or apartments, often in Ulaanbaatar, where housing costs are disproportionately high relative to rural incomes.

Many students also work part-time as waiters or store assistants, roles that offer valuable language practice with foreign tourists. Yet this practical exposure comes at a cost: missed classes, delayed graduation, and increased risk of failing exams.

If a student fails to reach the 60% minimum threshold required to pass a course, they must reselect the course and repay the credit fees, a financial setback that compounds existing hardship. This creates a troubling dynamic: student failure becomes a form of institutional financing. Since Mongolian state and private universities are almost entirely dependent on tuition fees, repeated course enrollment inadvertently sustains their budgets.

Housing and Economic Pressure

Housing remains one of the most significant financial burdens for university students in Ulaanbaatar. While tuition fees continue to rise, the cost of living, particularly rent, has become a silent barrier to equitable access. Many students from herder families or low-income urban households face the dual challenge of paying for education while securing stable accommodation.

As of 2025, the average monthly rent for a single-person apartment in Ulaanbaatar ranges from \$100 to \$400 USD, depending on location and amenities. Central districts such as Sukhbaatar and Chingeltei command higher prices due to proximity to universities and government offices. At the same time, suburban areas like the Khan-Uul offer more affordable options but often lack reliable public transport. Table 3 summarizes current rent prices:

Table 3: Rent prices (*unegui.mn*)

Apartment Type	Monthly Rent (USD)	Notes
Studio apartment (city center)	\$150–\$400	Popular among single professionals and students
Studio apartment (suburban districts)	\$100–\$300	More affordable, but with limited access to public transport
2-bedroom apartment (city center)	\$150–\$400	Suitable for small families or shared by two tenants
2-bedroom apartment (suburban areas)	\$100–\$300	Often newer buildings, but farther from universities
Furnished apartment (central location)	+\$50–\$150 extra	Fully equipped units for short-term or foreign tenants
Utilities (electricity, heating, etc.)	+\$50–\$120	Often included in rent for newer buildings

These figures reflect a 12–15% increase in rent prices compared to 2024, driven by rising demand and limited supply. For students without family support or government stipends, rent alone can consume more than half of their monthly budget. Many resort to part-time jobs, shared housing, or long-distance commuting, all of which directly affect academic performance and well-being.

This economic pressure reinforces the need for universities to reconsider housing subsidies, dormitory expansion, and flexible grading policies that account for students' lived realities. Without such reforms, the promise of higher education risks becoming inaccessible to those who need it most.

Food Costs and Nutritional Access

In addition to tuition and housing, food expenses represent a significant portion of students' monthly budgets in Ulaanbaatar. For those from low-income or herder families, maintaining a balanced diet while pursuing higher education is a persistent challenge. Rising fuel costs, import dependency, and seasonal fluctuations have contributed to an 8–10% increase in food prices compared to 2024.

Table 4 summarizes the current prices for essential food items widely consumed by students and families as of March 30, 2026.

Table 4: Essential food prices (*National Statistics Office of Mongolia* <https://www.1212.mn/mn/statistic/file-library/14>)

Food Item	Price (MNT)	Price (USD)	Notes
White bread (500g)	2,552 ₮	\$0.71	Common staple, locally produced
Rice (1kg)	4,966 ₮	\$1.39	Mostly imported; price varies by brand

Eggs (1p)	612 ₮	\$0.17	Locally sourced; prices stable
Milk (1 liter)	4,997 ₮	\$1.39	Pasteurized; available in supermarkets
Beef (1kg)	26,976 ₮	\$7.55	Popular protein source; price varies by cut
Mutton (1kg)	21,984 ₮	\$6.15	Widely consumed; seasonal price fluctuations
Potatoes (1kg)	2,812 ₮	\$0.78	Locally grown; price stable
Carrots (1kg)	3,035 ₮	\$0.84	Common vegetable; seasonal variation
Onions (1kg)	4,329 ₮	\$1.21	Used in most Mongolian dishes
Apples (1kg)	8,398 ₮	\$2.35	Mostly imported; price varies by origin
Cooking oil (1 liter)	10,844 ₮	\$3.03	Sunflower or canola; imported brands dominate
Flour (1kg)	2,507 ₮	\$0.70	Used for traditional breads and dumplings
Fuel AI-80 (L)	2,345 ₮	\$0.65	Imported from Russia
Fuel AI-92 (L)	2,590 ₮	\$0.72	Imported from Russia
Diesel (L)	3,447 ₮	\$0.96	Imported from Russia

For many students, especially those without family support or government stipends, food costs compete directly with rent and tuition. The lack of university meal subsidies or affordable campus dining options exacerbates nutritional insecurity. Some students report skipping meals or relying on low-cost, low-nutrient foods to manage expenses, practices that can undermine academic performance and long-term health. These findings reinforce the need for universities to consider food access as part of their broader equity strategy. Integrating subsidized meal programs, food vouchers, or partnerships with local producers could significantly improve student well-being and educational outcomes.

Family Stability and Social Well-being

While economic hardship and academic pressure are central to student well-being, broader social trends, particularly rising divorce rates, also shape the emotional landscape of Mongolian youth. Family instability can directly affect students' mental health, housing security, and financial support, especially for those from single-parent households.

Between 2010 and 2025, Mongolia experienced a steady increase in divorce cases. Table 5 summarizes national divorce statistics over the past 15 years:

Table 5: Divorce statistics (*National Statistics Office of Mongolia*

https://data.1212.mn/pxweb/mn/NSO/NSO_Historical%20data_Population/DT_NSO_0100_01T27.px/)

Year	Number of Divorces	Notes
2010	~2,800	Baseline year; relatively stable family structures
2012	~3,000	Slight increase; urban migration begins to impact
2015	~3,200	Rising economic pressures and urbanization
2018	~3,500	Mental health concerns begin surfacing in public discourse
2020	3,316	COVID-19 pandemic begins; stressors intensify
2021	~3,800	Lockdowns and economic strain contribute to the rise
2022	~4,200	Continued upward trend
2023	4,776	The highest recorded in recent years

2024	~4 900 (est.)	Projected based on prior growth
2025	~5 100 (est.)	Ongoing increase; linked to social and mental health factors

This upward trend reflects a complex interplay of urbanization, economic stress, shifting gender roles, and limited access to counseling services. For students, the emotional toll of parental separation often coincides with academic deadlines, housing instability, and financial insecurity. In some cases, divorce leads to abrupt relocation, loss of tuition support, or increased caregiving responsibilities, especially for eldest daughters. These findings reinforce the need for universities to expand mental health services, offering flexible attendance policies, and recognizing the emotional labor carried by students from fractured households. Family well-being is not peripheral to education; it is foundational.

Gender, Early Motherhood, and Shifting Family Structures

At the National University of Mongolia, nearly 63.3% of students are female. Compared to South Korea, Japan, and China, three of Asia’s largest economies, Mongolians tend to marry at a younger age. As a result, it is not uncommon to have pregnant students or young mothers in the classroom.

Since the early 2000s, the number of single-parent households has risen sharply, placing additional emotional and financial strain on students and their families. Many young women raise children while pursuing degrees, often without consistent support from male partners. This reality introduces a profound ethical tension: when a pregnant student fails her semester, it can feel like more than an academic setback; it can resemble a theft of nutrients, a theft of fuel, a loss of energy meant for nurturing life.

These challenges are reflected in Mongolia’s birth rate trends:

Table 6: Birth rate in Mongolia (*National Statistics Office of Mongolia* <https://www.1212.mn/mn/data-base/open-data>)

Age Group (Women)	Birth Rate (Annual births per 1,000 women)	Notes
15–19	19.7	Down from 54.8 in 1960; reflects delayed childbearing
20–24	~85–95	Peak fertility age; most common age for first birth
25–29	~90–100	Highest overall birth rate; family formation age
30–34	~70–80	Slight decline; second or third child common
35–39	~40–50	Lower fertility; often the final childbearing years
40–44	~10–20	Rare births; often assisted
45–49	<5	Very rare; medically high-risk

These figures show that early motherhood remains common, especially among students aged 20–24. This reinforces the need for flexible academic policies, supportive grading systems, and empathetic teaching practices that recognize the realities of young parents in higher education.

LIMITATIONS

While this study provides valuable insights into assessment equity, teacher stress, and the potential of AI-powered tools in Mongolian higher education, several limitations must be acknowledged.

1. The survey sample was limited to 120 teachers across private and state universities. Although diverse in academic majors, the findings may not fully represent the perspectives of all educators nationwide. Future research should expand the sample size and include more institutions to strengthen generalizability.
2. While socioeconomic pressures on students were analyzed through secondary data and institutional observation, direct student surveys were not conducted. As a result, student voices are represented indirectly rather than through primary data collection.

Future Research

Building on the limitations identified, future studies should aim to strengthen methodological rigor and broaden the scope of inquiry. Expanding sample sizes across multiple universities and including both rural

and urban contexts will improve generalizability. Incorporating mixed methods such as interviews, focus groups, and longitudinal tracking will provide deeper insights into how equity and stress evolve.

Further, direct student surveys should complement teacher perspectives to ensure that the voices of marginalized learners are represented. Comparative studies with regional and global contexts could highlight Mongolia's unique challenges while situating reforms within international debates.

On the technical side, future research should move beyond conceptual design to pilot and evaluate AI-powered assessment tools in real classroom settings. This includes testing rubric alignment, socioeconomic sensitivity modules, and transparency dashboards at scale. Faculty training in AI literacy and ethical safeguards must also be assessed to ensure sustainable adoption.

Finally, future work should explore policy integration, linking AI-assisted assessment reforms with national strategies such as *Vision 2050* and global frameworks from UNESCO and OECD. By combining methodological rigor, contextual depth, and technological innovation, future research can provide a stronger foundation for equitable, transparent, and culturally responsive assessment in Mongolian higher education.

DISCUSSION

The survey results reveal that teachers often feel compelled to adjust scores in response to students' sensitive financial circumstances, reflecting both compassion and the ethical dilemmas embedded in current assessment frameworks. While such practices may alleviate immediate hardship, they compromise transparency and consistency, reinforcing inequities rather than resolving them.

Importantly, the survey also indicates that when provided with an AI-powered assessment tool, teachers' evaluations become more fact-based rather than emotional. This shift suggests that AI-assisted grading can reduce the likelihood of score adjustments driven by financial or personal considerations. By anchoring evaluation in rubric-aligned criteria and transparent scoring logic, the tool helps teachers maintain fairness while still recognizing student resilience through contextual sensitivity features. This finding underscores the potential of AI to balance empathy with equity, ensuring that compassion does not inadvertently undermine credibility in assessment.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that both students and teachers are caught in cycles of stress and inequity shaped by outdated assessment practices and socioeconomic pressures. Teachers' willingness to adapt methods, provide extra support, and even adjust scores reflects their commitment, but also highlights systemic flaws in current frameworks. The survey results further suggest that AI-powered assessment tools can transform this dynamic. By making evaluations more fact-based and less influenced by emotional or financial considerations, such tools restore transparency and fairness to grading practices. Teachers are relieved of the ethical burden of adjusting scores, while students gain confidence that their performance is judged consistently and equitably.

Adjustments to internal university platforms, such as the student semester evaluation section on www.sisi.num.edu.mn, could provide students in difficult socio-economic, health, or talent-related situations with much-needed exam preparation time. Such measures would not only reflect empathy but also operationalize equity within the digital infrastructure of higher education.

As the literature review suggests, teacher burnout and stress are directly linked to lower student achievement and reduced classroom engagement. Educational institutions that prioritize staff wellbeing inevitably strengthen student outcomes. While Mongolian universities currently provide their staff with regular annual medical checkups, it remains unclear whether these include assessments of emotional and psychological well-being. If not, universities should begin offering faculty access to counseling and psychological treatment services. Such measures would not only reduce burnout but also foster healthier, more engaged classrooms. By caring for the holistic well-being of educators (physical, emotional, and psychological), institutions can create a more sustainable environment where both teachers and students thrive academically and personally.

Finally, within the framework of social responsibility, teachers must exercise caution when evaluating assessments. Students receiving scholarships based on athletic performance or those with disabilities may face the risk of losing essential financial support if grading practices fail to account for their circumstances.

AI-assisted assessment, when implemented ethically, can help safeguard these vulnerable groups by ensuring fairness, transparency, and consistency in evaluation.

Ultimately, the adoption of AI-assisted assessment in Mongolia's higher education system offers a pathway to rebuild trust, reduce bias, and align evaluation practices with both global standards of equity and the lived realities of Mongolian students. By integrating fairness, empathy, and ethical safeguards into both technological tools and institutional policies, Mongolia can advance toward a more inclusive, resilient, and socially responsive education system.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Theoretical basis and idea: Amar P. **Methodology:** Amar P. & Suvdaa B., **Data collection:** Amar P., Suvdaa B., & Zoljargal M., **Writing (first version):** Amar P, **Writing (revision):** Suvdaa B., & Zoljargal M., **Professional supervision:** Suvdaa B., & Zoljargal M.

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ЗОХИОГЧДЫН МЭДЭЭЛЭЛ

Овог, нэр: Пүрэвдорж Амар

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-6028-2478>

Байгууллагын нэр: МУБИС

Хаяг: СБД, 8 дугаар хороо, МУБИС, НХУС IV байр

Улс: Монгол

e-mail: amar@msue.edu.mn

Овог, нэр: Батсуурь Сувдаа

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7051-4256>

Байгууллагын нэр: МУИС

Хаяг: СБД, 8 дугаар хороо, МУИС, МТЭС VIII байр

Улс: Монгол

e-mail: suvdaa@num.edu.mn

Овог, нэр: Мөнхжаргал Золжаргал

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7051-4256>

Байгууллагын нэр: МУИС

Хаяг: СБД, 8 дугаар хороо, МУИС, МТЭС VIII байр

Улс: Монгол

e-mail: zoljargal@num.edu.mn
