



## Examination In Higher Education: Concerns & Trends To Reform

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### **Abstract:**

Examinations have specific objectives. They evaluate the performance and judge the academic achievement of the students. The traditional examination system does not bring out real ability, achievement or potentiality of students. The examinations are seen as an unwelcome ordeal to be gone through for the system is seen possessing serious voids. Hence, the present paper elucidates the contemporary concerns in higher education examination system in India and the suggestion to improve, thereof. The paper envisions a better examination system leading to a more skill and competencies based evaluation.

### **Keywords:**

Higher Education, Examination, Concerns, Examination Reforms

### **Introduction**

The process of education includes three major divisions: formulation of objectives, designing education for the achievement of the objectives and assessing the outcomes of education. The function of examinations is to provide such information as is needed for a precise assessment of the outcomes of education. As such examinations are as old as, or rather older as, any system of education. Examinations are of various forms. They may be performance, oral, or written. Written examinations may be classified as objective type, very-short answer-type, short-answer-type, and traditional essay-type.

The genesis of traditional essay-type tests may be traced to the Chinese system of administration in vogue around 1115 B.C. The Chinese used the essay-type tests for the selection

of candidates for Government offices (DuBois, 1964). The use of the essay-type tests in India came as an inevitable consequence of the introduction of the western system of education (Misra & Kar, 1970). Indian universities were modelled on the lines of the British universities; therefore, they also adopted the examination system in practice in the U.K. In India, the essay-type tests were used on a large scale for the first time in 1857 by the universities at Calcutta, Madras and Bombay for the selection of students, and later for the awarding of university degrees (Misra & Kar, 1970).

Over the years examinations have attained great importance in the West as well as in India. People have been branded for life on the basis of their examination results. Not only individuals' academic but social status has often been judged from his degrees and diplomas. One of the earliest studies exploring the efficiency of the essay examinations was made as early as 1888 by Edgeworth (1888) in the U.K. Other studies followed suit, of which those done by Starch and Elliot (1913) in the U.S.A., and Hartog and Rhodes (1935) in the U.K. are very important. Thus in the early half of the 20th century, systematic research on examinations was well on track.

The importance of examinations cannot be neglected at any level, as they play such a huge role in the academic life of a student both at the entry and the exit level. Examinations are highly beneficial for the students, it helps them to revise and go through the concepts that were taught to them throughout the whole term or semester and to fill in the gaps that were there due to not understanding any concept during the learning process. After going through the whole term, such a procedure helps the students to get a complete picture of what was the real meaning of the bits and pieces taught to them, resulting in them gaining the information much easily and properly.

Examination as a form of testing is often used in teaching. It is not only to assess the students' academic performance, help and urge students to systematically master the knowledge and skills, but also to check the teaching effect and promote teachers to improve the teaching work. The examination reform in colleges and universities has been carried out for many years, and has made some progress. But still there has been no substantive breakthrough. Examination reform becomes a mere formality.

According to Radha Krishnan Commission, (1948) "If we are to suggest one single reform in University Education, it should be that of examinations." Problem of examination is the most taxing problem of education. The unfortunate consequences of the present system of examinations are before our eyes. If we can solve it satisfactorily, there will be a great relief to the students and the very face of education will be different. Ignoring the management of the examination reform is the important factor which cannot be ignored. To change this situation, it is necessary for the department and personnel of management to effectively manage the examination reform.

Examinations in our country, external or internal, fall into three major categories: (a) written examinations; (b) oral examinations; and (c) practical examinations. They have developed some serious shortcomings which can be remedied with a little thoughtful effort. Some of the main shortcomings are as follows:

### **Emphasis on Memorization**

Memorization occupies a dominant place in examinations, which almost completely overlook the testing, of higher objectives like understanding, and the application of knowledge and skills. This, in turn, reflects very badly on the instructional programmes where the development of these higher abilities on the part of the students is also invariably overlooked. Hence, the practice of asking questions which demand only the recall of information rather than higher mental level operations has resulted in over emphasis on cramming or memorisation. As a consequence, there is a noticeable dwarfness in the development of higher mental abilities.

The following corrective measures will help improve the validity of the question paper in terms of objectives, instead of rewarding examinees for their rote memorization: (a) identification and definition of instructional objectives for the subject in question; (b) giving proportionate weights to each of these instructional objectives in preparation for framing questions which will test states of progress towards the objectives; (c) framing questions of different forms which are most suitable for testing the abilities associated with the particular instructional objectives.

### **Subjectivity**

Subjectivity within written examinations operates at three levels: (a) the subjectivity of the person who is setting a question paper; (b) the subjectivity of the examinee in writing answers; and (c) the subjectivity of the person who evaluates the answer books. It is symptomatic of many paper-setters' subjectivity that we often find lop-sided question papers where some content areas are over-emphasized and other areas completely neglected. Indeed, sometimes questions have been set which do not synchronize with the course content and the textbooks. The subjectivity of the examinee operates when he is answering the questions. Very often, due to the vague wording of the questions, he interprets the dimensions of the expected answer in his own idiosyncratic way. This leads to a host of differences of approach to answering the same question. The subjectivity of the person who marks papers (and may or may not have set the examination) is also very dangerous, as it operates in a haphazard manner.

To prevent such shortcomings, the examining agency should develop a design or policy statement of the question paper, and communicate it to the paper-setter. This design should give specific directions regarding the dimensions of the question paper and the considerations to be kept in mind while setting it. Such a design would indicate weightings according to objectives, according to areas of content, and the different forms of questions that should be included. It should prescribe, too, the scheme of options. Finally, the design should include directions regarding administration of the question paper. Another precaution against subjectivity is to require the setting of at least some questions which can be assessed objectively; that is, short answer and objective-type (multiple choice) questions. Furthermore, questions should be worded specifically so as to delimit the scope and length of the expected answer. It is most important that the paper-setter should prepare a scoring key and a detailed marking scheme as he completes setting the question paper itself. The key and marking scheme have to be supplied

to all the paper's examiners to guide them in scoring answer scripts. Preparing a scoring key and marking scheme while one is setting the question paper helps the setter to detect many mistakes in the questions which could otherwise go unnoticed. A detailed marking scheme, giving the value points in terms of the outline of the expected answers, will reduce inter-examiner variability to a minimum. Notwithstanding all the care that has to be taken by the paper setter, a most important pre-requisite will still be that the key and marking scheme are used, and appropriately so by each examiner for purposes of scoring.

### **Poor Content Coverage**

Formerly, ineffective coverage of the content by question papers had become such a common feature that nobody seemed to take any serious view of it. This phenomenon was unmistakably impairing the entire teaching-learning process. It exerted undesirable influences by encouraging selective study on the part of the students and selective teaching on the part of the teacher. Measures to ensure an effective coverage of content through a question paper are: (a) to define the major areas of content, giving proportionate weights to each of them when framing the series of questions; (b) to include numerous short answer and objective-type questions; (c) to restrict the numbers of options, retaining them only in the essay-type questions, and ensuring their mutual equivalence as alternatives there.

### **Administrative Shortcomings**

Even when there is excellent paper-setting and marking, the value and success of the examination can still be spoilt by poor administrative procedures when the examination takes place. Advance precautions to be taken in this regard include:

- a) The division of the question paper into two parts: Part A consisting of fixed-response questions, and Part B, free-response questions.
- b) Both sections may be handed to examinees simultaneously, but Part A will need to be collected earlier, after the expiry of a specified time limit—say half an hour or so. This will prevent students from getting opportunities to copy from others' scripts, which is very easy in respect of fixed-response questions.
- c) In administrative matters, giving precise directions to the setters for setting and to the examiners for scoring the question paper

### **Exams as Cause of Fear & Tension**

When examinations determine a child's advancement through school and his later life's opportunities, parents understandably put pressure to ensure that their child succeeds. The examinations create psychological fear and tensions amongst the students. Under distress, the students resort to all kinds of malpractices to pass the examination. On the other hand, the teachers also teach what will be examined rather than focusing on teaching life.

### **Quality Issues in Examinations**

There exists a lot of quality problems in the prevailing system, including Quality Question Paper, Quality of term-work assessment, Holding of fair practical examinations, Exam Schedules, Management of Malpractices in examinations, Question paper leakages, Students Cheating/impersonation, Quality of Answer Script Evaluation, Shortage of qualified examiners, Delays in paper correction, Discrepancies in handling of transcripts, Manipulation of scores, Award of grace marks, Manipulation of scores, Delays in results processing and declaration, Handling of re-evaluations, Quality of Question Paper.

### **Suggestions and Trends on Examination Reforms**

The call for examination reforms on the part of experts over the years has been very consistent and several states and universities already have taken up examination reforms, in fact, though in a piecemeal way, there is utmost need for orderly progress towards examination reforms. For more success in higher education, it is required that instead of lengthy examinations at a stretch, the due importance should be given to intelligence tests, personal interview and class room works at regular intervals. Some of the major initiatives concerned with examination reforms are as under:

#### **Updated Curriculum**

Continuous updating and revision of curricula is something which must be followed by the University. Each individual university must ensure that the curricula development exercise leading to a major revision in course contents and curricula is taken up every three years. Uniform academic calendar across all institutions of higher education has already been urged upon by the UGC.

#### **Streamlining Examinations**

Universities need to streamline their examination process such that the results are declared in a time bound manner and no student suffers in his/her career mobility and academic

progression due to delays in declaration of results and issuance of mark sheet.

### **Open Book Examinations**

Here in this system students are allowed to bring their own textbooks, notes, and other reference materials to assess during their examination. It has benefits like less demand on memory, examination becomes a learning process, verifies ability to retrieve information, enhances the comprehension and synthesizing skills, reduces examination anxiety, permits higher order questions.

### **Online Examination**

This is a technique of conducting examination by using internet which facilitate the conduct of examination without face to face contact between examiner and examinee, at the same time permitting the record of examinees' response instantaneously. Reduces travelling, less chance of copying, can use multiple set of question.

### **Semester System**

Here the whole academic year is divided into two halves and final examinations are held twice a year. It assesses the students' performance continuously. Grade depends on tutorials, projects and assignments leading to an increased rapport between teacher and students.

### **Question Banks**

If quality questions of different types are generated, measuring various objectives of varying difficulty levels, the quality of question papers will improve. For this question, banks need to be developed in each curricular area for all stages of education. These question banks should be made accessible to the teachers who can use them for making various tests and also to students who can use them for their own drill and practice.

### **Introduction of Internal Assessment**

Written examination is not an effective measure for gauging all the abilities nor does it promote the application of multiple techniques of assessment. The scheme of Comprehensive Continuous Examination (CCE) is inspired by the age-old adage that it is the teacher who knows the pupil best, and it is through this teacher that we would get to know how the learner is progressing with reference to his own earlier achievements, with reference to his peer group as also with reference to the expected levels of attainment set by the teacher.

### **Conclusion**

Using the effective management of examination reform can strengthen the system of

examination. It helps us to understand the importance, purpose and function of the examination, and can change the teachers' and students' concept on examination. Building the appraisal system of examination can supervise the whole process. Eventually, it guides the students to study actively and creatively, by “testing” to teach, by “testing” to learn. So we should let “testing”, “teaching” and “learning” be unified effectively. There has also been considerable experimentation in the processes of education, but the basic problem of fitting the system to the real needs of the country and its people has remained unsolved. Finally, making evaluation an integral part of the teaching-learning process and extending it beyond the narrow limits of academic achievement serves to bridge the gap between the school and the needs and aspirations of the society. For a successful implementation of the programme objectives it is necessary to change the attitudes of teachers, parents and pupils.

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