

ENVISIONING THE EXAMINATION REFORMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Harshvardhan Singh

Research Scholar, Department of Education,
Panjab University, Chandigarh

ABSTRACT

For promotion of quality and excellence in higher education, the University Grant Commission (UGC) developed an 'Action Plan for Academic and Administrative Reforms' to outline the main steps, the central and state universities, colleges and other educational institutions of higher education need to consider and adopt in respect of Curriculum development, Semester System, Choice-based credit system, Admission procedure, Examination reforms. The new grant marking policy developed by UGC as part of the 11th Plan, strategy for improving the quality of higher education involved lining of grant-making process with adoption of academic and administrative reforms by the concerned universities and colleges. Therefore, the educational institutions were expected to initiate this academic reform at the earliest. The teachers themselves might not be prepared to accept the responsibilities going with examination reforms. It is natural that any attempt at reforms for the purpose of changing the status-quo means resistance from the established order. The present paper elucidates the contemporary concerns in higher education examination system in India. The paper envisions a better examination system leading to a more skill and competencies based evaluation. Later the paper concludes in the true spirit of the motto "Experiment and innovative or perish", so the stakeholders must try to experiment and innovative and learn and finally reform our system of examination. Any rigid attitude will result in a total waste of our efforts to rid our examination system of the existing evils.

KEY WORDS: Higher Examination System, Envisioning Reforms.

Introduction

An examination is a means to assess the progress made by the students in the subjects taught to them. In the routine day-to-day teaching process, an examination seems to be an innocent affair, but troubles start when an examination turns from normal revision exercise to formal or rigid exercise of selection and promotion. The student community considers examinations as an unwelcome ordeal to be gone through. That apart, the system of examination suffer from many serious voids. Examinations have specific objectives. They are means to evaluate the performance and judge the academic achievements of students. Such evaluation, on the one hand, helps the students to adjust their learning programmes accordingly and, on the other hand, helps the teacher to adjust his teaching programme according to the requirement of the examination. It also provides some motivation for hard and continuous work by the students and for continuous improvement of teaching by the teacher. It is on the basis of the divisions or grades awarded to the students after evaluating their merit and ability that they are allowed or refused admission to institutions of higher learning. There is a general view, and rightly so, that the traditional examination system does not bring out the real ability, achievement, or potentiality of students. Hence, there is a need for examination reform. Before dwelling into this aspect, let us look at some key concerns in examinations in Indian Higher Education System

CONCERN IN HIGHER EDUCATION EVALUATION SYSTEM

The problems that have contributed to the crisis in education are countless. Quite relevant to the crisis in education are the questions of the curricula, the syllabi and the much-criticized system of examinations, which some people describe as the bane of the system in this country. Some of the key issues related to examination system in India are discussed in this section.

- **Reforms in Curriculum**

In the last few years, much debate has taken place with respect to reforming course curriculum and learning pedagogy. There is a greater emphasis on raising current standards to make the curriculum more relevant to professional requirements, and in line with international norms. The growth of private sector educational institutions and universities has helped improve supply, in terms of the number seats available. However, these have also worsened the quality problem. Not only is there wide variance in the quality of graduated from different institutions, there are too many with unacceptably low standards both in the government and private sectors.

- **Emphasis on Memorisation only**

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 tardiness in the development of higher mental abilities. To check this, the open-book examination system has been recommended by some educationists. The open-book examinations are specially designed to test the qualities of comprehension and capability of synthesis for which new types of questions need to be set. This system is claimed to eliminate the habit of unintelligent memorisation by students and also to minimise the evil of copying in the examinations, however, with the present essay type question papers, students cannot be allowed to consult books.

- **Curriculum Flexibility and student mobility**

Students should be allowed to appear in the examinations by bits or in instalments. They may appear in some papers or subjects in one particular year and may complete the rest or another few papers or subjects in the subsequent year or years. They may get the degree, diploma or comprehensive certificate after having qualified in the minimum number of subjects or papers.

- **External versus Internal examination**

The system of external examination is alleged to encourage selective study and cramming, use of made easy notes and to discourage the habit of regular work, use of good textbooks and innovations. The students do not take the regular class work seriously. Their total attention is fixed on the final examination. The gravest charge against the external examinations is that instead of serving as a useful aid to improve the quality and standard of education and teaching, education itself becomes subservient to examinations. External examinations are more objectives and less prone to local influences or external pressures. For this reason, though academically more unsound than the internal assessment system, they are preferred and advocated by certain educationists. Any new scheme that combines the merits of internal as well as external examinations would best serve the purpose.

- **Subject wise grades versus Overall grade**

Another concern is that the students should not be given only an overall grade but should be given subject-wise grades. Only subject-wise grades assignment can be considered a true assessment of a student's calibre. Such a system would enable the teacher to know the exact level of achievement of a student in various subjects and disciplines which would improve their employability. It has also been suggested that successful students may be permitted to improve their divisions and grades by reappearing in a particular subject.

- **Mismanagement of examinations**

We often come across the starting news about the leakage of question paper, mishandling of answers scripts, mismatch of roll number, errors in marking and totalling, awarding of grace marks, wrong declaration of results and many more. Most of the examining agencies still appear to be "technology-shy" and are hesitant in adopting the latest techniques of computerisation and optical scanning.

- **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, Delays in results processing and declaration, Handling of re-evaluations, Quality of Question Paper etc.

NEED FOR EXAMINATION REFORMS

An Examination Reforms Commission should be set up as a permanent body to facilitate monitoring of progress in examination reforms from time to time until the task is fulfilled in stages. The terms of reference for this Commission may be:

- i) Review of the status of examination reforms from time to time.
- ii) Phasing of examination reforms, indicating timeframe within which, and levels at which, the reforms are to be effected.
- iii) Introduction of fair and objective systems of grading/scaling.
- iv) Laying down norms for continuous comprehensive internal evaluation and suggesting safeguards against abuse of this evaluation system.
- v) Advising on minimum levels of learning to go with internal evaluation system.
- vi) Laying down modalities for semesterisation and modularisation.
- vii) Advising on inter-institutional linkages to secure comparable standards.
- viii) Teacher orientation for successful implementation of examination reforms.

It is obvious that the Examination Reforms Commission will have to go into problems relating to the reforms in each State, fully involving the State level authorities such that problems at the State as well as the sub-state levels are fully taken in to consideration (GOI, NPE 1986). Functionaries of UGC, AIU, AICTE, NCERT, NUEPA, State resource institutions, State Boards of Education and other expert bodies at the national and other levels, apart from time to time by the Commission. 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. The development if clean character towards prosperity of nation is another important aim of higher education. The question of examination reform should be constructed as a package of all the following factors: Introduction of semester system, Continuous internal evaluation, Teachers playing the key role, Student Mobility and curriculum development with scope for flexibility, Subject gradation rather than overall gradation, improving the efficiency of examination bureaucracy.

SUGGESTIONS FOR EXAMINATION REFORMS

For promotion of quality and excellence in higher education, the University Grant Commission (UGC) developed an 'Action Plan for Academic and Administrative Reforms' to outline the main steps, the central and state universities, colleges and other educational institutions of higher education need to consider and adopt in respect of Curriculum development, Semester System, Choice-based credit system, Admission procedure, Examination reforms. The new grant marking policy developed by UGC as part of the 11th Plan, strategy for improving the quality of higher education involved lining of grant-making process with adoption of academic and administrative reforms by the concerned universities and colleges. Therefore, the educational institutions were expected to initiate this academic reform at the earliest. The teachers themselves might not be prepared to accept the responsibilities going with examination reforms. It is natural that any attempt at reforms for the purpose of changing the status-quo means resistance from the established order. However, the call for examination reforms on the part of experts over the years is having been very consistent and several states and universities already having taken up examination reforms, in fact, though in a piecemeal way, there is utmost need for orderly progress towards examination reforms in terms of the above package. Implementation of this package, however, bristles with several practical problems, diversities in the educational system in the country being vast. Some of these initiatives concerned with examination reforms are as under:

- **Curriculum Development and Streamlining Examinations**

Continuous updating and revision of curricula is something which must be deeply ingrained in the academic culture of a 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. 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 issue of mark sheet.

- **Curriculum Flexibility and Student Mobility**

Curricular flexibility and student's mobility is another issue that warrants our urgent attention. These can be addressed by introducing credit-based courses and credit accumulation. In order to provide some degree of flexibility to students, we need to

provide for course duration in terms of credit hours and also a minimum as well as a maximum permissible span of time in which a course can be completed by a student.

- **A Common National Test for Institutions of Higher and Professional Learning**

Multiple entrances tests for a student passing class XII for admission to institutions for higher and professional learning not only results in a financial burden on the parents but also turns the student into a nervous wreck. Examinations have no emotions. This prompts us to do some loud thinking for replacing separate entrance examinations by a common national test.

- **Introducing Semester System**

Annual examination with emphasis on external written examination needs to be reformed. We can make a beginning by introducing Semester system. Similarly, we have to gradually move to a system which emphasises on continuous internal assessment and reduces the written examination component to a reasonable level. Duration of the semester, number of contact hours per paper, per semester and relative weight age of continuous internal assessment and semester-end examination needs to be prescribed unambiguously. The greatest advantage of this system is that it reduces the load of the students and inculcates regular study habits in time. Since the academic year is divided into two semesters, it also has the advantage of providing upward mobility; the students can clear the backlog even after moving to the next semester. It also enables the students to learn at their own pace. There need be no doubt that the type of education that concerns itself only with the study of a prescribed set of books and annual or term examinations in the traditional manner, or in the semester system, is not only incomplete, but also wasteful and a failure.

- **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.

- **Multiple Sets of Question Paper**

The CBSE introduced multiple sets of question paper in the year 1992. The wisdom of this move has been questioned by the cross-section of the society because it has led to many apprehensions in the minds of the examinees in particular and the society in general. The experiment was in conformity with the recommendations of the Madan Mohan Committee. However, it is important to compare the parallelism of the multiple sets of question papers.

- **Introduction of internal Assessment**

The fixed one point 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 attainments set by the teacher.

- **Use of ICT in Examination Management**

With steadily rising enrolment numbers and new courses being introduced each year, the number of entrance and other exams conducted is expected to grow substantially in the coming years. Indian education institutes spend much time, money and effort to manage these exams, which are as yet being conducted through traditional paper and pen methods with manual evaluations. Online examination module can be introduced.

- **Grading System**

We also need to move away from marks and division system in evaluation and need to introduce Grading system – preferably on a 9 point scale and Cumulative Grade Point Score (CPGS) in order to make our evaluation system at par with the best practices in the rest of the world.

Conclusion

The Indian higher education landscape is changing rapidly. There are greater expectations from higher education due to the country's rapid economic growth. In the true spirit of the motto "Experiment and innovative or perish", we must try to experiment and innovative and learn from them and finally reform our system of examination. Any rigid attitude will result in a total waste of our efforts to rid our examination system of the existing evils. Every now and then, the country's leaders, including educationists of various hues and disciplines, talk of the deficiencies of the present system, and plead for reforms. No wonder, there has been a plethora of education reform committees and Commissions. 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. A great stress needs to be given for establishing good libraries in our colleges and universities. More discussions and arguments on varied topics can impart more knowledge and information than more lecturing and completing the course. Equally important are the laboratories with latest types of equipment and items.

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