

Written Examination System In Higher Education: A Reflection

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Abstract

Higher Education is undergoing rapid change in India. The transformation has been taking place in the meaning and dimensions of higher education. Of the various dimensions of higher education, examination is a chief factor which defines the direction of transformation. Examination is the eternal part of any education system and written examination is the most important aspect of examination system. Current examination system is dominated by the written examination in spite of various flaws in it. Therefore this paper tries to focus on the current ways of conducting written examination and reflect the issues and suggest the reforms.

Key words: Written Examination, Higher Education, Question paper, Answer key etc.

Introduction:

The scenario of each nation is reflected in its education system. Education is fundamental factor in the nation's all-round development. In the Post-Independence period, higher education spread rapidly in India and now India has become one of the nations of the world offering maximum level of higher education. In spite of this fact, there are many issues in Indian higher education, out of which examination system is a prominent aspect. The purpose behind education system is to judge and evaluate the intelligence and skills developed amongst students by way of a variety of tools and techniques of evaluation. The method of written examinations was adopted for the 1st time in Cambridge University of England in the year 1702. Cambridge University of England brought written examination into practice due to high enrollment in the students' strength in the university. Cambridge University found that the tool of written examination was highly beneficial in mass assessment but its handicap was that it was unable to assess comprehensive development of students. In the same line, various educational commissions and committees expressed their concern over existing examination system in India and suggested to bring reforms in examination system. Since independence, lots of reforms were made in the examination system but examination remained fruitless. This is due to dominance of written examination. Therefore, it is a urgent need to tackle written examination as a serious issue. It is also necessary to understand existing nature and issues of written examination system before thinking over examination reforms, prominent among these are – question paper setting, answer key, assessment by examiners etc.

Question paper setting

Generally, while setting a question paper, its format, types of questions asked, weightage of factors in syllabus are taken into consideration. While it is necessary to prepare a blue print while setting a question paper, this part is neglected completely. Some of the questions in the question paper are vague or ambiguous, which lead to confusion amongst students. While framing question paper, it is framed in two

languages, but a lot of difference in translation is observed. All these are the shortcomings in question paper setting which affect the merit of students adversely. Hence, commencing the process of question paper setting, some orientation/ enlightenment on these problems should be made.

Answer key

Answer key needs to be prepared by the paper setter while setting question paper so that the examiner would know what are the expected answers of questions. In the answer sheet assessment process, answer key is of great importance and it makes the job of examiner easy while assessing answers of questions. At times, examiner himself has to prepare answer key due to vague and insufficient (brief) points given in the answer key. If the answers in the answer key are wrong or vague, then assessment goes in the wrong direction and the examiner himself has to make changes in it.

Many a times, a lot of difference is seen between questions asked in the question paper and the answers given in the answer key, which increases the chances of wrong scheme of marking. It is therefore required that the answer key be as precise and objective as possible.

Examiner

Those teachers having expected level of experience in a subject can work as examiner. The entire future of students depends on the examiner. Naturally, the personality of the examiner affects the marks scored by students either favourably or unfavourably. Some of the examiners view paper checking as a duty imposed on them, whereas some perform the task of paper checking for earning purpose. Some of the examiners become very strict while assessing papers, some are liberal in giving marks. All this leads not only to adverse impact on allotting marks to students but it also subjects examination system to a lot of criticism or resistance from some corners. Due to such vague method of giving marks, a majority of students resort to availing revaluation and re-checking facility whereas some even go to the extreme extent of committing suicide. In order that such discrepancies do not occur in giving marks, some orientation of examiners before checking papers has to be done. Moreover, in order to keep the examiner free from fatigue or stress factor while assessing papers, some measures should be thought of.

Scope to get full marks

It is expected to give marks as per the answer key prepared. If a question bears 10 marks, then the distribution of 10 marks is given in the answer key. It means that 10 marks be allotted to a student writes an answer exactly as per answer key. But it may happen that even though the student has written answer as per answer key, then also the examiner tends not to give full marks to the student, which is unfair to the student. Hence, it becomes essential to create such a situation in which the examiner gives full marks to answers written as per expectations. This would raise the merit of examination system in higher education which in turn would lead to proper evaluation of answers.

Creation of bridge courses

The nature of each examination is such that some of the students pass the examination, whereas some students fail in it, out of this section, some get promoted to next class due to the rule of ATKT (i.e. Allowed To Keep Terms). But the entire year of students who don't get the advantage of this facility goes wasted since they fail in the examination (i.e. they fail to pass in the minimum number of prescribed papers). Since an entire year from student's career goes wasted and it may even lead to slow down the progress of the nation. Moreover, students who got ATKT also remain under pressure for the entire year. Therefore, in order to avoid delay, results of the examination should be declared as early as possible once the examination is over and the result of the failed students be kept reserved. Further, the factors/ aspects from the syllabus which students didn't understand because of which they failed in the examination should be analyzed. By analyzing tough factors from the syllabus, the same should be converted into bridge courses. Students should be charged a certain fees and they should be taught the same factors again. The examination of the students should then be conducted and its result be declared before the commencement of the following academic year. Due to this system, one precious year from students' career won't be wasted. Also, students who have got ATKT won't have to bear the burden the entire year.

Conclusion

It is needed that the examination system in higher education be made more transparent. As mentioned by the Kothari Commission, an independent examination section be started in the UGC. In order to bring about radical changes in the examination system of higher education, there should be a separate department which should be engaged in research related to examinations. Since written examination is an integral part in the examination system and since students' future depends upon written examination, question paper should be framed by taking into consideration the syllabus of the course. Important factors of written examination are considered to be question paper, answer key and examiner. Hence, before setting question paper and while preparing answer key, orientation courses should be arranged. The realization that examination is for students and the future of students depends upon examinations should be brought in each one associated with the examination process. Since each year is important from student's career point of view, it is very much needed that bridge courses be prepared so that student's year doesn't go wasted due to failure in examination. This would also reduce the burden on examination department. If the problems discussed in the present paper be implemented properly, then merit of examination system as well as that of higher education would go be raised. Based on this merit, we would be able to realize the dream envisioned by Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam to make India a Super Power by year 2020.

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