Alternative Assessment Practices in Management Studies of Nepal

Rabin Sharma

Lecturer at Tribhuvan University

ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
Research Paper **Keywords :** *Alternative assessment, Hard skills, Policy, Profession, Skills, Standards*	The purpose of this paper is to understand the situation of assessment system in different university of Nepal. This study follows a qualitative design and to facilitate, undergraduate and graduate students underwent an in-depth interview concerning the assessment practices. The findings of this research disclosed that the current practice has already become obsolete and is not instrumental when it comes to holistic development of a management student as practical skills are not ensured through traditional assessment methods. Adhering to the orthodox assessment makes students unable to build critical thinking skills and other hard skills which is inevitable in their professional career. Traditional assessment is found to be time-consuming, effort-intensive, impractical, and refrains from complying to the universal standards. It is, therefore, recommended that a stringent implementation of alternative assessment system be carried out along with periodical monitoring and evaluation.

Introduction

In an academic setting, assessment refers to the act of inspecting and examining the students' performance in a particular course of study or subject. It helps to identify the performance level of the student (Cole, 1998). In the context of Nepal, from school to University, we tend to have similar assessment methods which have made headlines several times in a negative manner. The obsolete way of examining students is considered an ineffective way of inspection and it does not substantially contribute to their improvement (Nasab, 2015). However, there are several types of assessments such as

formative assessment, summative assessment, performance-based assessment, holistic assessment, project-based assessment and so forth.

Formative assessment refers to such practice which happens during the learning procedure and is intended to provide incessant feedback to the student for their improvement in each stage. In contrast, summative assessment is such practice that is executed one-time through final grading methods.

Likewise, performance-based assessment is based upon the analytical and evaluation competency of the student. On the other hand, holistic assessment addresses all aspects of a student such as emotional, practical, behavioral and social (Akubuilo, 2012). Another type of assessment is project-based assessment in which a certain series of tasks are asked to complete which ultimately strengthens the skills of the students.

An alternative assessment system helps in enhancing deep learning, boosts creativity, and critical thinking skills and also helps in the implementation of the knowledge gained pragmatically. It contributes to the holistic development of a student. However, it has been blatantly discouraged.

In the context of Nepal, the history of alternative assessment practice starts from the piloting program which was initiated in five-year Compulsory Primary Education (CPE) in the education year 2000/1 in grade 1st. However, there were also efforts from the side of Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP) to support Continuous Assessment System during 1996 to 1998 as the HMG proposed this system to the parliament.

Gradually, the 9th and 10th plans introduced Continuous Assessment System at the primary level in which the 9th plan focused on grade 1 to 3 students and the 10th plan focused on students up to 5th grade. As of now, Continuous Assessment System has been implemented up to grades 7th and 8th.

The basic principle of the CAS system is that the teaching methodology is student-centred (Nepali, 2012). It also provides that learning outcomes of the curriculum shall be used as the basis of teaching and assessment. Also, the teacher is supposed to assess the students on a continuous basis and there are no such periodical examinations. Finally, the student's work and progress reports shall be kept in their personalized portfolios.

There are several techniques of Continuous Assessment Systems such as Question and Answer in the lesson, Short Tests and Quizzes, Class tests, projects, group assignments, MCQs to enhance

communication, creativity, and collaboration skills for the students as a part of formative evaluation method (Dhakal, 2020).

Although students were observed to have improved their skills slightly during the initial period, the CAS has been found to be not so effective because there has not been any significant change in the improvement or achievement of the students. And the reason is because of a lack of responsibilities from all the stakeholders

Problem Statement

Nepalese education system has become somehow synonymous to traditional assessment. The management graduate students who recently moved to a corporate or banks are found to be lacking the inevitable skills required in their daily work such as data analysis, data analysis, portfolio analysis, security analysis, and other soft skills such as communication, presentation and decision-making.

Traditional assessment system has not been instrumental when it comes to polishing their hard skills which is inevitable in professionalism. Some examples of traditional assessment practices are MCQs, essays, true/false questions, short answer questions, and so forth which is obsolete and impractical while learning skills (Ryan & Poole, 2019). However, the students are supposed to have pragmatic skills as it is inevitable in the corporate sector. Also, there have been very few studies done concerning assessment system in Nepal focusing on business students. For example, students learn theoretical courses during their degree program. However, because of lack of exposure and practice that is caused due to the absence of pragmatic assignments in their coursework, students are anxious when it comes to implementation. A practical session or project-based assessment makes them prepared for the business market (Snyder & Snyder, 2008). However, traditional assessment could not justify this skill.

Research Questions

In relevance to the objectives of the study, the following research questions have been formatted. They are:

How management students understand assessment system?

How do students who got evaluated through traditional assessment system perceive practical skills?

Objectives of the Study

There are following objectives that has been determined to study in this research. They are:

To understand the experience of management students regarding traditional assessment system

To examine the causes behind incompetency of management students in practice

Significance of the Study

This study helps to explore the experiences and perception of students who are undergoing assessment during their coursework. As traditional assessment is a commonly followed and easy system amongst the institutions, it has several strings attached as well. Earning a degree is not only an achievement, rather the translation of the learned knowledge into a substantial form is necessary. This study also finds out how the traditional assessment affects the competency of the management students that ultimately helps to rectify the errors. Also, it helps the professionals who are striving to solve this growing academic issue.

Research Design and Methods

This research follows a qualitative research design. Concerning qualitative approach, primary data collection methods like in-depth interviews, open-ended surveys were conducted. To understand more about the phenomenon, this research adheres to a phenomenological design based on which their experience regarding alternative assessment methods were evaluated.

The number of participants who were involved in this research was 20. For in-depth interviews, 5 participants from two different academic programs, i.e., BBA (Bachelor in Business Administration) and MBA (Master in Business Administration) were selected. The remaining 15 participants were asked to fill out an open-ended survey out of which 13 of them successfully responded to all questions. Those 13 participants belong to streams like BBS (Bachelor in Business Students and BBM (Bachelor in Business Management). Along with this, several case studies on the Continuous Assessment System, the history of assessment in Nepal, and trends were studied as a part of secondary data collection method.

At first, interviews with the students from BBA was taken. The researcher underwent transcription and coded the interview extract into 13 different codes. Post-coding, the researcher enlisted all these codes and gathered them into different groups. After gathering, certain themes were generated such as, "recklessness from authorities", "distrust", "lack of vigilance", and "misinterpretation". To represent the

accuracy of the data and its usefulness, the researcher has split, discarded and combined the relevant ones and redefined a new theme as "Distrust of Students".

Furthermore, after taking interviews with the BBA students, the researcher conducted interviews with the students from MBA. After the interview, the researcher underwent transcription and coded the interview extract into 15 different codes. Post-coding, the researcher enlisted all these codes and gathered them into different groups. After collation, certain themes were generated such as, "overdue results", "underdog mentality", "inferiority", and "lapse". To represent the accuracy of the data and its usefulness, the researcher split, discarded and combined the relevant ones and redefined a new theme as "Running out of Time".

Results

 Two themes are created to interpret the results. One theme centralizes on the interview inputs from BBA students and another one centralizes on the inputs from MBA students. The objective behind thematic analysis is to understand the data properly. The inputs from both programs, i.e., BBA and MBA will help to understand the scenario of assessment system in university level.

Distrust of Students

The inception of Continuous Assessment System in 1996 was ahead of its time, however, the implementation gap has made students lose trust from the authorities. Concerning the assessment methods in management studies, a BBA student claims: "I have no expectations from the universities present here in Nepal. The controversies that keep on popping up now and then in the news, and the misguidance during teaching, carelessness in copy checking, not addressing the students in an equal manner and so forth has made me reluctant to believe sugar-coated things the government authorities claim. Their political indulgence is not understandable". This statement provides that Nepalese universities, especially those supported by the government are known for the predominance of political party. Representatives, members of the political parties, and trade unions are kept in priority.

While inspecting the assessment history and students' record, very minimal participation was found. In this context, the program in-charge mentioned: "Politically influenced colleges do not even conduct assessments of the so-called leaders and carry forward the grades. This sort of action shows zero transparency regarding assessment. This has led the other students have distrust the assessment

procedure of the college. There are several instances that made headlines when a couple of students submitted the same research paper/thesis and ultimately got graded".

The objective behind having assessments for undergraduate and graduate degrees is to enhance their applicability and research skills, such bad practice would result in incompetency (Nasri et al., 2010).

The failure to encapsulate assessment system till now has caused students to build a distrust towards the University of Nepal. Ultimately, it has an adverse effect on student's retention which is an alarming issue at the moment.

Running out of Time

Assessment of periodical examination papers takes a substantial amount of time in Nepal which sometimes exceeds a year. Regarding result time, an MBA student shares a perspective: "Master's is such a level that requires practical exposure, research-based learning, discussions, and indulgence of case studies which would contribute to building problem-solving skills. However, even in master's degree assessments, the 3-hour written exam is taken and the questions are not even near to critical analysis. The students are compelled to mug up and cram up the answers as the question blatantly discourages critical thinking skills". This statement denotes that besides the lack of attention from the side of the university to develop critical thinking skills of a master's scholar, the results are not published on time. This is an unaddressed predicament that master's scholars of management are facing due to the traditional assessment system. While interrogating with an authority from college department, the experience is: "It is due to a lack of examiners in the administration. Most of the professors do not bother assessing papers for the limited amount of stipend they get. If the Nepalese university had followed an alternative assessment system just like that of US-affiliated colleges and modern colleges in Nepal, the result would have been published on time with utmost transparency and accuracy."

 The reason behind having an alternative system is to address the requirements of the student (Nepali, 2012). The assessment system that our universities no near addresses the need of the students but rather causes students to run out of their time during the phase of strengthening a career. On one hand, such an assessment system does not result in the developing skills of a student and on another, the delayed results lead students to face unemployment.

Discussion

In relation to the data collected in form of interviews and answers to the open-ended questions, the discussion is presented here. Evaluating the perception and experience of the participants, there are a substantial amount of insights from their side that would help to curb the problems as well.

Relating to the objective of this research, i.e., to understand the experience of management students regarding traditional assessment system and to examine the causes behind incompetency of management students in practice.

We can analyze that the students have undergone traditional assessment and have an exponential experience with it. As students highlight assessment methods in the Nepalese education system have become obsolete, it is because institutes are reluctant to follow the alternative assessment procedure despite being mentioned in their curriculum. Some examples of traditional assessment practices that the students underwent are MCQs, essays, true/false questions, short answer questions, and so forth.

It is a matter of disgrace that academic institutions still follow the same old school assessment system up to the Master's level. We can hardly observe any student incessantly or religiously doing their project work, report, or paper presentation. There is this trend of going for a guess paper that is readily available in the market, studying those probable questions and attempting for the exams.

However, analyzing the curriculum, the words and requirements are very sugar-coated. It is often mentioned that a student must complete at least two presentations, one seminar, one project work, one research paper and an industrial analysis. Nonetheless, the monitoring and evaluation is nil because of which students are unable to polish their skills.

For a short period of time, students would be thrilled because of bypassing the rigorous process, but has potential cause of traumatic experience in their professional career. It is because the market is extremely competitive and there are potential professions with robust skills and this behavior of students, i.e., resistance to change leads to an ultimate detrimental result, i.e., unemployment.

To demonstrate clearly, the following questions depicts two different forms of assessment systems. The first one is a traditional system that has been used by the universities in their board examination. However, the second one should be followed.

Questions That are Asked in Board Exams of Universities

- What is company?

- What is the importance of law?

- Define Contract

- What is AGM?

- What is a Cheque?

Questions That Should be Asked

- Assume that you are about to establish a company (you can give any name to it). Address the following matters:

- How will you register your company? Explain the legal provisions regarding registration.

- Mention the legal provision of AGM

- You have to sign a contract with the partners. What sort of provisions will you address in the deed?

- You will be hiring staffs in your company. What is the legal provision of Social Security Fund and Welfare as per new Labor Act, 2074?

- Assume a client gave a cheque and it got bounced. What are the legal processes to act against him/her?

The causes of incompetency in management graduates can when it comes to practice can be analyzed from three dimensions, i.e., Curriculum Development Authorities, Institutes engaged in teaching and Students themselves. From the side of curriculum development authorities, there is a problem when it comes to need identification and there is a lack of piloting and evaluation.

From the side of institutes, they are not implementing whatever has been mentioned in the curriculum. It is because of a lack of progressive teachers, infrastructure and sometimes even their reluctance.

From the side of students, they consider alternative assessment practice as an extra pressure and redundant. Also, their previous learning approach was different. On top of this, the absence of stringent guidelines from the side of the institute is also one of the causes.

Immediate Action to be Taken

There are different approaches to alternative assessment. These practices ensure that a student will build a comprehensive and holistic academic competency and also helps to improve their pragmatic skills. The following types of assignment methods are suggested by the students along with their insights about it. Adopting the following assessment methods will ensure a progressive pedagogy as well as enhance their hard and soft skills.

Project-Based Assignments

These types of assignments are given to students based on a particular subject matter that helps in building their problem-solving skills, research and communication as well. It also helps in building networks. It ensures that the student will implement their theoretical knowledge and relate to the real-life scenario. In schools, we can find students being provided with project assignments which are either in a group of could be individually as well.

Authentic Assignments

Such assignments teach students how they can transform their cognitive ability into practice via case studies, role-playing and internships. The thing that they learn in their classroom will be transformed into practice. OBE (open book examinations), paper writing, article review, and case studies are some examples of authentic assignments (Fook & Sidhu, 2010). For instance, law students can be asked a case study and their opinions can be solicited. This helps in building critical thinking abilities.

Peer Assignments

These types of assignments are done with friends and in groups. Different groups of students in a classroom collaborate with each group, discuss, deliberate and reach a conclusion. They can draw inferences based on group conscience (Perez et al., 2022). It builds interpersonal skills and communication abilities at the same time.

Digital Assessments

Assignments such as online quizzes, multimedia presentations, simulations, and more help in building a personalized way of learning. It also builds their technical as well as competencies to polish the intelligent quotient.

Observations

It is another form of assessment in which a teacher or a professor observes the student, i.e., it could be participative, direct, indirect that helps in understanding the abilities of the learner.

Interviews and Conferences

Interviews and conferences are considered an effective way of understanding and examining an individual as one can inspect both hard as well as soft skills in this practice. It helps to know if they have a strong command over the concerned knowledge as it happens face-to-face and in person. It is also instrumental when it comes to understanding psychological behavior and emotional biases.

Efforts in Implementing Alternative Assessment Method

There have been several efforts catered by the Government of Nepal concerning alternative assessment methods. For instance, in May 2021, the government came up with the idea of conducting SEE exams through alternative assessment methods. However, it could not be implemented.

Majority of the schools, colleges and even universities practiced alternative assessment method during the period of COVID pandemic where students were in a virtual learning platform (Reeves, 2000). For example, business students were asked to take an online interview of managers from the industry based on which they were graded. Some of them were asked to prepare a financial analysis report of a particular industry based on which they were supposed to get the marks. Although there were some efforts to deploy this system, eventually, it phased out and the same old methods have been in practice.

Impact of Not Following Alternative Assessment System

Here, the argument can be supported with an example of a business student. For instance, a business student is supposed to have theoretical knowledge, for example, law, human resources, organizational behaviour, communication, leadership, etc. Also, he/she is supposed to have good command over finance, tax, audit and other computational pragmatic aspects such as data analysis, predictive analysis and so forth.

Every appointment in any company starts with a presentation and technical skill round these days. Because it is what matters at the end of the day. Not only private sectors, but even government entities

have also started to adopt Group Discussions, technical skills evaluation and personal interviews in their competitive exams. So, a lack of alternative assessment would not contribute to building such skills.

Recommendations

The provision of OBE, article review, e-portfolio (through which students can track their progress), presentations, take away examinations, and so forth should be implemented. Based on such parameters, the students shall be graded accordingly.

Furthermore, project works can be indulged into the curriculum where students are required to prepare themselves for a rigorous market. A good approach to alternative assessment is practiced by few foreign-affiliated colleges in Nepal where students formulate an economic analysis report that is subsequently presented in front of authorities at the Ministry of Finance prior to budget planning. This helps students to build confidence that their suggestions are valued. Included, but not limited to, the competency in communication skills are also enhanced. Furthermore, a good public relation amid government is also ensured.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, this paper has studied the practice of the assessment system in Nepal, efforts catered by the policymakers, issues in implementation and hopeful prospects. All in all, we can observe that we lack implementation and it is from three dimensions, recklessness by the educational institutes, curriculum development authorities, and students themselves. On top of this, the discrepancy is resulted due to lack of finance, resistance to change, lack of teacher training, obsolete mode of operation, issues in record keeping, and so forth. Proper guidance as well as piloting is required immediately to resolve this issue.

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