

PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS TOWARDS TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY EXAMINATIONS

*Netra Prasad Sharma**

ABSTRACT

Tribhuvan University (TU), the oldest university in the country, was founded in 1959. It administered the first examinations in 1961. Since then it has come a long way and it has been conducting several examinations under both semester and annual systems. Nevertheless the standards of the examinations have raised questions among the stakeholders. Therefore, this article makes an attempt to find out what students and teachers have to say about the examinations conducted by TU. For this, a questionnaire based on the Likert Scale was used. The tool consisted of altogether 39 statements grouped under ten different constructs related to the standards of TU examinations. The tool was administered to 40 students and 10 teachers selected based on non-random sampling from the two campuses of TU located in Kathmandu. On the analysis of the responses, it was found that both students and teachers felt that there were shortcomings in TU examinations and that improvement were required in line with the internationally practiced standards of examinations.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Since TU started conducting its examinations in 1961, comments, both positive and rather negative, have been made by the public. Examinations are the integral part of teaching and learning as Gronlund (1976: 4) puts “we cannot escape making evaluative judgments. Decisions must be made and action must be taken. The more accurately we judge our pupils, the more effective we will be in directing their learning.” For effective evaluation, evaluators need to comprehend the goal of evaluation in general and also the procedures used for the purpose in particular. From the stage of deciding to evaluate students to the reporting of results to the concerned individuals, all the evaluation related human resources including the test developers, administrators, scorers, etc. need to be careful, should act honestly and rigorously. Besides, the evaluation procedure is expected to be in consonance with the existing international norms and standards.

In the light of the arguments among general public and the responsible stakeholders for and against the standards of the Tribhuvan

* Mr. Sharma is Lecturer in English Education at Mahendra Ratna Campus, T.U., Tahchal, Kathmandu, Nepal

University (TU) examinations, I decided to carry out a small- scale research on how students and teachers perceive the TU examinations. I believe that this study has brought in black and white what actually students and teachers have to say about the TU examinations. The findings will, I hope, be useful for a positive change in the existing examination practices of TU.

The study included altogether ten constructs related to the different aspects of examinations. Forty students and ten teachers from two campuses located in Kathmandu were asked to respond to 39 statements grouped under ten constructs. The constructs used were *accountability, confidentiality, human rights, equity, conformity with the society, conflict of interest, objectivity, test situations, test quality, and reporting of scores.*

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The term ‘perception’ refers to an idea one holds about an entity based on one’s understanding of the entity. As regards to the perception of students and teachers towards TU examinations also, the same concept applies. This study aimed at assessing how students and teachers perceive TU examinations.

To my knowledge, there are a very few studies carried out in this area. They are reviewed in brief in the following paragraphs.

Alutu and Aluede (2006) from Nigeria studied the perception of secondary school students’ perception of examination malpractices and ethics. In the study, they administered two sets of questionnaires to 200 students from two public schools selected randomly and found that majority of the students had a wrong notion about examination ethics and believed that their involvement in examination malpractices was a common occurrence and it was difficult to eradicate. Parents, teachers, and even school principals were found to encourage cheating in exams. The researchers suggested the counseling intervention strategies as a solution of the problem.

Another study from Nigeria was carried out by Oladunni (2010). He also studied the perception of students towards examinations and examination ethics. He administered two different sets of questionnaires to 1000 students with a mean age of 21.3 years. He found that majority of students misunderstood the examination and its underlying ethics. The students took examinations as an instrument of oppression, humiliation, and restriction on the ladder of success. Hence they often disobeyed the rules and regulations of examinations.

Oloyede (2012), again from Nigeria, studied the attitude and perception of students and teachers towards examination malpractices. A questionnaire based on the Likert Scale was developed and administered

to 100 students from 4 schools. He found that for examination malpractices there were a number of reasons such as parental pressure for good grades, peer group influence, inadequate preparation, etc.

Munshi, Javed and Hussain (2012) from Pakistan studied the perception of students and teachers towards the semester system of university examinations. They involved 270 students and 45 teachers in the study and found that, despite some positive attitude towards the semester system, most students' perception was negative mainly because of the subjectivity in evaluation.

Sridevi (2012) from India studied the attitude of teacher trainees and problems faced by teacher educators in the semester system. Altogether 204 teacher trainees were involved in the study but the results were rather inconclusive.

Pathak and Rahaman (2013) from India also studied the perception of students and teachers towards semester system. A questionnaire was administered to 133 students and 44 teachers. They found that the subjects were not very positive towards the semester system.

Bhattarai (2014) studied the attitude of TU teachers towards the semester system involving 60 teachers. He administered a questionnaire and found that in general, teachers were positive towards the system as such but they were not satisfied with the management.

My study is different from the studies reviewed so far mainly because unlike other studies, it is concerned with the constructs that covered almost all aspects of TU examinations, both semester and annual. In addition far as I know, no study of this kind has taken place in Nepal. It could be justified in terms of the quality of the information it came up with.

METHODOLOGY

The tool for collecting the data was a questionnaire consisting of 39 statements under 10 constructs related to the different facets of examinations. The questionnaire was prepared following the Likert Scale. It required the respondents only to tick in the box against each statement. Besides, it contained three other question terms asking them to rate the overall standard of TU examinations and to provide their comments and suggestions. The question requiring the respondents to rate the overall quality of the examinations consisted of a five-point scale on which there were 5 points-1 to 5, indicating 'very poor' quality to 'very good' quality. The intermediate points '2' to '4' indicated 'poor', 'satisfactory', and 'good' respectively. Care was taken while writing the statements. The statements were simplified as far as possible so that the respondents could easily understand them. The statements were made in the positive tone intending to lessen any kind of unwanted influence of examinations the respondents might have had

resulting into prejudiced responses. For the same purpose, intensifiers as 'really', 'highly', 'any', 'very', etc. were also avoided. I think, this also helped in lessening the influence that could have, otherwise, been exerted on the particular 'frame of mind' of the respondents.

The tool prepared was administered to the 40 students and 10 teachers from two campuses in Kathmandu.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the administration of the questionnaire, the responses were carefully studied, counted and tabulated. The results are presented and analyzed first holistically and then in components in the following section. The abbreviations used in the presentation of results and discussions are as follows:

SA= Strongly Agree SD= Strongly Disagree

Ss= students A= Agree

U= Undecided D= Disagree

Cons.=Constructs Ts= teachers

The five-points on the rating scale used in the question item asking students to rate the overall quality of TU examinations represent the following terms:

1= very poor 4=good

2= poor 5= very good

3= satisfactory

OVERALL PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

The perception of students and teachers is presented as below:

Table 1: Overall Perception of Teachers and Students

	SA	%	A	%	U	%	D	%	SD	%	Total no. of responses
Ts	125	7.81	489	30.58	169	10.56	532	33.27	284	17.76	1599
Ss	32	8.35	118	30.80	61	15.92	140	36.55	32	8.35	383
Total	157	7.92	607	30.62	230	11.60	672	33.90	316	15.94	1982

Table 1 gives the overall glimpse of the perception of students and teachers towards the TU examinations. The table presents the data holistically. Out of the total 1982 responses to the question items related to 10 constructs, 7.92% responses went for 'Strongly Agree', 30.62% responses for 'Agree', 11.60% responses for 'Undecided', 33.90% responses for 'Disagree' and 15.94% responses for 'Strongly Disagree'. The responses for 'Agree' and 'Disagree' are slightly different i.e. only by 3%. This indicates that students and teachers felt the need for some

improvements of TU examinations. However, it was also evident that the consensus among the respondents was not uniform. The respondents seemed to have been divided in the issue. Only 3% responded for ‘Disagree’ meant that the strong criticism of TU examinations from some quarters might not be justified as they expected. Besides, the table also shows that 11.60% responses went for ‘Undecided’ but it was interesting that why both students and teachers are having had the first-hand experience of TU examinations could not decide what to say. In addition, the statistical difference between ‘Strongly Agree’ and ‘Strongly Disagree’ (i.e. 7.92% vs 15.94%) indicates that improvements in TU examinations were necessary. Yet another remarkable point in the table is that the perceptions of both students and teachers were in consonance with each other. This finding was against the laymen belief that teachers, as they themselves are involved in testing, might perceive the existing practices positively and that students might perceive the issue differently.

PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS

The perception of students is presented as follows:

Table 2: Perception of Students

Cons.	Students’ Responses									
	SA	%	A	%	U	%	D	%	SD	%
1	9	7.2	32	25.6	11	8.8	43	34.4	30	24
2	14	10.93	56	43.75	20	15.64	30	23.43	8	6.25
3	20	10.15	89	45.18	19	9.65	46	23.35	23	11.67
4	11	9.17	35	29.16	20	16.67	34	28.33	20	16.67
5	6	4.54	45	34.09	16	12.12	43	32.58	22	16.67
6	19	15.83	47	39.16	10	8.33	36	30.1	8	6.67
7	4	4.96	13	16.04	9	11.11	35	43.20	20	24.69
8	20	5.84	110	32.06	37	10.80	120	34.98	56	16.32
9	20	8.69	48	20.86	18	7.83	96	41.76	48	20.86
10	2	1.64	14	11.39	9	7.31	49	39.83	49	39.83
Total %	7.81		30.58		10.56		33.29		17.76	

Note: 1=Accountability, 2=Confidentiality, 3=Human Rights, 4=Equity, 5=Conformity with the Society, 6=Conflict of Interests, 7=Objectivity, 8=Test Situations, 9=Test Quality, 10=Reporting of Scores (results)

Table 2 displays the perception of students towards TU examinations. The table shows that, on the whole, 30.58% responses went for 'Agree' and 33.27% responses for 'Disagree'. The difference is that of about 3% only. This indicates that students were in favour of some improvements in TU examinations. The small difference between 'Agree' and 'Disagree' shows that there were not much uniform views regarding the examinations. Almost a half of the responses indicate that the students agreed with the existing examination practices and slightly more than a half of the responses indicate that they were not satisfied with the existing practices. The statistical difference between the responses that went for 'Strongly Agree' and 'Strongly Disagree' (i.e. 7.81% vs 17.76% respectively), however, more strongly indicate that the improvements were required in the examinations. The fact that 10.56% responses went for 'Undecided' indicates that the students could not decide what to say either because they did not understand the statements or because they did not have any knowledge structures about the issues raised. Another remarkable point in the data is that more responses of students went for 'Agree' than for 'Disagree' regarding the constructs 'confidentiality', 'human rights', 'equity' and 'conformity with the society'. This is something that had not been expected.

On studying the construct-wise responses, in construct no.3, i.e. 'Human Rights', 45.18% responses went for 'Agree' whereas only 23.35% responses for 'Disagree'. This means that majority of the students supported the TU examinations in terms of human rights. In case of construct no. 2, i.e. 'Confidentiality', 43.75% responses were for and 23.43% were against. This means that majority of the students thought that TU maintained confidentiality. Looking at the data rather broadly, in all constructs the responses for 'Strongly agree' and 'Undecided' fall within 16% only. The responses for 'Agree' fall within 17% to 46%, except for one construct i.e. 'Reporting of Scores'. Similarly, the responses for 'Disagree' fall within 24% to 44%. The responses for 'Strongly Disagree' fall within 25%, except for one. This pattern of data indicates that the Agree-vs-Disagree issue is more important than any other. The range of the responses for 'Agree' was 17 to 46 except for one construct and the range for 'Disagree' was 24 to 44. In both the cases, the range does not differ very vastly. The insignificant difference indicates that students were not unanimous as regards TU examinations.

PERCEPTION OF TEACHERS

The perception of teachers is presented and discussed as follows:

Table 3: Perception of Teachers

Cons.	Teachers' Perception									
	SA	%	A	%	U	%	D	%	SD	%
1	3	10	11	36.67	7	23.33	9	30	0	0
2	2	6.46	10	32.26	2	6.45	17	54.83	0	0
3	8	19.52	10	24.40	9	21.95	13	31.70	1	2.43
4	2	6.67	5	16.67	10	33.33	9	30	4	13.33
5	2	5.88	11	32.35	5	14.70	13	38.25	3	8.82
6	3	10.36	10	34.48	5	17.24	10	34.48	1	3.44
7	3	15	10	50	0	0	5	25	2	10
8	3	3.48	30	34.88	11	12.80	31	36.04	11	12.80
9	3	5.67	16	30.18	7	13.20	24	45.28	3	5.67
10	3	10.36	5	17.24	5	17.24	9	31.03	7	24.13
Total %	8.36		30.80		15.92		36.56		8.36	

Table 3 displays the responses of teachers to the ten constructs. On the whole, 30.80% responses went for 'Agree' and 36.56% for 'Disagree'. It indicates that teachers were in favour of more improvements in TU examinations. The interesting point is that 15.91% responses went for 'Undecided', which was not expected in general. Teachers who were directly involved in teaching and testing could have decided what to say. It might be because either they could not understand the statements or because they did not have the knowledge and experience of the issues raised in the questionnaire. As in the case of students, here also majority of the responses went for 'Agree' and 'Disagree'.

The responses indicate that the teachers were in favour of improving the examinations mainly in terms of the constructs 'Confidentiality', 'Test Quality', 'Conformity with the Society' and 'Test Situations'. Nevertheless, they also wanted it in terms of 'Human Rights', 'Equity', and 'Reporting of Scores'. The remarkable point in teachers' responses is that in the two constructs 'Accountability' and 'Objectivity', the teachers chose 'Agree' more than 'Disagree'. In case of 'Accountability', 36.67% responses went for 'Agree' whereas only 30% for 'Disagree'. Similarly, in case of 'objectivity' 50% responses were for 'Agree' and only 25% for 'Disagree'. This means that majority of the teachers' views were not in favor of bringing about many changes in the examinations in terms of accountability and objectivity.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA OBTAINED FROM THE FIVE-POINT SCALE

Both students and teachers were also asked to rate the quality of the TU examinations on a five-point scale. The points representing LOW to HIGH. Out of 40 students, 38 students rated as instructed but 2 of them created another point between 2 and 3. They created the point '2.5' and

indicated their views. Even though the reason was not given clearly, possibly they did it to express their views more precisely. The results are presented in the table below:

Table 4: Overall Perception of Students and Teachers towards the Quality of TU examinations

Students					Teachers				
1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
8	22	8	0	0	2	3	5	0	0
21.05%	57.89%	21.05%	0%	0%	20%	30%	50%	0%	0%

Table 4 shows that out of 38 students, 8 chose to rate '1' indicating the 'very poor' quality, twenty-two students marked '2' indicating 'poor' quality and 8 students marked '3' indicating 'satisfactory'. None of the students chose '4' and '5', which indicated 'good' and 'very good' respectively.

However, in case of teachers, 5 out of 10 teachers marked '3' and indicated that TU examinations were 'satisfactory' only. Two of the teachers chose '1' and 3 of them chose '2' indicating 'very poor' and 'poor' quality respectively. The interesting fact is that neither students nor teachers chose '4' and '5'. It indicates that students and teachers both absolutely agreed on the fact that TU examinations were not more than just satisfactory. Nevertheless, there were differences as regards whether the examinations were 'poor' in quality or not. Almost 58% students considered the examinations 'poor' in quality whereas only 30% teachers considered so. Regarding whether or not the examinations were 'very poor' in quality, almost the same percentage of both students and teachers agreed.

On the whole, despite some minor differences the results of the rating scale and the results of the questions related to ten constructs were found to be in consonance with each other.

COMMENTS OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

The students and teachers involved in the study were asked to provide their comments on the TU examinations. Very interestingly, the comments provided by both the groups were surprisingly similar against the fact that, as any one might expect, the comments would be different. The researcher had also thought that because of the quite different roles and responsibilities of students and teachers in examinations, the comments would be quite different, perhaps one set of comments rather critical and the other set rather neutral or appreciative.

On studying the comments of the students and the teachers, it was found that they mostly commented with a rather critical attitude. Although they were given freedom to provide comments on any aspect of examinations, their comments were found to be limited within the areas covered by ten constructs in the questionnaire.

They opined that the test tools lacked the qualities like reliability, validity, authenticity, etc. and that the examination halls were not conducive enough for performance. Similarly, geographical situations, cultural values of examinees were not addressed. Besides, they also expressed the fact that examinees were not provided with feedback after the examinations and that the rights of examinees were not considered. In addition, the results were not published timely and that the political interference as well as the conflict of interests among the stakeholders was damaging the standards of examinations.

As regards the suggestions for the improvements, both students and teachers said that the concerned authorities had to be more serious about sensitivity of the examinations and act accordingly. Constructions of test tools, their administration, scoring and timely publication of results were the areas where the stakeholders were required to work on much more cautiously and efficiently. Besides, the semester system was suggested against the annual system of examination. In the same way, the respondents suggested avoiding, at any cost, the damage caused by political interference and the conflict of interests.

CONCLUSION

With a view to explaining the beliefs of students and teachers about TU examinations, I decided to carry out a small scale research for which I chose the topic. It was because I had heard grudges from laymen and responsible stakeholders. For the purpose I prepared a questionnaire and administered it to the Master's level students and teachers as well. I, then, analyzed the data which revealed the fact that TU examinations were not as standard as they had to be. According to the respondents, TU examinations had a number of shortcomings as lack of validity and reliability of tests, inappropriate test situations, lack of accountability and so on. Besides the responses obtained from both students and teachers were in consonance with each other. Both the stakeholders pointed out some shortcomings and suggested measures to improve the examinations. Both students and teachers were undecided about certain issues, which is against the common expectation of people. The responses obtained from the questions under the 10 constructs and responses obtained from the other three items were found slightly different. The first sets of responses were not as critical as that of the second. Concludingly, considering the overall responses of the respondents, it can be said that TU examinations need improvements in a number of aspects. In general, the findings were in consonance with the common belief of laymen and the researcher himself. The reasons behind such findings are clear from what the respondents commented on and suggested about the examinations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results and discussion, it is evident that the stakeholders of TU examinations need to work more in the areas like construction of test

tools, administration of tests, scoring and reporting of scores. In addition, it would be much better if the issues of accountability, confidentiality, equity in terms of geographical and cultural values, politicization of examination-related affairs, transparency, the rights of test-takers, etc. could be addressed with more seriousness so that even the people in the lowest tier of examination-related affairs feel that the TU examinations have really changed and that the change has taken place for excellence.

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