

## **Teachers' Perceptions of Student's Weaknesses While Scoring Answer Sheets**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper aims to explore the perceptions of examiners in examining bachelor's level answer sheets. This study was carried out by adopting the hermeneutic phenomenological method under a qualitative research design. The participant of the study were five teachers from the constituent campuses of Tribhuvan University. This study explored whether students mismatched the answer numbers, such as writing the incorrect answer or writing an irrelevant answer. Unpreparedness about curriculum content and writing inappropriate answers with verbal repertoire is a common problems. Most of the answer sheets were found to be lacking in managing the time while writing the answers. Furthermore, students were found poor at structuring answers and wrapping them with appropriate remarks. The study findings can contribute to the test construction, test administration, and refinement of a student's writing with relevant content and demand for the questions.*

**Keywords:** *Examiner's perception, mismatching of answer number, irrelevant answer; time management*

### **Introduction**

We have experienced a couple of decades of teaching in schools and colleges. In a longtime run in the teaching field, we have observed various situations while accomplishing tasks provided by the authoritative agency related to the teaching-learning activity, teaching curricular content, administering the test, and checking answer sheets, which are common responsibilities of teachers. As teachers, we have seen so many remarkable features in the students' behavior in the class. Likewise, we have seen various features in students' answer sheets while examining the papers. Some students are seemed in inclining to express their views. So they have written unnecessary matters, and some are running beyond the demand of the question. Many answer sheets are written carelessly about content areas (Glover & Brown, 2006). In such a situation, we try to explore why the examinee's perception goes beyond the curricular content. Sometimes the examiner feels confusing about scoring the test paper, which raises the question of why graduate-level students exhibiting such weaknesses and shows the drawbacks in structuring the answer (Wiggins, 2011).

Nepal's examination system prioritizes students' rankings and uses its main tools for measuring students' achievement for upgrading grades or levels (Sharma et al., 2020). Thus, the examination papers are precious for the students. The students who can write the question-answer well are considered great and perfect at learning (Korthagen, 2004). As a result, examiners' perceptions of the examination paper play a hazy role in students' careers and future opportunities. The ranking system instills students' emotions of superiority and inferiority (Deutsch, 1979). For example, students with poor exam results may feel inferior as compared to students with better exam scores. In the sense that students who feel inferior, are demotivated to acquire new skills (Nedelsky, 1954). Now a day, students' thoughts are deviated to giving the exam is just passing and having the certificate. The certificate holder has not realized that they need to have some apparent skills. In the exam, the student only appears for certification without any knowledge. To overcome such type of thinking of examinee, this study may dig out essential thoughts and perceptions of stakeholders for the administering the test. This study may become a milestone for setting test strategies for upgrading the exam system of a university degree.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study seeks to explore teachers' perceptions while examining the answer sheet. Mainly, it focuses on the teacher's perception while scoring the answer sheet of Bachelor level.

### **Methodology**

In this study, we have used hermeneutic phenomenology as a research design. This design explores lived experiences and the shared meaning of similar experiences (Manen, 1997). As research participants, five examiners from constituent campuses of TU from Kathmandu valley were chosen purposively. The teacher's lived experience in assessing the graduate-level answer sheets was explored through in-depth interviews and semi-structured questions. The examiners who participated in this study had extensive expertise in teaching and learning, as well as test administration and development. Furthermore, they had been involved in the checking answer sheets for many years. Regarding ethical issues, the participants took informed consent (T. Miller & Bell, 2002). Confidentiality was mentioned by employing a pseudonym as examiners (E1, E2, E3, E4, and E5). The audio recorder was used to record the interviews with the participants. The recorded interview was transcribed and coded (Tuckett, 2005). The code was applied for developing the theme, The similar theme was arranged for the organizing theme and the organized theme was used for the global theme. The global themes were explained, connecting with code and literature.

### **Result and Discussion**

This section comprises the results from the transcribed data which were derived from in-depth interviews and thematically presented as follows:

### **Mismatching of Answer Number**

The act of doing work carelessly and not seriously is considered a mismatch. While writing the question number without observing the test paper properly, is a mismatching of the answer number (Clement, 1982). The questions in the answer sheet are not in the proper place where they are to be mentioned. How the examinee writes questions and answers is an influencing factor for the examiners. In this context, participant teacher E1 asserted:

*I had examined the answer sheet of Ed 412, but I got no answer number written on the paper. The answer numbers do not match the question asked. At that time, I felt confused about where to put the marks because students were deviating from the essence of the question. Two or more answers with the same number and feature of an answer are roaming in different directions, embracing unnecessary verbal deposition.*

From this assertion, it is clear that some of the students are writing the question number in the right place and some of the answers are written in the heading of the same number. Sometimes they overlap the answers to the different questions. In examination answer sheets are observed in expressing insufficient knowledge within the content areas (Prince, Scherpbier, Van Mameren, Drukker, & Van Der Vleuten, 2005). Since they have little notification about the subject matter, they are not sure about what they will learn. The result shows examinees are skipping from the epicenter of factual knowledge. The teacher needs to be sincere about the pedagogy, and the teacher is very sincere about the content knowledge by the internal assessment approach. In the same vein, examiner E2 said

*While I was examining the answer sheet, I found that there was no margin left and it was filled to the rim of the paper regardless of the instruction on the first page. In this situation, I find it difficult to put the marks on the left side of the paper.*

In relation to the above statement, the answer script was found to be missing the margin on both sides of the paper, so the examiner felt difficulty in putting the score on the paper. Being graduate students, they need to have the knowledge to write answers in an efficient manner. However, the instructions are provided on the front page. The students do not see it and write the answer, covering all the pages. To overcome this situation, the invigilator needs to be aware of the instruction before they begin to write the answer (Cramp, Medlin, Lake, & Sharp, 2019). The examiner, E3, said as

*Some of the answer sheets are set up with the same question number without the separation. In such a situation, the written question has been scored, and the left will be scored by reviewing the question. Sometimes I fall in confusion about which question is answered.*

In this assertion, students are writing the answer without mentioning the question number. They can't tell the difference between the question and the same thing repeated. The overlapping type of question and answer make the scorer divide the allocated marks. Clear instructions need to

be proclaimed before starting to write on the answer sheet. The instruction needs to embrace the penalty of deducting marks if question numbers are not mentioned clearly (Hill & Ball, 2009). Similarly, the examiner E4 said

*In some of the answer sheets that I have checked, the students are giving the answer to both parts of the "and" question. The students are not segregating the meaning of the question. The student attempts all the questions that are asked in the question.*

In the above statement, the examinees are giving answers to both parts of the "and" question. This means that they do not understand the meaning of the words "or" question. Such types of questions reflect the meaning of a single value of an equal option, carrying out the same weightage. In such a question, each examinee will benefit if any part of the content is not abstracted properly. To eliminate the ambiguity of "or" questions, the subject teacher must instruct on this feature while administering the test. Another participant, E5, asserted as:

*In the task of examining the answer sheet, the students are asked to write a portion of the answer on one page and the remaining on the last page. In some copies, students cannot complete one side of the paper and finish it on the last page or somewhere else. In such a case, I feel confused about what is to be done in the portion of the answer.*

The participant's experience reveals that the answers are written by skipping the pages. The answer is segmented for the same question. The meaning of doing such a type of task may be a reflection of cheating behavior from the neighboring copies due to the fear of the invigilator. To overcome this situation, the test construction needs to be formatted by the alternative questions in the neighboring peers. Subjective questions need to be constructed by giving different contexts for the same question in such a way that the cheating habit is completely discouraged (Granovetter, 2018).

### **Writing Irrelevant Answers and Lack of Preparedness about Content Areas**

Unrelated and unexpected answers to the questions that they can't add value to with their thoughts in that specific context (Morgeson et al., 2007). Examiner E1 stated the following in response to the misleading answers to the questions:

*In the answer sheet, I found that students were writing the answers falling out of content and issues raised by the question. The students do not understand the question and cannot express insight about the specific content knowledge. While writing the answer, students write haphazard answers without touching key points in the content areas and just try to feel the page.*

The notion of the participant indicates that students are reflecting on their views beyond the content areas. The answers of students show that their answers are only the repertoire of unnecessary words. This poses a threat to the teacher's pedagogy. The students are not convinced by the content knowledge and they are not satisfied with the existing instructional pedagogy

(Zembylas, 2007). In such a context, the teacher needs to adopt student-friendly instruction by taking the motivation from the student's needs and interests. In favor of the above statement, the examiner E2 asserted as:

*While examining the paper, I found a folk song in it. In some of the papers that I had checked in, I was asked to write a request letter for passing in the subject, wishing all the best for the teacher by offering some benefit.*

Why examinees were writing songs on the answer sheet? Obviously, this is a lack of understanding of content knowledge. On the other hand, the examinee is not serious about the exam. In fact, the examinee is not appreciating the importance of reading and writing. The thought of a candidate who wants to take only a certificate without knowledge (Sato, Wei, & Darling-Hammond, 2008). This scenario seems to be the symptoms of an underestimated educational future. In this case, the concept of education as life itself has deteriorated and fallen into imperfection. In this context examiner, E3 said

*I found some of the answer sheets were written winrough handwriting. I could not match the answer key with the written answer and fell in confusion about scoring the item.*

In this assertion, answer sheets were written in rough handwriting, which is a signal of a bad impression. In such a case, the examiner has a negative perception of the item and feels self-conscious while scoring it. In the case of poor handwriting, the number of mistakes is increasing in the view of the examiner, and his perception is not good for evaluation (Rowntree, 2015). So examinees, need to think about clear handwriting while attempting the question.

### **Filling with Verbal Repertoire**

This refers to the collection of meaningless words. Administering the test is not collecting unnecessary words and filling the papers with ink (Carter, Kofler, Forster, & McCullough, 2015). In the examination, the examiner requires to drop their views with constructive thought and use appropriate symbols and words with proper language configuration. In this context, examiner E1 said as:

*The students are not writing the appropriate answer to any question. They express their opinions without any justification in some of the responses. Some students only fill out the copy, but there is no precise solution. The student can fill the paper with unnecessary words, such as a repertoire of words with meaningless remarks.*

The above statement signifies that those answer sheets are not found with relevant answers to any question. The demand for the question is on the one hand and the answer runs on the other hand. This means either the examinee could not understand the question or the examinee was unable to benefit from the instruction provided. They were unable to express their thoughts as

fully as possible due to a lack of in-depth knowledge of content areas(as stated by E2). In the above context, the examiner E2 said

*I got the answer sheet. The objective test item of all students has the almost same answer, and the subjective answers are unnecessary words rather than the demand of the question. The paper was filled with unwanted words, sometimes pragmatics. On one hand, the issue of the question is on one hand and the answer is on the other hand. In such a situation, I felt shy and a question stood in front of me: how is the quality of learning affected by the situation? Is this generation escaping from the mainstream of learning?*

Participants' felling means that the students are not well prepared and serious in presenting their answers. Students are appearing in exams just to fill up answers scripts with unnecessary words. The above assertion prevails that students' learning practices and backgrounds are poor. They are not extracting their innate power in writing the answer script. As a result, students needed to be motivated to learn specific content for better writing up (Roths, Lemos, & Gonçalves, 2017).

### **Lack of Time Management Skill**

Time management skills are the ability to manage time-based on the weightage of the question. The essay-type question requires more time than a short question (Das & Evans, 2014). Spending more time on a short question is not beneficial for the examinee. In this context, examiner E1 said:

*In the examination, students seemed to be writing without managing their time. On some of the answer sheets, students are attempting only 2/3 of the questions. In some answer sheets, I discovered that the length of the long question answer is smaller than the length of the short question answer. The students understand the meaning of the question, and they are given the answer to both questions.*

The above assertion states that the examinee was not conscious of time management. They write as long as they can at first, and at last, they cannot manage time for resting questions. That's the reason they are unable to secure good marks in exams. In relation to this statement being agreed with the other participant, E2 stated as:

*In the answer sheet, the answers are very long, which is not necessary for the first five pages, and the answers are too short in the later pages. In doing so, the answers are inadequate and incomplete for the questions that are asked in group C of the test paper.*

The above assertion states that students are not well-practiced and serious about time management. As a result, they are unable to attempt all questions. If they attempt, they can't provide a sufficient answer at last. The three types of questions that are commonly asked in bachelor's degrees in education faculty. According to the syllabus for bachelor's level, twenty objective questions are asked in group A for twenty marks, eight questions in group B for fifty-six marks, and two

questions in group C for twenty-four marks. For group A, twenty-minute marks are allocated for twenty questions, which means one minute for one question. Group B and C are subjective types of questions that need to be completed within 160 minutes. This time allocation specifies fourteen minutes for seven-point questions and twenty-four minutes for twelve-point questions.

### **Lack of Structuring the Answer**

Structuring an answer entails developing an argument from a logical combination of ideas. Because essays are essentially linear in that they provide one idea at a time, they must express their ideas in the sequence that makes the most sense to the reader (M. J. Miller, 1979). Attending to a reader's reasoning is required for successful essay construction. The format of an answer is determined by its emphasis. It specifies the facts that readers must be aware of and the sequence in which they must be informed. As a result, the structure of your essay must be specific to the major point you're conveying. In this regard, the examiner E1 said:

*I got the answer sheet without structuring and not shaping it on the basis of the nature of the question. The students are not writing their views and perceptions in their own words as far as practicable. The writing is completely monotonous and falls into the exaggeration of their own narratives. Subjective question answers are expressed as descriptive essay types and do not meet the exact figure of answer.*

The answers are written in a monotonous and unnecessary exaggerated manner based on the above statement. The key points were not met at the heart of the question. Subjective questions are beyond the signpost of the question. In this situation, the examinee needs to restructure his answer by covering the demand of the question. Writing an essay types test item is not appropriate for all types of questions. In the same context as above examiner E2 expressed as:

*From the answer sheet, what I have checked is found to be completely unstructured and does not match the demand of the question. The question is seeking one aspect, and the answer runs beyond the aspect. The students are writing without the scope of the question. This situation made me confused about the use of a scoring key.*

In this assertion, some answer sheets were found to be unstructured and deviated from the demand of the question. The written answer was beyond the expectations and scope of the content. To overcome this situation, the subject teacher needs to make students prepare by administering the pre-board exam. Similarly, examiner E3 stated as follows:

*In the answer sheet, the students are responding within the scope of their content knowledge. The question, for example, mentions learning culture, but students express religious culture, cultural norms, and values. The students could not express the appropriate theme required for the question. I got the answers that deviated from the core of the questions in the subject matter.*

In the above quotation, the respective examinee was not understanding the question and responded accordingly. This might be the cause of my not understanding the question. To overcome this

condition, the question needs to be constructed in both scripts Nepali and English. If it is not possible, the questions need to be translated into Nepali in the exam hall. Examiners anticipate the main idea of questions in the first section, supporting details in the body section, and a conclusion that includes the main essence and critical reflection. Similarly, starting an answer at the top of the page and leaving a minimum one-inch margin on all sides is also important while framing an answer in an examination. The main theme of the study and its profound discussion covers the essence of attributes needed for the examinee for his better performance. The existing scenario is impacting the quality of education regretting the mainstream education system and hence obstructs to development of the nation.

## **Conclusion**

Actually, administering tests is to measure the capabilities of students in whatever they learn in the classroom within the curricular framework. The achievements of students represent the assumption that whether the objective is fulfilled or not. The tendency to achieve general objectives is degraded from the student's capacity in the absence of proper practice. The examinees are expressing their views beyond the content areas, and they are expressing themselves just like receiving a certificate without knowledge. Time management, expression of relevant answers, structuring of answers, and managing technical aspects are basic requirements for the exam. In the experience of participants, the fundamental assumptions that the examinee needs to adopt are lacking. Likewise, attempting the entire question without content is not a major thing but rather than an appropriate answer. Presenting such a type of answer is threatening to the instruction provided by the teacher. How is the knowledge level of students declining and it is a big question whether the curriculum is becoming outdated for the next generation? The pedagogical transformation is highly valued for the existing content, and students and teachers must keep up with technology.

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