

An Exploratory Study on Problems Faced by Students during Board Examination

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Abstract

The study was designed to explore the problems of students during board examination regarding physical environment, management and conduction of exams, technical errors of boards and the solution of these problems. The sample of the study was 10 students from Intermediate program of education including F.A, F.Sc, I.Com and I.C.S. An interview protocol was used as research instrument and survey method was adopted for data collection. The findings of the study show that there are some certain and genuine problems faced by students during exams which create tension and mental agony among students and affect their academic progress. Students feel dishearten and discomforted due to poor physical environment, management and conduction of exams and technical errors. Most of the participants found these problems very challenging and tough during exams but they gave some suggestion to overcome and to find permanent solution of these problems, for example, comfortable environment, behavior of examination staff, active role of complaint ells and cooperative attitude of examination boards.

Keywords: Problem, students, examination, examination board

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Introduction

Effective examination system is the key to quality education throughout the world. Standard examination or board examinations are the part of education process in many countries throughout the world. These examinations are considered to play significant part in determining how and what learning and teaching process continue in the classroom (Assessment Reform Group, 1999; Mirza, 1999). To support the learning and teaching process is the main purpose of conducting exams (Gipps, 1994), but according to Rehmani (2000a) deep learning of students can be impeded through some form of assessment.

Students in Pakistan are physically and emotionally pressurized by the authoritarian attitude of their parents, elders and students and due to social and cultural norms. Children are supposed to sit passively and are compelled to follow the teachers and parents blindly to be obedient that is the cause of less confidence. School makes the students over burdened by assigning them heavy home work without understanding of content knowledge and this situation leads them to find some tuition centers to get good marks in board examination. In Pakistan, students are facing teacher- centered or curriculum based learning. That is the reason for students' rote learning to get better marks and grades in examination and so they fail to attempt understanding of content and comprehension base questions. Sometimes suggested text book for a certain grade has higher level of ideas that don't match with the students' cognitive skill and absence of no other choice for them compels to rote learn (Government of Pakistan, 1994; Farooq, 1996; National Education Policy, 1992).

In Pakistan, Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education conduct external exam to assess the students at IX and X grades which is known as SSCE (Secondary School Certificate Exams) and at XI and XII grade which is known as HSCE (Higher Secondary Certificate Exams). The students throughout Pakistan take these exams in spite of the fact that they belong to public, private and any other type of schools. But some elite schools follow the Cambridge system of exams conducted by Cambridge International Examination for Ordinary Level (O' Level) and Advanced Level (A' Level). Both systems are different in terms of disciplines, syllabus, teaching style, exam system, type of papers, validity and reliability of papers (Naqvi, 2002).

Examinations conducted by Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education have the purpose to select, promote and certify the students. The purpose of these examinations for students at school level is just to pass the examination and bring school name on surface. Some schools and students have a strong desire to pass these exams with good marks by hook or by crook. Commonly teachers are rewarded according to the achievement level of students. Gipps (1996) pointed out that these purpose of assessment are more superficial and it is need to make exams more objective and reliable.

According to Ahmed and Malik (2011) and Rehmani (2003), education system and examination system are interrelated. If one aspect is collapsed the other will automatically fall down. The function and purpose of examination is closely related to the learning and teaching process and to achieve the objectives of education at different level. There are presented some aspects which is influenced the quality of the other aspects like quality of text books, outdated and over loaded curriculum, teachers' competency of teaching, increase in enrolment, inadequate educational facilities, examination policies, examining bodies, nature of used text in examination, internal examination, external examination, different types of influences, malpractices, question paper setting, supervision, problems during examination, management and conduction of examinations, major role of teacher in evaluation and examination and teacher preparation and research programs.

Ramsden (1992) stated that understanding is promoted by learning and examinations are to measure the students' learning through understanding and misunderstanding hnders the effective learning. Real learning is occurred when it promotes students' understanding towards subject taught and when it makes the students to ready to interpret and to apply the learned knowledge in different situation than the learning situation (Harlen & James, 1997).

In Pakistan the summative assessment is the part of examination system which has the aim to cover the whole curriculum rather than to assess their level of understanding for achievements. It only assesses the knowledge of the students which may be based on root learning rather than to assess the students' application level, analytical skill and critical thinking. And on the other hand teachers are taught students not for the sake of learning but just to gain good marks in test or exams. The literature presents some serious issues of examination system regarding invigilation, paper setting, dissemination of results, curriculum coverage related to validity and reliability, paper setters' training, guideline for examiners, paper marking and result preparation (Greaney& Hassan as cited in Hoodbhoy, 1998; Mirza, 1999).

Change and improvement in examination is not possible in isolation. Examination issues and problems are interlinked with the system of education. A real change and improve in examination system may be only by changing and improving the overall education system. If the quality of teaching is not so good, the result of assessing the success of learning and teaching process cannot be good. To improve the quality of education, educational and professional qualification and teaching staff's morale and integrity must be improved. In addition the quality of curriculum text books, class room facilities, the whole system of paper taking, paper setting, paper marking and conduction of exams need to be improved as a whole process (Rehmani, 2003).

Statement of the Problem

The role of examination in students' life has great impact in their academic life and in future for professional life. Without conducting examination the student's progress at particular level cannot be determined and the goal of developing quality in education cannot be achieved. That is why it is a need to explore the perceptions of the students to explore the problems during their board exams on which bases decisions are made about their progress. The focus of this research would be to explore the problems faced by students during board examination.

Research Questions

1. What problems do the students perceive during board examination regarding physical environment?
2. What problems do the students perceive during board examination regarding management and conduction of exams?
3. What problems do the students perceive during board examination regarding technical errors of boards?
4. What solutions do the students suggest for these problems?

Research Methodology

This study was qualitative in nature and was a descriptive research. Population for this study was all the students of Intermediate program of education including F.A, F.Sc, I.Com and I.C.S. The sample consisted of 10 students selected by using convenient sampling technique due to limited time. Interview protocol was used as a research instrument and survey method was adopted for data collection. Interviewees' consent was taken before conducting the interview. The researchers

discussed the instrument with relevant experts to validate it. After discussion with experts irrelevant questions were discarded, after that research instrument was finalized. Two interviews were conducted for piloting of this study in Distt. Sahiwal.

Findings

Question 1

How do the students perceive the problems during board examination regarding physical environment?

The analysis of the collected data for research question 1 led to the five themes which are listed below and graphically presented in figure 1.

1. Electricity problem
2. Lack of clean water
3. Insufficient furniture
4. Improper light
5. Overcrowded rooms.

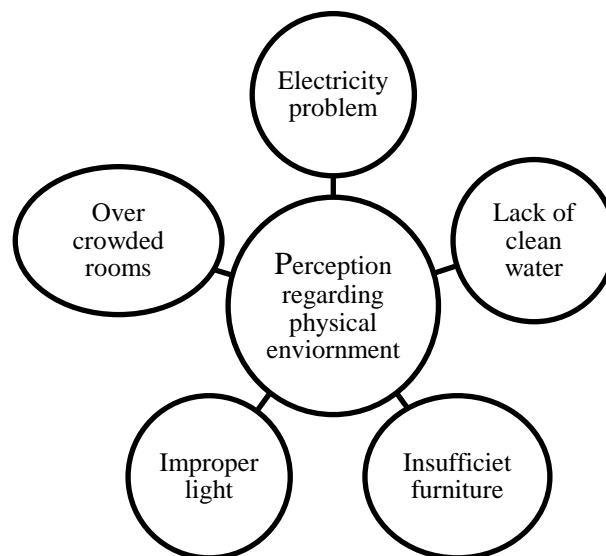


Figure 1 Perception regarding Physical Environment

Electricity Problem

Eight out of ten participants were of the opinion that they suffered a lot in examination centers due to electricity problem. They felt uneasy and exhaust when suddenly light broke down. They lost their concentration while taking exams especially in hot season. One of the participants said, *“Examinations are conducted in summer season mostly when load shedding is on peak.”* Another participant was of the opinion that, *“Load shedding is a big issue in Pakistan. During exams students can’t get fruit of their whole year efforts which causes bad results. Some students became faint due to electricity problem in hot weather”.*

Lack of Clean Water

Seven out of ten of the participants stated that filthy water is given during examination. There is no clean water and hygienic utensils that causes physical infections in students. One of the female participant remarked, *“There is no water to drink. We got hot water in summer season if available fortunately.”* While a male participant disappointedly said, *“Servants misbehaved with students when they demand cold and clean water.”*

Insufficient Furniture

Five out of ten interviewees said that furniture is insufficient to fulfill the needs of the candidates. Sometimes broken furniture is arranged for the students which cause restlessness and mental agony among students. One of the participants was of the view, *“Examination centers are not fully equipped with proper furniture. Mostly chairs are armless and are full of dust.”* But one of them had different views, *“Furniture is almost in better condition but chairs are not properly arranged.”*

Improper Light

All the participants had opinion that almost all the rooms had improper lighting system. This situation causes difficulty among students to solve the paper in time. For example, one of the female interviewee said *“due to improper light, students face difficulty during papers especially those students who are with low eyesight.”* However, another female interviewee remarked *“mostly exams are conducted in rooms which have no proper light and darkness disturbs us because most of the lights are dysfunctional.”*

Overcrowded Rooms

Eight out of ten participants were of the opinion that rooms size is not according to the students' strength. Overcrowded rooms create a lot of noise that's why students' attention divert and unable to solve paper with concentration. Thus examination one of the interviewee remarked, "*Examination rooms are congested and overcrowded and unable to accommodate the students in proper way.*" And another interviewee expressed his feelings with sad face, "*Due to overcrowded rooms cheating is very common among students.*"

Question 2

How do the students perceive the problems during board examination regarding management and conduction of exams?

Six themes were emerged from the collected data. These themes are mentioned below and graphical representation is given in figure 2.

1. Invigilation issues
2. Interruption during exams
3. Non-cooperation of board authorities
4. Delivery of question paper
5. Improper sitting plan
6. Paper leak out.

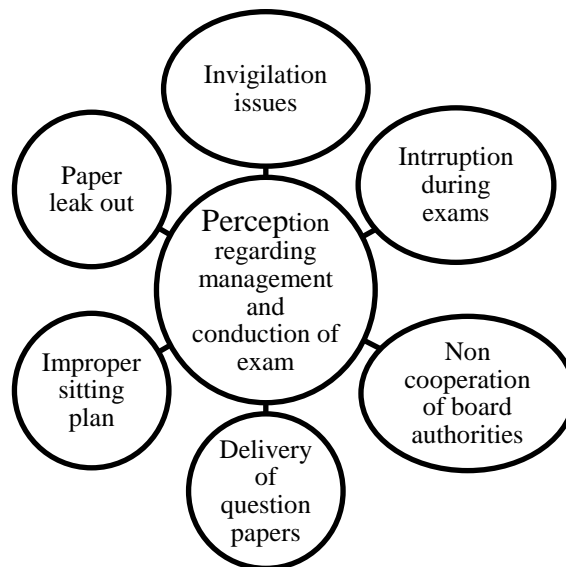


Figure 2 Perception regarding Management and Conduction of Exams

Invigilation Issues

Eight out of ten participants were of the opinion that invigilators' behavior is very strict. Invigilators scolded them when they asked something. One of the participants said, "*Students are mentally disturbed when invigilators tease them without any reason just to avoid their own shortcomings.*" However one of the male participants said, "*Our invigilator was so nice and behaved well with students but he was very strict to control the students.*"

Interruption during Exams

All the participants were of the opinion that irrelevant interruption during exams in examination room creates a lot of problems for them. They were not able to solve paper in time due to the interruption of the invigilators, students and other management.

One of the interviewees said, "*At the end of the paper, we felt uneasy due to the interruption of the invigilator shouted about the timing of the paper.*" However another female expressed her problem, "*We could not complete the paper because of the interruption when teacher announced different instructions again and again.*"

Non Cooperation of Board Authorities

Three out of ten participants stated that they faced problems due to the non-cooperative behavior of the board authorities. Students suffered a lot because of their non-cooperation.

One of them remarked, "*I suffered a lot because of the non-cooperative behavior of the board authorities when I called them to solve my problem regarding admission.*" While another student remarked, "*Board authorities cooperate me when I went for rechecking of paper.*"

Delivery of Question Papers

Six out of ten participants responded that sometimes question papers are delivered very late to the students and students are unable to complete the paper in time in this situation. One of them remarked, "*Sometimes question papers are delivered very late to the students and ask them to solve paper in great hurry which leads them to the bad grades or failure.*"

Improper Sitting Plan

Five out of ten participants responded that due to improper sitting plan students feel discomforts during exams. One of the participant said, *“In spite of being seated according to the roll numbers, we faced so many problems, sometimes just before the starting time, students are asked to wait outside because chairs are not arrange according to the plan.”* While another remarked, *“Some students are seated near and some are on distance which creates chaotic condition.”*

Paper Leak out

Four out of ten participants were worried about the leakage of paper because it spoils the efforts of hard working students. One of them responded with worry, *“Paper leak out is a great cause to create conflict among students and put bad effects on students’ morale. Hard working students have to take this paper also.”*

Question 3

How do the students perceive the problems during board examination regarding technical errors?

After analysis of data three themes are emerged which are given below and presented in figure 3.

1. Issuance of roll number slip
2. Online admissions
3. Printing mistakes.

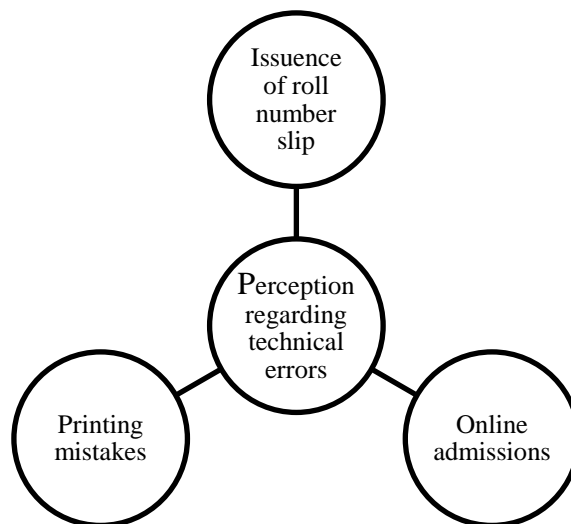


Figure 3 Perception regarding technical errors

Issuance of Roll Number Slips

Nine out of ten interviewees were of the opinion that there are numbers of problems faced by students about the issuance of roll number slip. Sometimes roll number slip information is not according to the provided data which creates tension among students when students are not allowed to take paper along with wrong information given on roll number slip. One of them responded, *“Errors in students’ name mostly occurred on roll number slips. Date and subject order is also not proper.”* However another participant as of the opinion, *“Roll number slip is not issued to the student sometime.”*

Online Admissions

Four out of ten participants said that they faced problems when they submit their online admission form because access of internet is not available in especially remote areas. They had to travel to submit online forms. One of the interviewees shared her worry, *“Submission of online admission is a big issue for students. Sometimes electricity broke down and sometimes internet connection was poor.”*

Printing Mistakes

One of the participants stated, *“Printing mistakes creates problems for students because during examination this type of mistakes rarely removed in time and students have no time to waste in correcting them.”* While another responded, *“Sometime examination board pastes the picture of another student.”*

Question 4

What solutions do the students suggest for these problems?

There are four themes emerged from the data which are given below in list and figure 4.

1. Comfortable environment
2. Behavior of allocated examination staff
3. Active role of complaint cells
4. Cooperative attitude of examining body

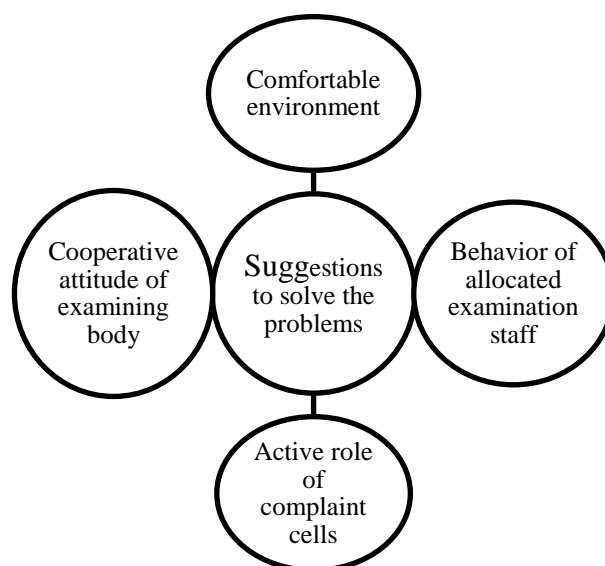


Figure 4 Suggestions to solve the problems

Comfortable Environment

All the ten interviewee had the opinion that comfortable environment should be compulsory to solve the students problems during exams. So that they can perform well and get good grades. One of the participant proposed, *“There should be proper arrangement of light, electricity and clean water.”*

Behavior of Allocated Examination Staff

Five out of ten participants of this study were of the opinion that behavior of examination staff matters a lot in students’ better performance. One of them suggested vigorously, *“Invigilator should announce basic information and instructions in polite manner.”*

Active Role of Complaint Cells

Four out of ten participants responded that to give comfort to students during examination and to cope all urgent problems faced by students there is a need of an active role of complaint cells in examination board. One of the participant stated, *“It is a need of time to make active role of complaint cells in board to avoid inconvenience in conducting and taking exams.”*

Cooperative Attitude of Examining Body

Seven out of ten participants responded that to solve all these problems faced by students can be compensated through cooperative attitude of examining body. One of the interviewees proposed, *“Authorities of examination board should be cooperative with the students especially with those who are suffered with some difficulty and problem during exams.”*

Discussion

Strong examination system is the significant part of the quality education of any country. When examination system fails to fulfill its purpose it affects the quality education. The purpose of examination is the accountability, promotion and to enhance the learning of students and teaching process. Examination is not the name of burden for students but it is meant for effective learning. Students need comfortable physical environment, systematic conduction and management of exams and free from technical errors during board examination. This study is related to the problems of students during board examination. Students disclosed some problems and deficiencies which are faced by them during their board exams (Amaele, 2013).

Saleem (2012) and Saddiqi (2012) reported in view of their studies that responses from students indicated that they were facing some sort of problems during their examination period inspite of the fact that examination boards are providing well organized examination structure on their own part. Similar findings have been investigated in the current study wherein the students have reported poor physical environment including electricity problem, lack of clean water, insufficient furniture, improper light, distance of examination center and overcrowded rooms. Pakistani examination system is not up to the standards and still inappropriate. Availability of proper furniture, load shedding and unhealthy environment is a great challenge for students in taking exams.

Students were of the opinion that they are not satisfy with the conduction of exams. There are so many problems regarding invigilation, process of taking exams, non-cooperative behavior of authorities and paper leakage. They feel discomfort and dishearten due to these common practices. To take up the students' morale high there should be a change in this system.

Students also worried about the technical errors of examination boards like problem in issuance of roll number slip, online admissions and printing mistakes. Sometimes students have no other way in spite of wasting their whole academic year due to the negligence of examination boards. Recently Govt. took notice about these mal practices and made an attempt to create uniformity among examination boards. Govt. established Provincial Assessment Centers in this regard (Greaney& Hassan, 1998; Mirza, 1999).

It is suggested by the students that they should be provided comfortable environment, active role of complaint cells, cooperative attitude of examination staff and examining body. Because examination boards not only play an important role to ensure the quality education but also its effective role is concerned for the good performance of students. It is the need

Pakistani current examination system needs to be changed under drastic reforms. Due to problems in our examination system, schools and parents want get outstanding performance and results from students. Under this pressure, students become more tense along with the problems that are to face during exams (Rehmani, 2003).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Examinations are very important to assess the students' ability for the promotion in the next grade. The findings of the study show that there are some certain and genuine problems faced by students during exams which create tension and mental agony among students and affect their academic progress. Students feel dishearten and discomforted due to poor physical environment, management and conduction of exams and technical errors. Examinations boards must realize the sensitivity of this pity issues to keep the students morale high and to promote the quality education among students. The students demand comfort and ease regarding easy to access and up to date examination system during their examination. Most importantly, on the part of the examination board to provide the solution to the students' problems regarding exams not only matter to enhance the quality education but it makes the students' performance better. Most of the participants found these problems very challenging and tough during exams but they gave some suggestion to overcome and to find permanent solution of these problems for example comfortable environment, behavior of examination staff, active role of complaint ells and cooperative attitude of examination boards. If examination boards change their ways to conduct the exam surely it will enhance the quality of education and learning of students.

After data analysis and drawing a conclusion from the findings following recommendations may be given to address the problems:

1. Students may be provided proper light, clean water, proper power supply and sufficient furniture and rooms to perform well.
2. Management and conduction of examination may be supportive for students during exams through proper orientation of the senior BISE staff engaged in examination.
3. Intensive training may be given to the invigilation staff to avoid the inconvenience for students in examination centers. They should be briefed about all the guidelines they need to observe and the instructions of the students which they need to follow while attempting the papers.
4. Vigilant and more IT skilled staff may be hired by the Examination boards to avoid the technical errors.
5. Future researchers may work on this issue on broader level.

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