

A CRITICAL REVIEW OF NAGALAND UNIVERSITY **UNDERGRADUATE EXAMINATION SYSTEM**

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Abstract

Educational institutions rely on examinations for assessment of their students and the quality of the examination outcome directly reflects upon the success or otherwise of its values and practices. This paper, within that broad principle, is a study of the efficacy of the undergraduate examination and evaluation system currently followed in Nagaland University. The introduction of the semester system in 2012 in Nagaland University has led to a marked improvement in the overall passed percentage as well as the percentage score of graduates and course toppers when compared with that of the annual system which was previously followed. The question however remains as to whether the upward trend in the result is truly a reflection of progress in the quality of education transaction under the semester system or whether it is merely the product of certain lacunae within the semester examination system which has led to the lowering of the evaluation standard thereby resulting in the result improvement. To understand this issue the paper has critically scrutinized the evaluation process laid down in the Nagaland University Undergraduate Semester Guidelines and outlined the difficulties relating to its implementation. The paper has also attempted to suggest reform measures and practices which can help check and maintain quality within the system. The objective of this study is to aid the evolution of a sound examination system which can be employed to bring about qualitative improvement in higher education.

Keywords:

Assessment,
Quality,
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INTRODUCTION

Assessment of performance is a crucial component in any process of learning and teaching. Examination and evaluation are an integral part of the formal education process in India and as part of sound educational strategy, examinations are used as a means to measure the quality of the teaching-learning output and practice (NPE, 1986). The knowledge base, comprehension ability, language skills, personal progress, strengths and weaknesses of students are evaluated through the means of examination conducted from time to time. Of course, it is true that one can legitimately argue that exam scores alone may not correctly reflect the entire picture of the quality of the student and the teaching-learning process. This counter argument is stressed by the fact that the examination pattern in the country generally encourages and rewards rote learning and memorization. It does not take into account the overall development of a person's life but merely focuses on recollection and reproduction of information, facts and figures. The present education system is also such that teachers, instead of assisting learning, spend most of their time assessing learning. Instead of enabling and equipping students to learn, colleges and other institutions have taken on the function of examining and screening out on the basis of those examinations. Despite the many criticisms against the present system of educational examination in India it must be accepted that examination as a practice cannot be done away with until and unless there is a viable alternative to it. Till such time educational institutions must reform and improve their examination system so as to holistically and exactly assess the growth and development of the students and to enhance the impact of its educational processes.

In this background this paper is an effort to study the Nagaland University under graduate semester examination system with the purpose of understanding its effectiveness and dependability as a tool in assessing the quality of higher education in Colleges of Nagaland. A comparison between the results of the UG annual system and the UG semester system which was introduced in 2012 shows a substantial increase in the percentage score of graduates and the course toppers. For instance, in the annual system the percentage score of course toppers was generally between 55-65% whereas in the current semester system it is usually between 75-85%. The statistics also shows an increase in the pass percentage of the students in the semester system as compared to the annual system (N.U Result Gazette). All such result outcomes could be considered to be very positive indicators if they are the consequence of an improvement in the

quality of learning and education in the colleges because of the introduction of the semester system. However it is also possible that such results are mere statistical improvements which have come about because of certain weak and defective examination and evaluation practices in the semester system. And if the latter happens to be the case then the University under graduate results cannot be taken to be genuine indicators of the quality of educational transaction happening in the colleges.

RESEARCH METHOD

The methodology adopted in this research paper is both quantitative and qualitative in nature. It is quantitative in its approach in the analysis of result statistics and the performance of higher educational institutions affiliated to Nagaland University. It is qualitative in the sense that the findings, inferences, conclusions and suggestive measures given are generally grounded on the understanding of the Nagaland University undergraduate examination system through direct observation of the system and through communication with participants and stakeholders within the system.

UNDERGRADUATE EXAMINATION SYSTEM IN NAGALAND UNIVERSITY

Introduction of the Semester System in Indian Universities has become a National Policy. The UGC has made it mandatory for all institutions of higher learning and affiliated colleges in the country. To fulfill this requirement, Nagaland University introduced the Semester System in the Undergraduate level in all the affiliated colleges from the 2012 academic session in a phased manner. The Guidelines regarding was approved by the Academic Council in its 14th Meeting held on 21st March 2012. The objective of introducing the system is stated as follows, “The entire course curriculum and syllabi have been designed by the respective BUGS keeping in view the needs of the present generation. It is a learner friendly programme suitable to meet the needs of students in a competitive world. Therefore, it is expected that this will create a better teaching-learning spirit in the institutions of Higher Education for which both teachers and students will have to work more seriously” (N.U Guidelines, 2012). Under this system the three years UG programme is divided into six semesters of 6 months duration each. In the given period admission, course work, conduct of examinations and declaration of results is to be completed. For honours course students have to complete 32 paper carrying 100 marks each and for Pass (General) course students have to complete 24 papers carrying 100 marks each.

The Guidelines lays down in detail the process, rules and regulations of the examination and evaluation system, the relevant portion of which is paraphrased as given below:

1. **Conduct of Examinations:** All examinations of Semesters I, II, III & V, both Internal and Semester End will be conducted by the respective Colleges and only the Semester End Exam of the IV & VI Semesters shall be conducted by the University. Evaluation of answer scripts (both Internal Assessment and Semester End Exam) of Semesters I, II, III & IV along with the Internal Assessment of IV and VI Semesters shall be done internally in the respective colleges.
2. **Student Assessment and Progression:** The performance of a student will be evaluated on 30:70 basis (30 marks for Internal Assessment and 70 marks for Semester End Examination). A student should secure a minimum of 45% marks in the Internal Assessment and 45% marks in the Semester End Examinations.
3. **Internal Assessment:** In the Internal Assessment a learner will be assessed for 30 marks in the following categories of activities such as Class Tests, Assignments, Seminars, Case Studies, Quizzes, Open Book Tests, Projects, Tutorials, Debates, Group Discussions and Art of Public Speech. A College must select a minimum of three activities for Internal Assessment out of the above mentioned items. These exercises should be completed before the conduct of the Semester End Examination.
4. **Qualification to appear Semester End Exam:** A student will be deemed qualified to appear in the Semester End Examination only when he/she secures minimum marks in the Internal Assessment and maintains 80% attendance in the class in every subject. 5% relaxation of the attendance may be considered by the respective College authority in cases with genuine reasons.
5. **Semester End Exam Evaluation:** The College Principals will submit a list of the Panel of Answer Script Evaluators to the University. After the examination of a particular subject, the respective College Principals shall distribute the answer scripts to the respective evaluators as approved by the University within 48 hours. Evaluation of answer scripts must be completed within 10-15 days at the College level after the conduct of a particular paper and each evaluator must submit the result sheet within the stipulated period to the respective Principal for tabulation of marks at College level and for onward submission to the University on time. Thereafter, the

respective Colleges must submit the detailed Result Sheet to the COE within 20 days after the last date of Examination for declaration of Results by the University subject to Moderation by a Special Committee appointed by the VC.

6. Review of Marking System by the University: Every College Principal must submit to the COE, three numbers of sample answer scripts from three different ranges, namely, lowest range (below 44.99% 'F' Grade), middle range (55-59.99% 'C' Grade) and highest range (above 80% 'O' Grade) for each of the papers along with the detailed Result Sheet within 20 days for verification by the Special Committee. The Committee shall examine/review each of the sample papers, compare the standard of Marking System followed at the College level, take an overview of the entire Marking System, check reasonability of Marks given by the Evaluators, send back or re-call for re-evaluation, recommend or withhold the declaration of results of a College or a particular paper till rectification by the College authority. Thereafter, the University shall announce the results once for all or college-wise. The Committee should complete its job within one week.

7. Inspection of Examinations: Every Principal shall constitute an Examination Inspection Team for every Semester End Exam within the College level consisting of 3-5 member including one person from the College Governing Board/Government official or both and officers and teachers of the College. Every Principal should submit a copy of the formation of this Committee to the VC and COE. The Convener of the Examination Inspection Team (EIT) shall submit a detailed report of the conduct of Examinations through the Principal on the last day of the examination to the VC and COE. The NU shall also deploy Flying Squad Teams to the Exam Centres from time to time during the Examination to check the fair conduct of Examination. Reports of the NU Flying Squad shall be dealt seriously on the matter of Examinations. Disciplinary action shall be imposed on any of the affiliated Colleges under NU for negligence on the matters of examination and for non-fulfillment of the prescribed academic standards.

PROBLEMS AND GAPS IN THE SYSTEM

A careful perusal of the N.U UG Examination and Evaluation system raises the following pertinent issues:

1. With the introduction of the semester system in the undergraduate level, Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) has been introduced in the college level. This is a good system because it provides the opportunity to assess the performance of students during the course of the entire academic session (NPERC, 1990). This system, however as practiced in Nagaland University is unbalanced because the major share of Evaluation responsibility is given to the affiliated Colleges. The Colleges are given the task to assess their own students using the internal assessment parameters in all semesters and by internal evaluation of semester-end exam answer scripts of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd & 5th semesters. Under this system more than 75% of the total credit points/marks of a student's course are evaluated in the College in which the student is enrolled. The major share of authority given to the colleges to evaluate internally the performance for their students has vested the institutions with too much power to influence the attainment of university course topper positions and better pass percentage. This has created a sense of unhealthy competition among the affiliated institutions leading to the temptation and compulsion of allotting high marks to its students often not commensurate to the quality of their performance. The necessity of going through NAAC assessment and securing better accreditation grade through the means of better academic results has also compounded this situation. There is therefore the need to have a proper balance between internal and external evaluation.

2. The existing evaluation system has also generated widespread and deep disparity in the Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) scored by students of different Colleges. The perusal of N.U results from 2015-18 clearly highlights the fact that some Colleges have consistently produced high CGPA scores (6.5+) whereas some (respectable) Colleges have failed to produced even a single score of 6 CGPA (7 point scale). The reason for such CGPA difference is primarily because of the un-uniform quality assessment yardstick used by the teachers of different Colleges to measure the performance of their students. For instance, in College A, a teacher may give 10 out of 10 for an answer of 'outstanding' grade whereas in College B a teacher may give only 8 out of 10 for an answer of equal quality. This variation in measurement of quality generally explains how students of same quality can end up with vastly different CGPA. The only way out of this evaluation paradox is to develop and use a standard quality evaluation scale in all affiliated colleges. The University however has not been able to come up with such a scale.

3. Another matter of concern is the inability of the University to keep proper check on the affiliated institutions regarding adherence to the semester exam guidelines. For instance, the attendance requirement for appearing semester end exam and employment of at least three activities for internal assessment are matters which must be strictly implemented so as to inculcate discipline and ensure holistic education development in the students as envisioned in the guidelines. But the adherence to such regulations is hardly monitored by the University authority thereby creating the impression that institutions can do as they deem fit.

4. Even though the University guidelines clearly mentions the process of 'review of marking system' submitted by the affiliated colleges, the actual implementation of the prescribed procedure is not up to the standard. More often than not the tabulation sheets and results prepared by the colleges are accepted as final without proper vetting.

5. The 'inspection of examination' measures mentioned in the guidelines are also conspicuous by their non-implementation on the ground. The constitution and function of Examination Inspection Team and Flying Squad Team is crucial to check and ensure the fair conduct of Examination in the centres.

SUGGESTIVE MEASURES TO ENHANCE SYSTEM QUALITY

1. All Semester End Examinations (SEE) must be Externally Evaluated: As in the case of the 4th & 6th Semesters, the other four semester end exams must also be externally evaluated through the centralized script distribution system followed by the N.U exam branch. However, if it is difficult for the N.U exam branch to handle the logistics of such a change then the colleges themselves can be allowed to engage teachers from other colleges to evaluate the semester end exam papers. The selection process and appointment of such evaluators must be documented and submitted to the University for scrutiny. The evaluators on completion of the work may deposit the evaluated scripts in the college along with the mark list. A duplicate copy of the mark list in a sealed envelope must also be submitted in the college for onward submission to the University by the college concerned. Introducing such an evaluation system with balanced internal and external evaluation emphasis will help check assessment quality, ensure fairness and transparency, and mitigate the chance and occurrence of any undue practices.

2. Common Evaluation Standard and Principle is a necessity: Each University is required to prepare broad guidelines for grading and evaluation to be followed by individual colleges/institutions and departments under its jurisdiction (NPE, 1986). There is the need in N.U for such an Evaluation Framework which can serve as a set of guidelines for the examiners albeit with the freedom to innovate and adapt the framework to suit the specific situations. The standards are relevant both for semester end examinations and evaluations conducted internally in educational institutions. A uniform evaluation standard will help determine a balanced and fair assessment of each student and ensure that the quality, calibre and erudition of the students are truly reflected in the marks allotted. The problem of disparity in assessment standard between the colleges affiliated to the university will be greatly solved if such a uniform evaluation standard to determine quality can be framed.

3. Framing of Evaluation Benchmark: For MCQ/Objective type question evaluation, the key answer methodology as followed by the University is the best benchmark. For evaluation of Internal Assessment activities and Short Notes & Descriptive Questions of Semester-End Examination, evaluators can be given a quality-marks rubric to grade the answer/paper/performance and convert the quality meaning (grade) into marks. A prototype of such a rubric is given below:

Table 1: Quality-Marks Rubric

SL. NO.	QUALITATIVE MEANING/ GRADE	PERCENTILE	Marks to be Allotted (approximations)			
			Total-5	Total-10	Total-14	Total-15
1.	Outstanding	91-100%	5	10	14	15
2.	Excellent	81-90%	4.5	9	12.6	13.5
3.	Very Good	71-80%	4	8	11.2	12
4.	Good	61-70%	3.5	7	9.8	10.5
5.	Above Average	51-60%	3	6	8.4	9
6.	Average	46-50%	2.5	5	7	7.5
7.	Marginal	45%	2.3	4.5	6.3	6.8
8.	Poor/Failed	≤ 44%	≤ 2.2	≤ 4.4	≤ 6.2	≤ 6.7
9.	Absent	0	0	0	0	0

4. Framing of Grading/Marking Principles: It is important for the evaluators to be fair, reasonable and consistent in assessing the answer standard. To be so, the evaluators must follow a common evaluation criteria methodology. Given below (Table 2) is a rubric which contains three evaluation criteria. This rubric makes clear the grading/marking process by highlighting what key elements are expected in a good piece of written/spoken work. The criteria points are to be used to determine the overall quality of the answer/work (CSU, 2019).

Table 2: Evaluation Criteria Rubric

CONTENT	THINKING	PRESENTATION/ ORGANIZATION
1. Information and evidence are accurate, appropriate and integrated effectively. 2. Claims and ideas are supported and elaborated. 3. Alternative perspectives are carefully considered and represented. 4. Responds to all aspects of the question/assignment.	1. Connections between and among ideas are made. 2. Analysis, synthesis, evaluation and interpretation are effective and consistent. 3. Independent thinking is evident. 4. Creativity/Originality is evident.	1. The purpose and focus are clear and consistent. 2. The main claim is clear and significant. 3. Organization is effective, purposeful and appropriate. 4. Sentence form and grammar are acceptable.

5. Adoption of Model-Answer Methodology: As a corollary to points 3 & 4 discussed above, it is important to note that evaluation of descriptive answers following the model-answer methodology makes the assessment process more transparent and explicit for a teacher. A model answer indicates the elements a teacher should focus on during the assessment. This allows the teacher to assess as accurately and objectively as possible. Based on these response elements, the teacher concludes which students' answers get which grades (Van Berkel et al, 2014). A model

answer is intended as a guideline for the assessor. Based on the students' responses one can, if necessary, refine or modify the model answer.

6. **Scrutiny of Internal Assessment:** The implementation of the Internal Assessment System in the colleges must be verified and checked from time to time to ensure that the University guidelines regarding are strictly followed. A functioning system of checks will remove the wide spread apprehensions about the credibility of the internal evaluation process.

7. **Monitoring of Attendance Record:** Attendance assessment as laid down in the University guidelines must be strictly implemented in all affiliated institutions and semester attendance record of the students must be kept properly for scrutiny. The presence of students in the classroom is absolutely necessary for their holistic learning growth and essential in the process of cultivating ethical and responsible behavior.

8. **Conduct of Orientation Programme:** The University must organize Orientation Programme from time to time to brief, sensitize and train Teachers and Principals about examination management, evaluation guidelines, examination reforms and innovations, standards of continuous comprehensive evaluation, setting of question papers etc. Such good practice will not only familiarize the stakeholders with the examination system but also create good working rapport between the University and affiliated colleges.

9. **Implementation of Quality Check System:** The quality monitoring measures, stated in the University guidelines, such as 'review of marking system' and 'inspection of examination' must be implemented and practiced in the letter and spirit of the N.U guidelines.

CONCLUSION

The Nagaland University Undergraduate Semester System through the introduction of the Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) has made evaluation an integral part in the process of creating better teaching-learning spirit in the institutions of Higher Education (N.U Guidelines). And so to ensure that the expected levels of attainments in terms of knowledge, comprehension, communication skills, understanding, application, analysis, synthesis, judgments

etc. is accomplished the system must continue to innovate and change for better. Examination reform is an important component in this endeavor. Examination along with teaching and learning constitute the trinity of functions in the educational process (CABE, 1991). High marks alone make no sense without corresponding quality of education evident in the life of the graduates. The examination and evaluation system as an instrument of good education therefore must be built and reformed to truly assess the quality of the students as well as the efficacy of the educational process with the objective of improving the whole framework of educational transaction. Only an uncompromising emphasis on quality in higher education will ensure the successful progression and mobility of the students across the country and elsewhere.

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