Incongruence in Scoring Practices of Answer Scripts and Their Implications: Need For Urgent Examination Reforms in Secondary Pre-Service Teacher Education

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Introduction

Higher education in India is in a phase of tremendous growth and change. The country faces the challenge of accommodating the aspirations of the youth in educational and employment sectors. There is great demand for employment and profession oriented programmes. With the peak of opportunities for graduates from higher education institutions for employment being already attained, the quality is slowly becoming a buzz word among academicians. This quest for quality is in turn leading to efforts to enhance student learning by improving curriculum and pedagogy. There remains a critical element that is still missing from the picture – accurate measurement of learning outcomes. There are reports of low quality graduates from technical institutions in Kerala. Surveys suggest that as little as 25% of technical graduates and 10-15% of other graduates are, in fact, employable upon course completion.

The surge in demand for professional education is evidenced to some extent in the teacher education scenario as well especially in Kerala. There was nearly 10 fold increase in the number of secondary teacher education institutions in Kerala within a span of 20 years, with over 200 secondary teacher education institutions in Kerala in 2014. However, teacher education institutions have not yet come under the public scanner of quality as much as other professional education programmes; though the quality concern is evident to all within the system.

A number of challenges in quality of higher education in Kerala were identified by various committees (KSHEC 2011; Hridaya Kumari, 2012). There was recognition that examination reforms are absolutely essential to bring in desired effects of the proposed restructuring of higher education in Kerala. Examination reforms have been one agenda of many of them. There was recognition that the school education system in Kerala has already switched to a creative assessment process and the higher education system needs to follow suit. Challenges in qualitative transformation in exams included shortage of qualified examiners, delays in paper correction, inconsistency in evaluation, Delays in result processing and declaration and Handling re-evaluations (KSHEC 2011, Report on Examination Reforms). Following the report of Kerala higher education council has taken initiative to curricular reforms by attempting the specification of outcomes in its effort to improve teaching and evaluation. Restructuring Undergraduate Education (RUE, 2008) suggested questions which require simple memory recall do not help in assessing the achievement of objectives. The sizeable weight for internal assessment (compared to the norm across the country) was a major step in reforms in assessment. Although internal assessment is welcomed in principle and put into practice, problems of implementation have been encountered.

The external/final written examination remains a dominant component in student assessment. Its weaknesses have been the focus of most examination reform discussion. Continuously improving these formal and high-stakes examinations should be an active concern of academic bodies and university authorities. A number of improvements have been made at various places. While agreeing with the observation of Report on Examination Reforms (KSHEC, 2011) that the examination scheme remains heavily weighted in favor of the summative external examination, the quality of which is one of the biggest problems of our system and that serious attention needs to be given to finding effective mechanisms for implementation in the present setting, the quality of examinations and the evaluation practices in teacher education throws doubt on the efficacy of the proposed reforms. The teacher education is a good sample to assess the efficacy of such reforms in bringing about quality improvement in

higher education reforms for three reasons. One, though evaluation as a meta-discipline is an ill-understood area among teachers in general, teacher-educators and trained teachers fare better in this regard in comparison to teachers from other disciplines, despite this understanding being meager. Secondly, the specification of outcomes, question setting on the basis of blue-print, the principles of assessment are not only well known to the teacher educators, but also practiced in at least in paper in teacher education arena. Third, teacher education is in touch with the school education, which is said to be leading higher education in examination reforms, more than the other fields of higher education. Hence, teacher education will give a sample for analyzing whether stating the objectives, introducing the internal and continuous assessment, and making teachers aware of the evaluation principles will improve the situation. The question being raised by this study is whether the time allotted for scoring the answer scripts of B.Ed. is adequate for teacher educators to do justice to their role as evaluators?

Objectives

This study investigates the congruence among the reading speed of written scripts among teacher educators, time allotted for scoring answer scripts, and the time actually required to score answer scripts. The study investigates the strategy adopted by teacher educators in scoring the stipulated number of scripts within allotted time and reflects on the impact these practices have on the teacher education. Specifically, this paper probe assessment practices among secondary level teacher educators in scoring the B.Ed. semester end examination, the number of words per script in B.Ed semester exams, the reading speed of teacher educators in reading answer scripts, and uses these information to judge on the adequacy of time allotted for evaluating the B.Ed semester exam answer scripts and explore the justifications given by teachers for the same and match/mismatch between question objectives and teacher policy in scoring.

Methodology

Analysis of the answer scripts and question papers, along with structured observation (of the reading speed) and semis-structured interview of evaluators provided the data.

Sampling

The study used 5 randomly chosen answer scripts each of three core courses in B.Ed first semester exam of one university in Kerala, giving weightage to the three levels of quality of the script in terms of marks scored (<50%, between 50 to 60%, and, >60%), and the respective question papers. Fifteen teacher educators, five each per course, with teaching experience ranging from 3 to 18 years, participating in a centralized valuation camp represented the evaluators.

Procedure

The select teacher educators were observed while scoring the scripts in the centralized valuation camp and the time taken for scoring a script by each of them were noted. The number of words per the each of the 15 scripts was counted. One random page from the scripts (but with a complete answer fitting into the page) from the three levels of scripts were Photostatted and was made to read by 5 each evaluators, after informing them of the question. The number of words per the page and time taken to read it were noted. The valuators were asked to mention the score they would assign to the answer and the reason or justification for the same. They were further interviewed on the techniques they employ to score the script.   Question papers were analyzed to find out the question word/ task words used in them.

Results

Table 1. *Length of answer scripts of three core papers of B.Ed programme in terms of page per script and words per scripts*

	Page/script	Average Words /page	Words/ script
Paper 1	22		3696
Paper 2	18	168	3024
Paper 3	14		2352

The average length of answer scripts of B,Ed papers (for two hour examination) ranged from 14 to 22 pages. The average number of words per page of the answer script was 168 words. Thus, the average length of an answer script ranges from 2352 words to 3696 words depending upon the nature of the paper or course.

Table 2. *Congruence among the reading speed, time allotted, and the time required for scoring answer scripts*

Reading speed	Estimated time for scoring the script	Self Reported time (actually taken)	Time allowed/ script
136/minute	17.29 to 27.17 minutes	7.85 minutes	10minutes

The average reading speed of a teacher educator of an answer script is 136 words/ minute. The reading of the full answer script ranges from 2352 words to 3696 words will thus take 17.29 to 27.17 minutes. However, observation of the teacher educators reveals that they complete reading and scoring the script on an average in 7.85 minutes. As they are required to score 35 scripts within 6 hours (from 10 am to 5pm with recess time of one hour for lunch) the time allowed for scoring one answer script is 10 minutes. The allowed time is nearly half the time required if they read the script before scoring. It is another matter that they use even less tile in scoring. Actually the time required for scoring is even higher if one takes into account the tabulation works and summing up works of the scores (see table 3).

Table 3. *Time required other than for reading the script in scoring the answer scripts*

For reading	For entering the scores	Adding the scores and checking	Other tasks
17-27 minutes	1 minute	1 minute	Score sheet preparation Aggregating the scores Estimating the average Translating into grades

Strategies adopted by teacher educators in scoring the stipulated number of scripts

Just scanning the script, "Grading" the script as a whole, "looking" for value points only, scoring the "aptness" of answer, prejudging the level" of answer, neglecting the exact question word and scoring the "topic", Keeping a list of difficult average and easy items and scoring accordingly, Judging the level of performance based on first few answers, recalling the question area than the question word are the reported strategies adopted by the evaluators for scoring the scripts in completing the task within less time than allotted and required. Analysis of the the question papers revealed that they most frequently require the students to explain, describe, distinguish, define, bring about meaning, how and why questions apart from what questions, listing and outlining.

Conclusion

The less than required time allotted for scoring the scripts results in abnormally positively skewed scores, reduced student effort in learning, reduced focus in transacting curriculum, and exam oriented minimal "coaching". The low quality teacher evaluation will produce low quality teachers, impacting both ends of education; school education and education of teacher educators. This may be corrected by systemic reforms Change in question patterns Application of tools of IT Training in Evaluation competency Strengthening "Measurement and Evaluation" courses at B.Ed. and M.Ed. levels. The main challenges lie in the academic component of assessment, not in the machinery for conducting (delivering) examinations.

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