

The Examination System

—Dr. Abdul Haque

Stressing the need to reform the existing system of examinations in the country, Dr. Haque, a noted educationist, puts forward some suggestions which, if implemented, will modernise the system. It is a common feeling among educationists that the present system has outlived its utility.

In the past, many expert bodies gave thought to evolving a system of examination which will be consistent with the genius of our students under the socio-economic conditions prevailing in this country. No doubt some improvements are visible, but we have still a long way to go. When we speak of modernising our system of examination we naturally think of the Secondary School Certificate and the Higher Secondary Certificate Examinations as these are the two examinations in which a very large number of students take part.

Examinations play a dominant role in the national life of the country, as the students who pass the examinations ultimately fill up the offices industries and take part in various nation building works. Worthiness of these persons contributes to our national prestige. Hence the necessity of trustworthy examinations cannot be over-emphasised. It is to be kept in mind that the system of examination which is considered suitable today may not be so a few years later, because socio-economic condition has its effect on the system of examination. With the change of our social and economic conditions, our system of examination may need modifications.

It is needless to mention that a trustworthy examination is one which faithfully reflects the knowledge and skill of the candidates in a given area. Such an examination when repeated, will give the same result, the rank order of the candidates remaining the same and the marks obtained by each will remain more or less the same.

It is a known fact that the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Dhaka, was the pioneer for its work on examination reform. From the year 1965 or earlier this Board had been doing work on the improvement of the system

of examination. At the initial stage this Board conducted several experiments with a view to finding out the effect of copying in the examination halls. In one experiment, two batches of students of secondary schools were asked to sit for examination with identical questions—one batch without books and another with books. The results indicated that the students who consulted books in the examination hall could not show better results in comparison with those who did not consult books. The Ford Foundation came forward with financial assistance for work on examination reform. The then Chairman of the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education, Dhaka and Jessore were sent to the U.S.A. and the UK with financial assistance from the Ford Foundation to meet the specialists in test and measurement of international reputation in those countries and discuss with them the various aspects of the subject. The Chairmen acquainted themselves with the working of the various Examining Boards and Educational Testing Service. They witnessed how test results could be prepared within a short time with modern electronic devices. The Ford Foundation also assisted the Board with press machineries and with the services of an American expert for work on examination reform. The Board appointed specialists. Seminars were held regularly and teachers were given training in batches

on new types of questions. This created tremendous enthusiasm among the teachers. Later on other Boards also took up the programme.

It is well-known that the most important part of an examination is the setting of questions. Questions should be aimed at bringing out samples of knowledge and skill of the students in a given area on the basis of which the over-all achievement of the students in that area is assessed. The samples usually consist of written oral or practical work. If written questions may be essay-type or objective-type. Both the types of questions have their merits and demerits. None of these types of questions can claim over-all superiority. Only an expert paper-setter knows what type of questions will be suitable to unveil a particular aspect of knowledge and skill of the student in a given area. He very well knows where to set extended essay-type, short essay-type or objective-type questions.

Needless to mention that an ideal question is one which is unambiguous, so that the paper-setter examinees and the examiners think in the same way. Above all the question should be reliable. A good examination should cover all aspects of the subject which are deemed important and should not be concentrated only on a part of the syllabus. In a question paper which contains many questions, from which a candidate is asked to answer a few ques-

tions according to his choice it is imperative that all the questions should be of equal standard so that in whatever way the candidate selects the questions his answers cover a wide range of the syllabus. Otherwise by tactfully selecting the questions, the candidate may be able to pass the examination by concentrating only on a part of the syllabus. Such an examination is definitely defective. Many experts believe that no choice of questions should be allowed and all the candidates should run the same race. They say, it is humanly impossible to set all the questions of equal standard on quantitative basis. Moreover, they say by asking the candidates to answer questions by selecting out of many it is not possible to correctly assess the knowledge of the candidates in the subject.

It is known that at present a paper-setter is usually given fifteen days to a month's time to prepare a question paper for such important examinations like the Secondary School Certificate or Higher Secondary Certificate Examination. Many specialists believe that such a short time is not sufficient to prepare a good question-paper. Before setting questions for an examination it is necessary for the paper-setter to properly weigh the questions in order to judge their suitability and trustworthiness for the examination. Sometimes questions require pre-testing to find out the response of the students to the questions. Questions which receive ill response should be avoided as far as practicable.

As a matter of fact the setting of questions is the job of an expert. For such important examinations as the Secondary School Certificate and the Higher Secondary Certificate examinations it will perhaps be proper to entrust the work of framing

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questions to a body of subject specialists instead of an individual. This will ensure greater trustworthiness and reliability of the questions. For each subject or a group of allied subjects there should be a committee of subject specialists. These specialists must have sufficient experience in test construction. These committees of specialists will prepare improved questions of various types on the basis of the syllabi of the Boards in different subjects. They will work in close co-operation of the teachers of educational institutions and when necessary they will pre-test the questions on students in co-operation with the teachers. All the questions which are considered reliable would be compiled in the form of books subject-wise and distributed to various educational institutions examining bodies and educational authorities. At the time of holding the examinations the Boards may appoint 'paper-setters' instead of moderators as at present—a group of two or three highly experienced subject specialists for each subject. These persons will select appropriate questions from the books mentioned above and prepare the question papers. The work of framing ques-

tions and their compilation may be under the administrative control of one of the Education Boards. The subject specialists who may be entrusted with the work of framing questions and their compilation may be permanent staff of the Boards or may be appointed on ad-hoc basis. Ultimately an Educational Testing Centre may be established which may take up the work of test construction from the Education Board in time. Such an independent Educational Testing Centre may not only construct tests for measurement of students' educational attainment but construct tests for other purposes as well, such as tests for judging fitness for an employment for entrance to special types of institutions or for some other role in society. Such a Testing Centre may also undertake the work for training of teachers in test-construction.