

More About The Examination System

—Dr. Abdul Haque

THE Secondary School Certificate and the Higher Secondary Certificate examinations are two very important examinations in the life of our students. Quite a large number of them take these examinations with ease, while to others these examinations are sources of great tension and anxiety. In these examinations, students usually answer questions for three hours at a time; sometimes twice a day. They are forced to write a lot of things in a short time. They have to marshal all their knowledge and commit it to paper in a limited time without recourse to note books. In doing so, many of them are exhausted physically and mentally. Some even develop emotional shock and neurotic phobias about these examinations. Variation of mood and condition of health at the time of the examinations may affect the performance of the students in these examinations. Even climatic condition and environment around the examination halls may affect the mood of the students. These are some of the reasons which may affect the results of even good students. It is therefore keenly felt that these examinations are made liberal so that the examinees may take up these examinations with ease.

At present, if a student fails in the Secondary School Certificate or Higher Secondary Certificate examination, but passes in one or more component subjects, he is considered unfit for admission to higher courses of studies. It is not unlikely that he may fit quite well in a course of study, for which his proficiency in the subject or subjects, he passed, may serve the purpose of his admission to that course of study. It may be that he is quite suitable for appointment to a job, for which his proficiency in the subject or subjects, he passed, will serve the purpose very well.

At present there is a tendency to get away from the pass/fail concept of examinations and to think of them as sources of information about some qualities of the candidates, which the users may evaluate according to their needs.

Needless to say that at present a student who fails in the Secondary School Certificate or the Higher Secondary Certificate examination is required to appear in all the papers, including the paper or papers which he passed before—in case he appears in the same examination again. It seems quite logical to allow the student to appear only in the paper or papers in which he failed and carry the marks of the paper or papers which he passed before, towards the result of the examination which he repeated. Moreover, if a student fails in the examination due to his failure or inability to appear in one subject only, there should be arrangement for supplementary examination for him and similar such students soon after the main

Dr. Haque noted educationist and formerly Chairman, Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education, Dhaka, in this article, second in a series, scrutinises the inadequacies of the present end-of-course examination system in the country. He points out how the present system puts the examinee under too heavy a pressure and also fails to make a correct assessment of his educational attainments, besides exerting a negative effect on the teaching-learning process. The first article, under the same heading, was published in these columns on Oct 10

examination.

Many educationists believe that the results of the Secondary School Certificate or the Higher Secondary Certificate examination are not correct indicators of the educational attainment of the examinees, because these examinations are taken over a short duration of time. They say that a longer period of time and anxiety-free mind are necessary to correctly assess the educational attainment of students. According to them the work done by students in classes under normal condition during the years of study prove better samples of attainment than those in the end-of-course comprehensive examination conducted by external authorities, like the Education Boards. Here the students are not required to marshal all their knowledge and commit to paper in a limited time under strenuous condition. Here the students are awarded marks during their years of study by the teachers of each subject on the strength of their class work, contributions made to discussions, periodical group examinations etc. Finally a grade is awarded in the subject on the average of all these marks. Here the students work among their own teachers and fellow students in their familiar environment over a considerable period of time. Here the students are always under observation and constantly being examined by their own teachers. Since the class teachers pay considerable attention to qualities of motivation and persistence in making judgement about their students, hence many experts believe that continuous assessment of class work by the students' own teachers over the period of study is more trustworthy than the once-for-all end-of-course examinations conducted by external authorities, like the Education Boards. Some even go so far as to say that these end-of-course externally controlled examinations should be abolished and assessments by class teachers, based on students' daily progress, periodical examinations and class work as a whole should be depended upon. But the method of internal assessment is not free from criticism. Teachers of different institutions will assess the work of their students on different standards. So it will not be possible to compare the overall achievement of one institution with that of another on the basis of internal assessment. There is also apprehension that some teachers may unwittingly overrate some weak students and underrate some gifted students. So selectors for admission to seats of higher learning or for appointment to a job may find it difficult to differentiate the candidates from one institution from those of another on the basis of internal assessments. It is needless to mention that internal assessment by class teachers to be trustworthy, teachers should have high degree of proficiency in the modern methods of teaching and be highly skillful in applying modern techniques of tests to their students.

Perhaps a time will come when many of our schools and colleges will establish themselves as institutions of high reputation for brilliance of performance. People will then have great faith in the diplomas issued by those institutions to their students on the basis of their own assessments. Till that time, we have to seek the advantages of the traditional examinations conducted by the Boards and those obtained from continuous assessment by class teachers.

Many educationists believe that the certificates issued by the Boards to the successful candidates should show the marks obtained by them in the Board's examination as well as those in internal assessments. Such certificates will give a better profile of the students' achievement than those without showing any marks. Even those subjects which are assessed internally, but not included in the Board's examination should also be entered in the Board's certificates. For the present, the final results (pass or fail) may be determined on the results of the Board's examination.

Since the internal and the Board's examinations are taken by a student under different conditions, it is likely that the marks obtained by a student in the two examinations will be different. But if the difference is appreciable, it requires special attention.

If the marks obtained by a student in a subject in the internal examination are appreciably higher than the marks obtained

by him in the same subject in the Board's examination, then one may legitimately conclude that either the marks obtained by him in the internal examinations were too liberal or he was not in proper mood or health while sitting for the Board's examination or the questions set in the Board's examination were not to his choice. It may even be, that the student gave better expression of his achievement by long term assessment under normal condition than by assessment over a short period of time.

Similarly, if the marks obtained by a student in a subject in the internal examination is appreciably lower than the marks obtained by him in the Board's examination, then one may legitimately conclude that the student worked very hard to do well in the Board's examination and the questions were to his choice, provided that the results of the Board's examination were the outcome of his honest effort.

In the case of admission to an institution of higher learning or employment to a job, it is upto the discretion of the authorities concerned to accept the assessment of the class teachers or not. Their decision will surely depend on the reputation of the institution concerned.

Finally it may be said that at present our Secondary School Certificate and the Higher Secondary Certificate examinations are exercising tremendous influence on teaching and learning. As a matter of fact, the whole pattern of teaching and learning in the Secondary and the Higher Secondary stages of our institutions are at present conditioned according to the nature of these examinations. Many teachers are interested to teach only those portions of the subjects on which questions are likely to be set. Similarly many students concentrate only on those portions of the subject from which, they think, questions will be set. This is having an adverse effect on the teaching-learning process. Under such a situation, student's intelligence and power of free thinking cannot be fully developed and teachers cannot give their best to their students. Hence the necessity of reform of all these external examinations cannot be overemphasized. These examinations should not only be effective instruments to unveil the educational attainment of students, but also exert a healthy influence on the teaching-learning process.

Further the internal assessments by class teachers should not be confined to narrow domain of the curricula fixed by the Boards. Teachers should be free to teach with a wider outlook so as to develop the capacity of free thinking among their students. All these capacities of the students should be reflected in the internal assessments. Ultimately the internal gradings will establish themselves as the true indicators of the students' attainment.