

More On The Examination System

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WHEN we speak of external examinations, we have in our mind the Secondary School Certificate and the Higher Secondary Certificate examinations, which are the two major external examinations in our country. Examinations involve three parties—the pupil, the teacher and the society or the community. Hence, while dealing with the effects of these examinations, we have to take into account the interaction between these examinations and all the three parties severally.

Let us first consider the effects of these examinations on the pupils. The pupils are aware that these examinations are looked upon by the society as indicators of qualifications, on which their future depends. This feeling generates tension in their mind. They think that they will be exposed once they sit for the examination. These examinations not only dominate and dictate their activities, but also provide them with motivation for study. These examinations exert so much influence on the pupils that they study only for passing the examinations. To them, the best teacher is he who reflects best the requirements of these scholastic huddles. In fact, the entire educational activities of the pupils are now dictated by the external examinations.

It is needless to mention that, as a normal procedure, the examining bodies issue syllabuses which are nothing but catalogues of topics. The interpretation of the syllabuses is often carried out by referring to the past question papers, which often sample limited areas of the curricula. The standard of teaching in the classes is often patterned to the standard of the questions set in the past years. Very often, questions similar in nature are set year after year. As a result, the teachers and the pupils always look forward to divine the minds of the papersetters. Markets are flooded with help-books which contain questions set in the past years or are likely to be set in the future years, and their answers. Pupils are often found to be more interested in those questions which were set more than once in the past examinations. Many students engage private tutors. Now days, this tendency has increased to such an extent as was unheard of in the past. Educationists believe that limited assistance from private tutors, according to needs, may be helpful to the pupils, but too much dependence on private tutors is injurious to them by standing in the way of free-thinking, perseverance and self-help. Pupils require time for themselves to demonstrate their own interest, inventivity or creativity. The questions set in the examinations year after year are of such nature that they encourage many pupils to commit to memory without understanding, as an easy way to pass the examination. They also provide temptation for copying in the examination hall. No doubt, the nature of the questions are such that one may even pass

The author, a former Chairman of the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education, Dhaka, discusses the negative impact the existing system of end-of-course examination has on the learning and teaching process and consequently, on the society. He also points out how the existing sole dependence on the external examination falls short of an overall assessment of the pupil. This is the author's third article on the subject.

the examination by copying. All these have their adverse effects on class-room teaching. Under such circumstances, students are likely to become less attentive to class-room teaching. They may think that they will be able to learn what the teachers would have taught them in the classes, from their private tutors or by consulting help-books in a congenial homely environment. Class-room teaching loses its importance under such conditions.

As a matter of fact, for these examinations to be really effective, their purpose should not be confined to the evaluation of learning only, they should also reach the learning behaviour, motivation, aspiration and social attitude of the pupils. For the teacher, these examinations should provide scopes for evaluation of their methods of teaching. For the examining bodies, these examinations should give clues to find out whether the prescribed curricula conform to the aims of education. For the society, these examinations are suppliers of persons, competent to undertake various social responsibilities. It is a pertinent question how far these examinations are fulfilling all these purposes to-day.

The effects of the external examinations, as they exist to-day, on the teachers is enormous. An educational institution is usually rated according to the number and quality of passes in the end-of-course external examinations. Even if a teacher is committed to sound educational aims, the pressure of the external examinations is so strong that he is compelled by circumstances to deviate from his aims. His personal career may be jeopardized, if his students cannot do well in the examinations. He resorts to such practices as note-giving, writing-out sample answers to typical questions set in the past examinations and so on. The students, in turn, expect him to be entirely examination-orientated. In such a situation, a teacher is likely to lose his professional responsibility.

The external examinations have their good effects, too. These examinations provide the students with a sense of competition. The students know that they are competing with a very large number of students and they cannot go to higher stages of learning until they can show proficiency in the present one. The examinations provide goals and incentives for them. They provide proof of their perseverance, endurance and quality of aspiration. But the adverse effects of the exami-

nations, as they exist today, are so strong that they camouflage many of the good effects of the examinations.

It is needless to mention that the welfare of the society is intimately linked with the efficiency of the examination system. After all, it is the society which is the recipient of the fruits of examinations. Surely, the society deserves a good return of what it invests on education. It depends on examinations as suppliers of intelligent and educated persons, capable of undertaking various social welfare activities. For this reason, the examinations should be efficient and trustworthy, so that only the worthy persons can pass through them.

The external examinations, though primarily meant for finding out what the pupils have learned, may serve many other useful purposes. As 'back-wash' effect, these examinations can invigorate the class-room teachings and cultivate those mental endowments of the pupils which exert strong influence on learning. They can energize the learning process, which will in turn cultivate those faculties in the pupils as self-help, perseverance, learning behaviour, social habits and so on. But it is a matter to ponder, to what extent the external examinations, as they exist today, is capable of cultivating these mental faculties in the pupils.

According to the normal procedure, pupils' success in the examinations is rewarded by the granting of certificates. But these certificates take recognition only of the academic aspects of learning. But such mental faculties of the pupils as learning behaviour, endurance, perseverance, social attitude, which have their roots in examinations, find no place in these certificates. Cases are not rare where a pupil is found to exhibit brilliant result in the examination but his mental faculties such as creativity, social maturity, emotional stability are not as desired. On the other hand, there may be a pupil who exhibits poor result in the examination but possesses such mental faculties as may lead him to establish himself as a very useful person in the society. Only the class-teachers who observe the pupils closely over a long period of time are competent to assess these mental faculties of the pupils effectively. The predictive values of the certificates regarding the future performance of the pupils will be very much enhanced, if the class-teachers' assessment

of these non-cognitive aspects of learning find their place in the certificates along with the gradings of the internal and external examinations.

As a matter of fact, for an examination to be effective, it should be so designed as to maximize its good effects and minimize the bad effects on education. The external examinations, because of their very nature, are not effective for evaluation of all aspects of learning. They are to be supplemented by internal examinations. In the external examinations, the pupils' mental faculties remain operative for a short duration of time, whereas in the internal examinations, their mental faculties remain operative for a long period of time. For this reason, the results of the internal examinations are interlinked with various mental faculties of the pupils, such as perseverance, endurance and so on. The external examinations cannot claim much credit in this regard. In view of this, the responsibility of the class-teachers is enormous.

Some educationists are of the opinion that assessment for such mental faculties as learning behaviour, social habits, emotional maturity, must not find place in the certificates, as these may adversely affect the career of some pupils. Some say, there should be separate tests to ascertain these faculties, if needed.

A question is often asked, to what extent the external examinations are themselves responsible for large-scale failures in the examinations. The external examinations may be responsible for such failures to some extent, but there are other reasons too, which are not related to the external examinations. It has already been said that the external examinations exercise adverse effects on the teaching-learning process, which again has a tendency to lower the effectiveness of class-room teaching. As a result, pupils who cannot recover from the ineffectiveness of classroom teaching by personal effort may add to the list of unsuccessful candidates in the examinations. It has also been stated that the nature of the questions set in the external examinations year after year is such that some pupils are tempted to copy in the examination hall or may depend on their memory to pass the examinations. But they may be baffled in their purpose for strict invigilation or the questions may not be to their choice. Such students too may add to the list of unsuccessful candidates.

Of the reasons—not related to the effects of the external examinations—which lead to failure in the examinations, mention may be made of the admission of students to many institutions without correctly ascertaining their aptitude for the courses of study, inadequate teaching facilities in some institutions, sitting for the examination without preparation, adverse home environment of some students, not conducive to study and so on.