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## EXAMINATION ON THE CROSS ROAD - A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION AT SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHAWA

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** This qualitative study was aimed to clarify perplexes regarding examinations at secondary school level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and to understand the real position of examination in the education system. **Method:** Phenomenology was chosen as the enquiry method and purposive sampling was used for the collection of data through semi-structure interviews from six respondents (two each from board of intermediate and secondary education Peshawar, two from the department of elementary and secondary education KP and two from the educationists one from public and other from private sector university). The collected data was analyzed through thematic analysis. **Results:** This study revealed that due to materialistic approach to education, examination which was a mean to education has usurped the very end of education. The abrogation and discontinuation of examination was timely needed due to Covid-19, while this practice is done in some advanced countries in normal situations. This study also identified that lack of professionalism in teachers has caused the students to resort to examination abuses. It was also find out that the exam culture is defective and is in the dire need of drastic reforms. **Conclusion:** This study recommended school based continuous assessment for the amelioration of examination system in the context of KP along with proper legislation regarding exams in abnormal situations; so that in pandemics disasters etc. the examinations could be handle without any hesitation.

**Key Words:** Examination abuses, continuous assessment, pedagogical skills, cancellation, discontinuation, certificate syndrome.

### INTRODUCTION

Examination is the evaluative device of assessing the learning capacity of the students. Without knowing the short comings of the learner, no ascending on the ladder of educational process is fruitful (Oniha, 2017). But the obsession of

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the passing the exam without burning the mid night oil or having a certificate for some job, has turned the whole process of education devoid for utility (Nyandoro, 2008).

The purpose of examination is not only the assessment of the student, it is considered as a double edged knife which assesses the students as well as teachers in the form of students' results (Rind & Malik, 2019; Khattak, 2012). As examinations are replete with so many mal-practices and these abuses have become an integral part of the exams, so it is the dire need of the day to purify the exams from these impurities and to incorporate academic excellence with analytical and decision making skills which in consonance with genius of our moral value system (Kamrani, 2011).

To keep the examination discontinued due to massive abuses also does not seem as the panacea of these ills, because through the practice of exams, students can be motivated towards hard work and diligence and through exams they are wedded to a healthy competitive environment (Umbreen, (2008). On the other hand, due to adherence to conventionalism the evaluation of effectiveness of learning teaching process is confined only to the public examinations (Braun et al., 2006), which has turned the situation even more drastic. So, the education authorities are faced with a dilemma i.e. to be or not to be and the fruit of examination at SSC (Secondary School Certificate) level cannot be eaten without the stings of so many insects of examination abuses, mal-practices and irregularities.

In addition to this the pandemic of Covid-19 became an obstacle in the conduct of SSC (Secondary School Certificate) and HSSC (Higher Secondary School Certificate) exams at the country level. The fact must be clear that the central Govt. has not kept the exams discontinued, but has technically made the 1<sup>st</sup> exam (9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>) depended on the 2<sup>nd</sup> exam (10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>) and promotion has given to the students in the next classes; marks would be awarded to the students of 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> on the ratio of previous performance i.e. 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>. Forty percent failed are passed with grace marks; while for the students of improvement and make up a smart exam is proposed keeping the pandemic situation in view.

Moreover this fact should also not be over sighted that some countries, i.e. Australia (Queen Land) have already turned its senior secondary examination discontinued for transmitting its energy and resources towards teaching and learning only (Hill & Grossman, 2013). The benefits associated with exams have become limited due to massive cheating and involvement in large scale examination abuses. So the aggravated situation may be ameliorated through initiation of Govt. policies regarding exams and teaching learning

enhancement.

The purpose of this study is to identify, with in the context of KP (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) to develop an improved system for examinations. So that the culture of school base continued assessment could be promoted, and eradicate examinations' male practices at the annual public examination level.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Although the specific research findings is scarce regarding this study. However some key pares from the existing literature are taken and discussed in this section of the study.

Khattak (2012) stated that when the matriculation certificate got the status of a license for employment in the pre-independence era then the Indian education commission took the notice in 1882, that the certificate syndrome has dominated the curriculum and teaching process, and certification has become the very purpose of education. Akhter, Din and Khan (2018) affirm that the main purpose of examination is the provision of quality education to the citizens.

According to Batool and Qureshi (2007) examination is being used to improve educational efforts and it can also be employed to assess, how the effectiveness of school is, and where the curriculum is needed to be reformed while De-Castro (2012) associated the functions of certification, diagnosis, improvement of learning and accountability of the teachers to exams. De-Castro (2012) adds that its secondary function is to evaluate, teaching learning along with curriculum, so that academic excellence could be achieved.

Hill and Grassman (2013) are of the view that through the mechanism of examination the quality of education can be properly controlled. Similarly Carlson and Davier (2017) state stat that exams are conducted for controlling of access to higher education, certifying function in the shape of a report about the achievement of the students and for the evaluation of effectiveness of instruction.

The study of Clarke (2012) revealed that students about 70% are indulged in cheating even in the most advanced countries like USA. Cheating is a by-product of corruption, which has now become a social evil (Burke, Polimeni & Slavin, 2007). Asuru (2009) warns that the poor environment of teaching and learning and the missing facilities in the education system is a root cause of cheating. So the menace of cheating has crippled the entire examination system. Madaus, Russell and Higgings (2009) are even obnoxious on the very existence of examination, they are of the view that exam adds to anxiety and frustration among students, it distracts the attention of school towards getting good results

in exams at the expense of other educational outcomes. Obe (2015) considered examination mal-practices extremely catastrophic for the whole society as through foul methods of passing the exam, these person get enter in the Govt. services with no caliber and no character.

Adewale (2014) affirmed that examination abuse may lead to social devastation and moral degradation. Mason (2010) supports this view that ill- adopted person may lead to rubbery, stealing, prostitution and other illegal ways of economic gains. Gouleta, Witte and Letiecq (2015) found that due to examination irregularities the talented and hardworking students lose heart and shun study when they see that academically feeble students have scored higher than them, so they resort to pessimism. Turi, J. A; et al (2019) stated that suggest that, with the help of an information system, cognitive, social, and behavioral organizational elements have a major impact on organizational learning effectiveness. The study advises that all cognitive, social, and behavioral components and factors be addressed and improved for holistic organizational learning development.

Rote memorization and cramming has also turned the exams system devoid of utility for which SLO (Students Learning Outcomes) based exams are suggested time and again (Abbas, Ashiq & Abrar ul haq, 2018). Similarly practical exam is only an anxiety and extra load for the students, in which numerous flows are noted (Al-Abri, 2010, Ballen, Sakhi & Cotner, 2017). Perhaps the most missing domain in our examination system is the absence of continuous assessment. In its absence, the students totally rely on the one shot public examination i.e. board examination.

Nicol and Macfarlane (2006) observed that CA (Continuous Assessment) is the real remedy of the examination ills. Mangal (2013) found that continuous assessment is excessively lucrative for the harmonious growth of the students. Similarly Okoli (2005) suggest CA, as a main improver for the educational development of the learners.

Niazi and Dogar (2016) observed that due to the boon of continuous assessment students could be persuaded to incessant diligence, as compare to one shot (single) annual examination, where notes are crammed only during the exam. Osueze (2007) confessed that through CA (Continuous Assessment) indiscipline could be reduced in the school and the academic needs of the students could be fulfilled. So CA (Continuous Assessment) could be the best substitute of one shot public examination.

The aim of this study was to develop such a system of examinations, where mal-practices and other foul means for getting success could find no room, and the SSC (Secondary School Certificate) become the factual X-Ray of the students' caliber.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As the nature of this study is qualitative, for which purposive sampling is specifically recommended (Willig & Rogers, 2017). In such a study, the researcher approaches to the key informants and knowledgeable respondents for acquiring in-depth information regarding the problem under study (Cohen, Manion & Marrison, 2011).

Similarly, the very aim of such a study is to investigate the pros and cones of social phenomena as experienced by these persons themselves (Shazadiy, & Rafa, 2018). In addition to this a qualitative research process is rich understanding about the undertaken problem (Clarke, 2012; Cresswell, Schwantner, & Waters, 2015).

## SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

This study sample is purposive which comprised of six respondents serving in education department since a long in Khyber Pakhtunkhawa. Two of them belonging to BISE (Board of Secondary Education) Peshawar, two belongs to Directorate of Secondary and Elementary Education while the remaining two are University Faculty Members one from Public Sector University and other from Private Sector (all respondents are given pseudo/quasi names for the maintenance of confidentiality).

**Table1:** *Brief Description of the Respondents*

S. No.	Pseudo Name	Designation	Age	Education	Exp.
1	Mr. Naveed Khan	Chairman, BISE	55	MA IR, Pol-Science	4 years
2	Mr. Arshad Khan	Controller, BISE	52	MA History	7 Years
3	Dr. Sohail	Dy. Director, E & SE KP	54	PhD. Education	8 Years
4	Mr. Kamal	Add. Director, E & SE KP	56	MSc Chemistry	9 Years
5	Dr. Zahid	Educationist, Public sector University	57	PhD. Education	7 Years
6	Dr. Z.A Bukahari	Educationist, Private sector University	52	PhD. Education	4 Years

## DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

For gaining in-depth insight from the respondents a semi-structured interview was devised for each two respondents. One set of semi structured interview was

designed. As semi structured interviews are best fitted for the interpretive researchers (Katete & Kalonga, 2019).

Each interview was recorded by a voice recorder. The interview medium was kept permissive both in English and Urdu. Redundancy in the responses was erased. All the responses of the interviewees were analyzed through description and thematic analysis.

## RESULTS

In the wake of interviews conducted and literature reviewed, six themes emerged from this study.

### (a) Materialistic Approach to Education

The major cause which affects the examination system is materialistic approach to education, all the interviewees confessed, that we have not strengthen our value system and education is limited only to certificates and degrees for finding jobs.

Dr. Z.A Bukahari (Educationist) expressed his views in this regard. *“We see to education in the glasses of appetite, it is true that a hungry man is an angry man; we educate our children solely for economic prosperity and monetary gains, for which no way fair or foul is spared.”*

Dr. Zahid another educationist from Public Sector University shared his views. *“Our approach to education is totally mundane, we want to have a degree or certificate, and in short cuts without knowledge and potentiality, the grade of the students must be A-One for further admission in celebrated collages.”*

Mr. Kamal (Additional Director Elementary and Secondary Education Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) commented that *“The materialist society is the lover of ostentation, showing off and glimmer; the people want glitter in everything. With due apology, I am going to say that our private sector education is totally based upon glimmer, glitter and grace. So a large portion of their energy is spent on publicity.”*

Another respondent Dr. Sohail (Dy. Director Elementary and Secondary Education Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) said, *“Education should be our mission, if we want to purify our education. We should give it a status of mission. We should keep it second to worship.”*

The findings of this study showed that the society has an avaricious approach towards education. The need of the society is not knowledge but wealth, and people love publicity much more than values of education.

### (b) Cancellation/Discontinuation of Examination in Covid-19

The findings of this study revealed that cancellation of exams in Covid-19 has totally eradicated the examination mal-practices. In this regard Dr. Z.A. Bukuri

said, *“This is the most positive aspect of the cancellation of exams that no student has cheated, no bribe has been taken and given for cheating and no examination irregularity has occurred. Dr. Z.A. Bukuri elaborated, “Examination must be cancelled or discontinued seldom in disasters and pandemics etc.*

Dr. Zahid comment in this regard was, *“I am personally very happy on this cancellation; as I hope this year no student will commit suicide on account of his failure or low grad etc.”*

Chairman board, Mr. Naveed Khan shared his view in this connection when he was asked, *“Cancellation of exam due to pandemic is an exigency, however in normal situations it cannot be recommended. Now this cancellation has causes so many complications, when there is an established system of examination. It should be utilized to the maximum, it should be reformed. It could be improved. Its inefficacy and short coming could be overcome, but totally cancellation in normal situations will be another disaster.”*

When the researcher added that some advanced countries have turned it discontinued, he explained his view points, *“They have strengthened their entire system; they have made the school autonomous. They have improved the pedagogy and instruction system. Accesses to medical, engineering and higher education are no problem there. They have not discontinued their secondary exams due to cheating, simply because they do not want to exert an extra burden on the students, in short they want to educate their children in a true sense.”*

Another respondent from BISE (Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education) Mr. Arshad Khan (controller of examination) stated, when he was asked regarding the benefits of cancellation, *“The benefits of cancellation are so much. Cheating is uprooted through this cancellation but it has also emerged so many problems for instance, disengagement of the students, and wastage of their precious time and the deterioration of their writing skills due to abrogation of examinations.”*

When he was asked that the abrogation of exams has also controlled the mafia. He answered that, *“you cannot burn your blanket due to lice, but you will have to clean it through anti lice.” “Yes, I admit your stand is also right.”* He added, *“When the situations become out of control, the mafia become so much powerful which trammel the stakeholder under their feet. Then the abrogation is the best solution. As a few years ago the Sindh Govt. faces this situation but it is the liability of the Government to afflict harsh penalties on such anti-state actors.” “But I think”* he elaborated, *“There is a dire need of proper legislation on exam matters at Board level, because sometimes a lot of complication arise*

*which cannot be solved only through executive orders. There should be well defined laws, so that law department or other stakeholders could not stay the abrogation of exams or arise some legal issues."*

It is evident from the findings of this study that in the context of Pakistan the abrogation of exam in normal situation is not recommended, which created a lot of problems along with some benefits in by products.

The finding of this study also identified that proper legislation is needed in this regard for coping with abnormal situations, so that promotion without exam could not be obnoxious for Govt. departments and higher education departments etc.

### **(c) Teachers' Professional Development**

A queer and unique fact is realized through the collected data of this study, is the lack of well trained and professionally well-equipped teachers. All of the respondents stressed on the pedagogical skills and their method of instruction.

It was also found through the gained data of this study that teachers' professional training is the most ignored aspect of our school system, which ultimately causes understanding disability of the students, in the wake of which they resort to examination irregularities.

Dr. Z.A. Bukuri stated, *"The pedagogical worthlessness of the teachers is the main factor causing mass failure of the students in public examination, the poorer students' resort to cheating for their so called success in exam."*

Dr. Zahid Clearfield that, *"The professionalism among teachers is deteriorating day by day. They have Degrees of B.Ed/M.Ed and even M.Phil, but their insight and skill in pedagogy is indescribably worse. What can be done with his degree, when his classroom management and communication skill is zero? I think teacher is responsible for the lag behind of the students. It is teacher who sends an academically feeble student to exam, where he is compelled to cheating."*

Mr. Kamal shared his view point in this connection, *"By God, if the teacher is reformed, all the problems of examination would be automatically solved, when teachers teach accurately. I assure you that students will not adopt any foul way."*

Dr. Sohail commented in these words, *"Teacher is the backbone of the education system. A teacher teaches in class, he is also an examination officer in the public exams, he prepare the paper, he check and mark the paper, he is the head examiner, he is the inspector of exam, in short, in all dimensions he is there, so he must be well equipped with pedagogical skills and managing affairs."*

The finding of the study revealed, that examination related problems have their roots, in the very soil of school. If school is successful by management and equipped with well-trained teaching staff, where truancy and corporal punishment are controlled, in such an environment, the learning ability of the student would be enhanced and a least number of students will resort to examination abuses.

#### **(d) Amelioration of Examination Culture**

During the course of this investigation it was realized that there is frustration, tension and anxiety in the culture of our exams. All of the participants of this study were of the view that the culture of our exam is not healthy. It is not congenial to the values of education.

All of the respondents were of the view that due to the obsession of examination queer activities are omitted by them i.e. impersonation for cheating, intimidation of exam staff, giving them gifts or other temptations.

Mr. Naveed Khan (Chairman Board) explained that *“I am personally trying to mitigate the race of high scouring among students for this purpose, I have proposed a DMC (Detail Marks Certificate) which will contain only grads, for instance A+, A, B+, B etc.”* He stated that *“Hoping it will lessen the marks competition.”* Moreover he stated that *“For mitigation of the influence of elite schools the system of e-marking is also being launched.”*

Mr. Arshad Khan the controller of exams commented, *“We have directed all the superintendents to treat the students’ leniently. Don’t pressurize or intimidate them, encourage them through your positive behavior.”*

Dr. Z.A. Bukuri shared his views, *“Naturally exam exerts a pressure on the students, and there is a special exam phobia in some students”*. He suggested that, *“The best remedy of this phobia is familiarity with exam, so the schools must conduct home exams (school based assessment) frequently, so that students could become accustomed with exams culture.”*

Dr. Zahid was of the view that *“Examination is an unalienable part of the teaching learning process; the teachers should take regular feedback from the students, so that the culture of accountability could be introduced in them.”*

Mr. Kamal was of the opinion, *“The best way to make the public examination easeful for the students is to improve the culture of assessment.”* He added, *“I have inspected such a Govt. schools, where only one annual exam is conducted, so when exam are so rare in our education system then the students will not take it easy. I think exam must be the everyday practice in the schools, after that the students will be ‘used’ to it.”*

Dr. Sohail (Dy. Director) added his view in this way. *“Exam is of course a serious matter. The students should take a little bit anxiety. Seriousness in exam is quite natural. Yes, the obsession of exam is injurious we have noticed*

*that due to this obsession and fear of exams a feeble student comes to exam halls with two or three supporters, which is a black stigma on the culture of our exam.”*

Finally to concluded the respondents views, the perplex of examination in the context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, is due to the materialist approach to education, lack of professionalism in teachers and absence of proper laws about the discontinuation/abrogation of exam in abnormal situations.

## **DISCUSSION**

The aim of this study was to investigate the status and position of examination in the educational system of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the current panorama. The obtained data revealed that approach to education is not suitable. certificate without knowledge is becoming a fashion. The large scale mal-practices have rendered the examination quite valueless.

It was also found during the literature survey of this study that exams have been discontinuous in some advanced countries on account of its demerits and problems, so discontinuation in some aspects have been found lucrative as the study of Hill and Grossman (2013) has found the discontinuation beneficial.

The study of Muchai (2014) found that cheating and non-academic activities of the students are a threat to the very purpose of education. Teacher and examination officers are neglectful of their assigned duties, it has also been found in the study of Chinamasa et al. (2011) which is in consonance with the findings of this study.

The teachers are unaware of the modern pedagogical skills and technique of assessment which keep the students academically poor. The results of this study showed that the existing exam culture is full of defects, frequent exams and assessment at school can at least mitigate the pressure of exam (Nicol & Maxfarlance, 2006).

From the aforesaid discussion, it has been diagnosed that the public examination at SSC level is treated only as a source for acquiring certificate for entry into higher education or some job, while acquisition of skills and knowledge is given the second priority as a certificate syndrome is already present in the society.

The students are not giving education for life, they are sent ill-equipped to exam, where they feel a lot of un-easiness and resort to unfair and crooked means for passing the exam.

Finally it has been derived from the holistic finding of study that SSC exam in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa context is standing on such a position that its abrogation has damaged the students, but it has also helped in eradication of large scale

examination abuses, the mafia of exams has suffered an ignominious failure. So the findings of this study showed that an improved system of exam is the need of time on the following grounds.

- i. Products of existing examination system are full of mal-practices and are academically worthless.
- ii. Producing academic potency in the students is missing domain of school.
- iii. The so called certificate holders or certificated illiterate are causing inhibition to national progress.
- iv. Proper legislation regarding cancellation/abrogation or discontinuation is timely needed.
- v. Exam culture is in the need of standardization and rectification.
- vi. School based continuous assessment is essential for the amelioration of exam culture as well as for eradication of instructional problems.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this qualitative study was to explore the draw backs associated to the existing examination system. The examination system is fraught of multifarious ills. Therefore the conduct of annual examination at SSC level seems to be a trivial activity. The cheating and examination abuses have turned it void of utility. The sole aim of education has gained the status of certificate syndrome.

Pragmatism and practicality is vanishing from the education system. Throat cutting competition for high scoring in exam has annexed the real purpose of education. Therefore in such a drastic situation the examination seems on the cross road, to be and not to be seems bewildering. For solution of the problem this study is being lunched. For managing this study data was collected through semi-structure interviews by purposive sampling technique and was thematically analyzed properly.

This study revealed that education is totally treated as a license for economic gains. Knowledge and intellectual progress is not kept in view, this study revealed that on account of large scale exam irregularities, the very purpose of exam is on the verge of devastation.

Discontinuation/abrogation or cancellation in the Covid-19 pandemic has really turned the exam mafia discouraged. The literature survey of this study revealed that discontinuation of exam is fruitful in Australia (Queen Land) but here in Pakistan that example cannot be followed on the bases of some ground realities. Finally it was realized that the culture of exam is in the need to be enhanced and improved, as the fear and pressure of exam always cause anxiety and uneasiness in the students.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are put forward on the bases of the findings of this study.

- a) The dignity of labor should be inculcated in students so that cheating could be avoided.
- b) Examination should not be treated as the aim of education. It is the mean to an end. So its abrogation and cancellation is some time beneficial and timely needed.
- c) Purification and reformation of the exam culture is the need of the day.
- d) Frequent exams should be introduced at school level in the form of continuous assessment.
- e) Cheating and rote memorization should be uprooted through setting the paper on SLO (Students Learning Outcomes) bases.

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