

## The Evaluation And Assessment Of Students: Myths And Realities (W.R.T. Management Education In India)

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### ABSTRACT:

Last two decades have witnessed the mushrooming of management institutes/ B-schools across India. It is shifted from 'class' to 'mass' education. A few business magazines have tried to gauge the standards and quality of the B-schools in India. But, their methodology has raised a few controversial issues. We focus, in this research paper, on the aspects related to evaluation and assessment of the performance of students in management education.

*It is a qualitative and phenomenological research based on secondary data. We conclude that lack of knowledge about various evaluation and assessment techniques results into poor standards and glorified evaluation results.*

### INTRODUCTION

The mushrooming of management institutions / business schools in India has posed several challenges. There is a lot of debate going on which focuses on various issues, especially with reference to the input quality of students, quality of faculty members, research, placements and infrastructure. However, the output quality (i.e. quality check of outgoing students) has not much attracted the researchers. With the increase in Business schools we have seen increase in grades of the students. Getting first class or "A" grade in MBA was very tough in the pre-1990 era. Now we see almost 60% of the students achieving this target, with ease. Does it mean that we have attracted more talented students to Business Schools than in the past? Or does it mean dilution of the standards of evaluation and examination?

Change from 'class' education to 'mass' education is a usual phenomenon, which is observed globally. Specifically in a country like India, where population growth is fabulous, it is almost necessary to have this shift from 'class' to 'mass' education. This has happened in almost every faculty of higher education (e.g. commerce, science, bio-tech., computer, engineering etc.). However, it is essential to address two important issues about this shift. First, is about maintaining the quality and standard of such education. Sincere efforts are being made in the past on this aspect. These include – up-gradation of curriculum, making faculty members up-to-date, promoting research work, refresher courses for faculty members, numerous faculty development programs, development of pedagogical tools etc. This is more or less similar for various faculty of education, i.e. Commerce, Arts, Science, Engineering, and Management. However, we could not do anything on the deteriorating quality of input (admission of students) for various reasons. The reasons could be social (upliftment of backward class, poor people) or political (compulsions created by politics and politicians) or economic (reduced funding by the government, resulting into private, un-aided institutions).

Secondly, the disturbing phenomenon is not about shifting from 'class' to 'mass' education, specifically about professional courses like engineering, management etc. Rather, it is imperative for a country like India. But the shift of professional courses from 'professionalization' to 'vocalization' shall be a matter of concern for all those who are at the helm of affairs. Alongside the granger attached to any professional course, there is a great deal of integrity, rigor, moral values and professional ethics which are required to be strictly adhered to. It appears that the direct or indirect impact of such rigor, values and ethics is decreasing day-by-day, specifically in the context of Management courses.

As a lot has already been done on the other aspects of quality and standard of management education, we have decided to focus on an issue of rigor and integrity of the examination and evaluation system of students undergoing various management courses. Surprisingly, we have found relatively less material on the issue. It appears that majority of the stakeholders of management education system have focused on superficial aspects like building, campus, hostel, internet facility etc. In comparison to that less number of researchers has focused on important aspects like curriculum, faculty members with doctorate etc. Even the periodicals and agencies involved in ranking of Business Schools have covered these superficial and cosmetic aspects, and hence, criticized. The real issue could be availability of reliable data, which might have forced these agencies to keep away such aspects related to evaluation. Thus, we have decided to focus on the same.

### 1. MANAGEMENT EDUCATION IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

Business education has a long history in India dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Early business schools were emerged from the "Commerce" stream focusing on the commercial side of business, seeking to fulfill the colonial administration needs of the British government. Their graduates joined the British government colonial bureaucracy,

usually at the clerical (“babu”) rank. India’s first business school - Commercial School of Pachiappa Charities – was set up in 1886 in the southern city of Chennai. In 1903, British government initiated secondary school level commerce classes at the Presidency College in Calcutta, with a focus on secretarial practice/business communication (shorthand, typing, and correspondence) and accounting. The first college-level business school was founded in 1913 in Mumbai (Sydenham College), and was soon followed by another in Delhi in 1920 (Commercial College, later renamed as Shri Ram College of Commerce). These business colleges imparted basic skills about the principles of trade and commerce to clerks and supervisors from fields such as banking, transport, and accounting.

The IIMs were not the pioneers of management education in India; they were preceded by departments of business administration (management education) in the 1950s in the four metropolitan universities of Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta and Madras. The best known of these are the Faculty of Management Studies in Delhi University and the Bajaj Institute in Bombay. IIMC and IIMA came up in 1964-65, while IIMB and others at Lucknow, Indore and Kozikode arrived in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s. The IIM name had become a respected brand because getting into them was a guarantee of the best job placements.

The 1990s have seen an emergence of Management Education in great number. From mere 100 Business Schools in early 1990s, the number has now increased to more than 4000 in 2012. The total number of outgoing students have crossed the mark of 2,00,000. All the Business Schools can be broadly classified as follows:

- a. Fully-aided by Central or State Government (mainly, IIMs)
- b. University MBA Departments,
- c. AICTE-approved, University-affiliated Business Schools, and
- d. AICTE-approved, Autonomous (Private, un-aided) Business Schools

This research work mainly focuses on (c) above. In this category, in Maharashtra alone there are over 1500 institutions with intake capacity of 60,000 seats.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A wide range of research work is available on the given subject. However, we have narrated only those which is related with either management education or with assessment, evaluation and grades of students or with both.

Juola, Arvo E. (1976) has stated about the grade inflation issue. He observed about the ignorance of the faculty members about the evaluation techniques. He, therefore, has emphasized on the need for faculty training in this direction. (Also, similar findings by Talia Bar et al (2009), Islam Shahidul (2009)).

Srivastava H. S. (1979) has listed several shortcomings of Examination System in India, such as, Emphasis on memorization, Subjectivity, Poor Content Coverage and certain Administrative issues. He also observed that whatever their limitations, examinations have come to occupy a very dominant position in our education system. Be this as it may; the modern reform point of view asserts that they should, as a part of sound educational strategy, be wisely employed to bring about qualitative improvements in education.

Sadler, D. Royce (1989) has elaborated the theory of Formative Assessment. A key premise of the theory is that for students to be able to improve, they must develop the capacity to monitor the quality of their own work during actual production. Instructional systems which do not make explicit provision for the acquisition of evaluative expertise are deficient, because they set up artificial but potentially removable performance ceilings for the students.

Pratt D. D. (1997) stated that policies, procedures, and criteria for the evaluation of teaching in higher education contribute to the marginalization of teaching within the reward structures of universities and colleges. However, these tend to be devoid of the very substance through which academics derive a sense of identity -- their discipline.

Killen R. (2000) has elaborated ‘Outcomes Based Education’. He insisted that OBE is not an “event” but a total approach to education. It is not something that has to be “fitted in to the timetable” but rather a set of ideas that influence the total school curriculum. If teachers want to succeed with outcomes-based education, they need to adopt the position that “there is no such thing as failure, only feedback and results . . . success depend on how well we process the feedback we get regarding our efforts”.

Henry Rosovsky and Matthew Hartley (2002) have also referred to an issue of grade inflation of the students. They have insisted on the frank discussion of evaluation patterns and methods. They observed that meaningful distinctions have disappeared because of various reasons – one amongst them is lack of integrity and know-how of the evaluation techniques in the faculty fraternity.

Fraser et al (2003) have stated that South African universities are changing in several very important ways; their entry standards are changing, their programmes are focusing more specifically on the outcomes that learners are required to achieve, and their student populations are becoming more diverse. There is considerable evidence that the views and expectations about success held by lecturers and students are not always consistent. However, the perceptions of first-year students were not strongly correlated with either lectures or senior students.

Vipin Gupta et al (2003) have taken a historical review of the growth in the Indian business schools. They have stated that there are quality business schools in India, but the number is pretty low. Also, quality business education

does not necessarily lead to excellence. It is only a prerequisite for excellence. The stakeholders in the business schools such as parents, industries etc. shall insist on the need for strengthening of the quality education with the help of rigor in academics.

David R. King & William W. Jennings (2003) suggested that augmented instruction better met the requirements of high-quality education by resulting in significantly higher student learning, intended behavior changes, and satisfaction. There are also noteworthy implications for faculty. Augmented instruction appears to compensate for an instructor's lack of experience and leads to higher instructor evaluations.

Wimshurst, Kerry et al (2004) discusses the student characteristics which were found to be clearly related to academic success and failure – including gender, university entry score, and mode of enrolment. The paper also explores implications of the findings for “mass” higher education. It concludes that a profitable approach to research on student success and failure might be to investigate the strategies which students develop to effectively cope (or not cope) with competing life demands.

Devesh Kapur and Pratap Bhanu Mehta (2004) have stated that India is facing a deep crisis in higher education, which is being masked by the success of narrow professional schools. The veneer of the few institutions of excellence masks the reality that the median higher education institutions in India have become incapable of producing students who have skills and knowledge. The process neither serves a screening or signaling function nor prepares students to be productive and responsible citizens. It would not be an exaggeration to say that India's current system of higher education is centralized, politicized and militates against producing general intellectual virtues. The fact that the system nonetheless produces a noticeable number of high quality students has to do with the sheer number of students and the Darwinian struggle at the high school to get admission into the few good institutions.

Struven, Katrien et al (2005) have reviewed students' perception about evaluation and assessment in higher education. The paper reveals that students' perceptions about assessment significantly influence their approaches to learning and studying. Conversely, students' approaches to study influence the ways in which they perceive evaluation and assessment. Findings suggest that students hold strong views about different assessment and evaluation formats. However, when compared with more innovative assessment methods, students call the 'fairness' of these well-known evaluation modes into question.

Taras, M. (2005) wishes to clarify the definitions of the central terms relating to assessment. It argues that all assessment begins with summative assessment (which is a judgement) and that formative assessment is in fact summative assessment plus feedback which is used by the learner.

Pawan Agarwal (2006) relates the growth of higher education in India to the changing funding pattern and suggests ways to ensure that higher education remains both affordable and accessible to all. Higher education in India suffers from several systemic deficiencies. As a result, it continues to provide graduates that are unemployable despite emerging shortages of skilled manpower in an increasing number of sectors. Despite, its impressive growth, higher education in India could maintain only a very small base of quality institutions at the top. Standards of the majority of the institutions are poor and declining. There are a large number of small and non-viable institutions. Entry to the small number of quality institutions is very competitive giving rise to high stake entrance tests and a flourishing private tuition industry.

Wimshurst, Kerry et al (2006) identified a range of student demographic and biographical factors significantly related to academic success and failure. However, there was also evidence of pronounced differences in grading practices between different components (courses, programs, schools) within the institution. It concludes that the tendency of governments and other stakeholders to now champion performance indicators, along with the shifting focus toward quality 'outcomes', are likely to increasingly throw the strengths and weaknesses of institutional assessment practices into stark relief.

Sandhir Sharma (2008) has referred to the mushrooming of the management institutions in India. It is observed that majority of the faculty members are not well versed with new teaching and evaluation aids. The study found that the knowledge base of the faculty regarding the latest happening in the field of business was minimum and thereby affecting the future of business students.

Maria De Paola (2008) has investigated whether grades are used by educational institutions as a competition variable to attract and retain students. After controlling for students' characteristics, class-size, classmates' quality and degree fixed effects, it is observed that students obtain better grades and are less likely to drop-out when their degree course experiences an excess of supply. The author has concluded that the teaching staff on degree course facing low demand tends to set lower academic standards with the result that their students obtain better grades and have a lower probability of dropping out than they might otherwise.

Carless, David (2009) stated that Learning-oriented assessment represents an attempt to reconcile formative and summative assessment and focus all assessment on the development of productive student learning. Learning-oriented assessment comprises three interlocking dimensions: assessment tasks as learning tasks; student involvement in assessment; and the closing of feedback loops.

Handley, Karen and Williams, Lindsay (2009) reports on a study which sought to enhance engagement by giving students exemplar assignments annotated with feedback *before* submission of their final assignments. The exemplar facility was highly valued by students, although there were no quantitative effects such as an increase in students' assignment marks when compared with the previous cohort.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This research is typically a qualitative research. Of the five types of qualitative research, this belongs to Phenomenology. A phenomenological study describes that meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). As noted by Polkinghorne (1989), phenomenology explores the structures of consciousness in human experiences.

The researcher has wide experience (of more than a decade) of the University-based Examination System, especially with reference to Management Education. He is involved in various aspects of such system in various roles right from student to teacher to paper-setter to examiner to Assistant Director for the Centralized Assessment Program (CAP) of the university. In the process, he has discussed various issues and problems of the Examination System along with various students, faculty members, office bearers of various university committees etc. The researcher is also involved formally and informally in some of organized, University-level efforts towards Examination System Reforms. This research paper is an outcome of all such discussions (formal and informal), and it also involves various University-level reports related to the subject (published or otherwise).

Thus, the data analysis involves horizontalization (i.e., extracting significant statements from transcribed interviews). The significant statements are then transformed into clusters of meanings according to how each statement falls under specific psychological and phenomenological concepts. Finally, these transformations are tied together to make a general description of the experience – both the textural description (of what was experienced) and the structural description (of how it was experienced). The researchers have also incorporated certain personal meaning of the experiences.

### 4. PHENOMENA / INCIDENTS:

The experiences of the researcher/s along with those shared by others, to the researchers, cannot be spelled out in this research paper due to the limitations of the space. However, it is worthwhile noting some very interesting, special experiences, representative in nature, in the context of this research. These are listed below:

1. In a newly started institute, a student was quarrelling with the faculty member about the marks he got. His argument was that he got very less marks as compared to another student who has written almost similar answer for more marks. The faculty member could neither convince the student nor rectify his mistake.
2. Twelve faculty members involved in assessment at CAP have found guilty of negligence and have been debarred from the process of examination and other university works. Their mistakes are such as giving more marks than allotted, giving full / partial marks for totally wrong answers, checking answer sheets of the subjects which they have never taught in the life etc. All of them were duly qualified as per the norms with varying experience levels ranging from 3 years to 18 years of academic experience.
3. A few examiners have assessed more than stipulated (i.e. 60 answer sheets in a day's span of about 6 hours) answer sheets (ranging from 200 to 600 answer sheets) in a day's time. Some of them (only!) have been debarred from the examination process.
4. All the students in a row have got same (only passing) marks for a given subject/s.
5. The result of one of the subject was very poor. Hence, the appropriate university authorities have called the meeting of the member of Board of Studies along with the Paper Setting Committee and assessors. It is decided in the meeting that grace marks ranging from 2 to 20 (total marks out of 70) are allotted to each student, so that the result will be uplifted. (the researchers has seen this happening on more than five occasions, in the recent past.)
6. Revaluation and reassessment of the University-level examination has become a mockery. Almost all the students, who have failed in the subject, do apply for the same to the university. About 70% of them clear the subject in the process. Surprisingly, some of the students have passed some of the papers in all the semesters through this mechanism.

### 5. IMPORTANT OBSERVATIONS AND FINDINGS:

- a) More than 80% marks are based on some or the other Written Examination/s. Thus, it is only a Memory Test of the Mugging Minds. Also, of these, 80% are based on the University-level, common examination. This leaves a very little room for institute-level evaluation.
- b) The various skill-based (communication, team work, case study etc.) evaluations are often not used by the institution/s for institute-level marks for various reasons. The reasons could be either administrative (typing,

- printing, Xerox of the material, distribution of the same, keeping record etc. to be done by the faculty member himself as the teaching assistant is not provided) or know-how related (conducting such skill-based evaluation techniques requires knowledge-wise well-equipped and up-to-date faculty member with judicious mind and less subjectivity).
- c) The lack of experience and know-how about the teaching-learning process and evaluation techniques amongst the faculty members leads to a situation as described in some of the phenomenon above. Most of the faculty members are very weak in their subject taught. Further to that, they are not making enough efforts to improve on this count. Also, they are not making sincere efforts (or perhaps, not allowed to make serious efforts) towards development and innovation about evaluation and assessment techniques.
  - d) Almost all the management institutes are self-financed. They receive 95% of their revenue from students' fees. Passing and/or failure of the students in the University examination will have serious repercussions on the funding of the institute. Thus, institutes are unwilling to have very critical (or appropriately tough?) evaluation pattern.
  - e) The admission process of many institutes is really a doubtful matter. Most of the institute level quota is filled by those students who are ready to pay a huge sum. The institutes also prefer to have more seats than stipulated by playing tricks and tactics with the students duly admitted on merit so that these seats will be converted into institute level quota. This results into sub-standard input (high paying students), which is imperative for the survival and growth of the institutes.
  - f) Such institutes directly or indirectly suggest (or, force) the faculty members to adopt any means to have good results of the students. One of the evidence of this is the "Scaling down of the internal marks" in view of the University-level examination marks scored by the student, as adopted by some of the universities.
  - g) The change in the pattern of result is also a matter of surprise. In the early 90's, passing percentage (without any backlog, i.e. "All-Clear") of the students was 60, with the highest marks are ranging between 65 & 70 percentages. After two decades, passing percentage (without any backlog, i.e. "All-Clear") of the students is 90, with the highest marks are ranging between 75 & 85 percentages. This is not really an improvement in quality, if one analyses the quality of question paper, assessment, knowledge of the assessor etc. Rather, the quality of question paper has been diluted. There are 'guide-like books' available in the market making a fortune of business. Most of them are 'bad quality' *cut & paste* type books, written (copied?) by local faculty members. There is 'tuition-like classes' giving you the required *mantra* of success. Question paper pattern is not expected to change. Even the questions are more or less the same. Any student with average IQ and use of appropriate tools and tactics can reasonably achieve First Class (without much of the knowledge of the subject).
  - h) The process of admission to the course and passing out of the course is made very simple and without any rigor. This is partially due to 'mushrooming' of management institutes / business schools. There is a clear shift from 'class education' to 'mass education'. However, the objection is not for the said shift, but for the way of shifting which has made it a 'vocational qualification' from the expected 'professional qualification'.

## CONCLUSIONS:

We have observed a phenomenal growth of the management institutes, courses and students in the past two decades. We are also trying to improve the quality and standards of these courses and institutes over a period of time. The process of accreditation is one of such step taken formally. Various business magazines (Business Today, Outlook etc.) have tried to rank institutes on various parameters. This is an informal way of putting pressure on the institutes to improve the quality and standards. However, both these efforts have barely given any importance to evaluation and assessment standards of the said courses.

Thus, we see a confusing picture where there are business schools with infrastructure facilities (and best pay-packages to the faculty members and also, other facilities etc.) even better than Indian Institute of Managements (IIMs). Yet, the output is not so recognized by the industry (i.e. poor placements). The real issue is what is the difference between IIMs and such institutes? Barring the difference between funding pattern, the real difference does not lie in infrastructure or qualification of faculty members etc.

The researchers are of the strong opinion that the gap between IIMs and other institutes can be bridged by benchmarking with IIMs in the context of academic inputs and rigorous evaluation of the students. More passing of students with flying color does not mean best quality of the output. It is high time that university affiliated management institutes shall make sincere efforts to improve the standards and rigor of the evaluation, examination and assessment of its courses. It is expected that some conscious efforts are needed in this direction such as refresher courses, faculty development programs etc. specifically designed for the evaluation, assessment and examination techniques of the students.

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