Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology
ISSN: 2576-8484
Vol. 8, No. 6, 8986-9005
2024
Publisher: Learning Gate
DOI: 10.55214/25768484.v8i6.3926

Essence from within: Unveiling the voices of Nepalese master's degree students in English and biology education on internal assessments within the semester system

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Abstract: This study explores the changes in the examination system at Tribhuvan University, which originally adopted an annual examination system, switched to a semester system in 1971, and then reverted to the annual system in 1981. In 2013, the semester system was reintroduced, and it is now widely implemented across the university and other institutions in Nepal, although some undergraduate programmes still follow the annual system. These changes reflect ongoing efforts to reform the examination system, yet it remains unclear whether these reforms were based on comprehensive research and whether students' experiences were adequately considered. The major objective of this study is to explore the lived experiences of Master's degree students regarding internal assessments within the current semester system. A phenomenological approach was employed, with in-depth interviews conducted with eight students from the MEd English and Biology Education programmes at Tribhuvan University, Sanothimi Campus. The findings suggest that while the university has made significant strides in improving its educational and assessment systems, further improvements are necessary in the internal assessment procedures. Key areas for reform include enhancing student attendance, fostering more active classroom participation, involving students in research activities, and improving writing skills. Additionally, the study highlights the need for improvements in the quality of written examinations system and recommends that the curriculum be more aligned with real-world applications and focused on skill development.

Keywords: *Teaching learning, Internal assessment, Semester system, Classroom performance, Attendance, written examination.*

1. Introduction

Nepal has long been recognized as a center of spiritual knowledge, a land where sages and seers meditated, and a sacred space for ascetics (Acharya, 1958; Swar, 1980). Philosophers, scholars, and spiritual sages such as Maharshi Yajnavalkya and Ved Vyasa, the author of the Puranas and the Mahabharata, contributed to the region's reputation as a hub of intellectual and spiritual thought (Altekar, 1944). Women like Gargi also played a significant role in this legacy (Shah, 2024). Visionaries like Kausika, the seer of the Gayatri Mantra, meditated along the Koshi River in eastern Nepal, while Jaimini, the founder of Mimamsa philosophy, and sage Jadabharata engaged in penance along the Gandaki River (Shah, 2024). Similarly, the poet Valmiki, moved by the sorrow of a bird's death, found creative expression in this land. Nepal is also the birthplace of Maharshi Panini, the pioneer of Sanskrit grammar, and holds the distinction of being the birthplace of Lord Buddha, the messenger of peace (Swar, 1980; Shah, 2024). Buddha's teachings of non-violence, mutual friendship, truth, and compassion

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have inspired the world (Wood, 1958). These historical contributions underline Nepal's rich spiritual and intellectual heritage (Sharma, 1962; Amatya, 1983).

Throughout various periods, sages and seers resided on this sacred land, dedicating themselves to study, teaching, and creative writing (Swar, 1980; Aryal, 1970). In doing so, they passed on their knowledge to the next generation in a variety of settings, including homes, hermitages, religious sites, monasteries, temples, rest houses, and courtyards (Bajracharya, 1974). Over time, this tradition became more organized, eventually evolving into formal systems of education (Bhattarai, 1968; Shah, 2024). This transformation led to the establishment of schools, colleges, and universities. Initially, these institutions were created through individual efforts, but they gradually developed into formal organizations designed to meet the needs of the state (Daniel, 1972; Bhattarai, 1968).

Until the medieval period in Nepal's history, education was primarily focused on religious and moral teachings. However, as societal needs evolved, modern education, particularly English education, began to emerge (Upadhyaya, 1922; Aryal, 1970). In the early modern period, General Bhimsen Thapa recognized the importance of incorporating English education alongside traditional teachings (Sharma, 1990; Maskey, 1996). This shift was largely influenced by the growing presence of the British East India Company in India. Proficiency in English became essential for understanding British administrative systems and facilitating diplomatic interactions. Following the Treaty of Sugauli in 1815 AD, the need for English education became more evident, especially for official correspondence and dealings with the British Resident in Nepal (Kumar, 1967). To address this, General Bhimsen Thapa invited English teachers from Bengal, India, who were skilled in English and also rooted in Hindu traditions (Whelpton, 2005; Upadhyaya, 1922). In a related development, Nepal's first Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief, General Mathabar Singh Thapa, highlighted the significance of English education by requesting, in 1835 AD, to enroll his sons in a government school in Patna, India. This marked a key moment in Nepal's gradual adoption of modern education systems (Sharma, 2015).

In 1853, Jung Bahadur Rana established a school within the Thapathali Durbar premises, where subjects such as English, Bengali, Hindi, Sanskrit, history, geography, and mathematics were taught by appointed teachers (Shah, 2024). This school was later relocated to the Char Burja Durbar within the Thapathali complex, which is considered the precursor to the Durbar School (Kumar, 1967). During Jung Bahadur's tenure, more than 50 teachers were associated with various educational institutions across Nepal (Shrestha, 1981). Notably, education in English, Sanskrit, and Buddhist studies was introduced in Kathmandu. Jung Bahadur also initiated a programme to send selected individuals to study in Calcutta on scholarships, reflecting the Rana rulers' preference for Western education, particularly for their descendants (Sharma, 1990; Upraity, 1962). However, such educational opportunities were restricted to the elite, while the general public had no access to these facilities. Additionally, some affluent families continued the traditional practice of hiring private tutors (pandits) to educate their children at home, maintaining a parallel system of learning alongside formal educational initiatives (Sharma, 2012). Tribhuvan-Chandra College was established in September 1918, initially offering the Intermediate of Arts (IA) programme, which later expanded to include science subjects. Regular classes began in September 1919 (Pangeni, 2019). The Intermediate of Arts curriculum included subjects such as Sanskrit, history, philosophy, and compulsory English and Nepali, while the Intermediate of Science (I Sc) programme offered physics, chemistry, and mathematics (Landon, 1928; Sharma, 2015).

1.1. Evolution of Tribhuvan University: A Single and National University

Following the enactment of the Tribhuvan University Act, 2016, the inaugural meeting of the University Council was held on Tuesday, June 14, 1959, at the royal palace, marking the formal establishment of Tribhuvan University (Sharma, 1987; Pangeni, 2019). The meeting was chaired by Vice-Chancellor Suvarna Shamsher Rana and attended by Treasurer Khadganarasimha Rana, Sardar Hansman Singh (member), Secretary of Education Keshar Bahadur K.C. (member), and members Sharadaprasad Upadhyaya and Bhairav Bahadur Pradhan. The meeting was convened under the chairmanship of Chancellor Her Majesty the Senior Queen Kanti Rajyalakshmi Shah, with Pro-Chancellor Her Majesty the Junior Queen Ishwari Rajyalakshmi Shah and Royal Visitor His Majesty

Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology
ISSN: 2576-8484
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King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev also in attendance (Sharma, 1987). During the meeting, participants were informed of the Council of Ministers' decision on June 12, 1959, to implement the remaining sections of the Tribhuvan University Act, 1959, effective June 14, 1959, in accordance with Sub-section 3 of Section 1, Chapter 1 of the Act (Pangeni, 2019). The meeting also communicated the dissolution of the University Commission under the Chancellor and Pro-Chancellor and the official inauguration of Tribhuvan University in compliance with legal procedures.

Prior to the establishment of Tribhuvan University, most colleges in Nepal were affiliated with Patna University and Calcutta University in India. As a result, the curriculum, examinations, results, and other administrative systems were governed by the regulations and acts of these Indian institutions. Similarly, Tribhuvan University initially operated under an act modeled after the Patna University Act (Pangeni, 2019). During the early phase of its academic activities, all aspects related to the curriculum, textbooks, and examinations - except for those in the Nepali language - were conducted under the direct or indirect supervision and assistance of Patna University. This arrangement was formally acknowledged by the university committee.

Although Tribhuvan University had initiated postgraduate classes, organizing examinations for the intermediate and bachelor's levels at other colleges from the very first year proved to be a complex task (Sharma, 2015). Additionally, the curriculum of Patna University was largely followed, and in the initial years, examinations were conducted with the direct involvement of Patna University. It is noteworthy that during its early years, Tribhuvan University adopted a two-year curriculum for each level but administered examinations for both the first and second years simultaneously in the second year (Pangeni, 2019). After all colleges in the country were brought under the jurisdiction of Tribhuvan University, the university assumed responsibility for managing the curriculum, textbooks, teaching standards, and examinations. However, Tribhuvan University allowed the continuation of teaching, training, and examination arrangements under the existing system for students preparing for the 1959 supplementary examinations from Indian universities that were previously affiliated with Nepali colleges, such as Patna University, Sanskrit College of Banaras University, and Bihar University (Pangeni, 2019).

Although examinations for university students were initially intended to be conducted only in the second year, the university had to organize examinations in 1960 for second-year students from other colleges who were enrolled in both academic levels. To administer these examinations, the university established an "Examination Board" (Shakya, 1984). As the number of subjects offered by the university expanded, alongside the increase in colleges, academic levels, and available disciplines, the student population grew steadily each year. In response to these developments, the university formed examination boards or committees as required to manage the growing demand for examinations. Significantly, during the 11th meeting of the Tribhuvan University Committee held on December 30, 1959, a formal "Examination Board" was officially constituted to oversee and manage all aspects of examination administration (Pangeni, 2019).

In 1961, during its second year, Tribhuvan University was required to conduct examinations for its own students. As a result, a "Board of Examinations" was established in accordance with the principles outlined in the regulations approved by the Postgraduate Council for MA, BL, and B.Ed. examinations (Pangeni, 2019). This board was tasked with overseeing the 1961 MA, BL, and B.Ed. examinations, as well as the annual and supplementary examinations for 1962. These examinations covered programmes such as MA, BL, B.Ed., IA, ISC, I.Com., BA, B.Sc., and B.Com. The examinations were conducted annually under the supervision of examination boards formed by the university. Initially, many examination-related tasks were managed by Patna University, but these responsibilities were progressively transferred to Tribhuvan University. Over time, the university introduced new systems for conducting examinations to address emerging needs and challenges (Shakya, 1984). This section explores the key developments and processes associated with these examinations.

From the commencement of its academic programmes, Tribhuvan University conducted annual examinations for students across all levels (Upadhyay, 2001). However, in 1971, the introduction of the National Education System Plan (NESP-1971) in higher education brought about the implementation of the semester system, requiring examinations to be conducted every six months for each semester

Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology
ISSN: 2576-8484
Vol. 8, No. 6: 8986-9005, 2024
DOI: 10.55214/25768484.v8i6.3926

(Pangeni, 2019). This system was a novel approach for Tribhuvan University (Sharma, 2005). Despite adopting the semester system, the university continued to administer annual and partial examinations under the previous system (Pangeni, 2023). Over time, dissatisfaction among students, coupled with recommendations from various committees and commissions, led the university to revert to the annual examination system.

1.2. Implementation of Semester Examination System: The Ray of New Hope

Under the National Education System Plan (NESP, 1971), Tribhuvan University announced the abolition of the existing examination system, effective until 1971 AD, and the introduction of the "semester examination system" starting from July 16, 1972 AD. However, during the transitional phase, colleges and educational institutions that were in the process of integrating various subjects into institutes were granted special provisions (Pangeni, 2019). Students who had already enrolled but had not completed their studies were permitted to do so under the previous regulations. Similarly, students who had completed their studies but failed their examinations were allowed to retake their exams based on the old curriculum until 1975 AD (Pangeni, 2019). Certificates were issued to those who passed, with lower-level certificates granted by the Dean and higher-level certificates issued by the university. These certificates explicitly stated that the individual had completed their studies under the old course.

After two years of implementing the semester system, certain modifications were introduced in 1974 based on the lessons learned. These adjustments clarified the objectives of the semester system, prioritizing a stronger and more direct alignment between teaching and assessment (Pangeni, 2019). The focus was on enhancing the educational value of the system by ensuring the continuous evaluation of students' progress and achievements. This approach aimed to provide a more accurate measure of students' academic performance while promoting overall educational excellence. The ultimate goal was to establish a system where continuous assessment became the cornerstone for effectively evaluating students' academic growth. A provision was established to allow the organization of additional semesters at each campus, beyond the two regular semesters. These additional semesters were designed to be conducted during vacation periods, as needed, with a fixed duration of 45 days. The workload for these additional semesters, including coursework and examinations, was generally set at half that of regular semesters. Priority was given to students who were unable to attend the regular semesters. All necessary regulations governing these additional semesters were to be determined by the respective Academic Councils.

In educational institutions, it is common for students across various institutes to take examinations and complete them in accordance with the guidelines established by their respective Academic Councils Pangeni, 2019). Examinations were typically divided into two categories: "internal assessments" and "semester examinations". Internal assessments were conducted through periodic tests and assigned academic tasks, such as projects or assignments, with the marks earned being made publicly available (Pangeni, 2023). Each subject included three periodic examinations, and the internal assessment marks were calculated based on the combined scores from these tests and academic tasks.

1.3. Restoration the Annual Examination System: Is It Demand of the Day?

After a decade, in 1981, Tribhuvan University reinstated the annual examination system. Under this system, master's degree examinations for subjects with a full mark of 100 were conducted over a duration of four hours, while certificate- and undergraduate-level examinations were three hours long. Moreover, students were required to pass both internal and annual examinations separately (Sharma, 2005). Although each paper in the annual examination system carried a full mark of 100, only 80 marks were considered in the calculation of the final result. For private candidates, each paper was also assigned a full mark of 100. Additionally, under this system, students who failed to appear for the first-year examinations were not permitted to advance to the second-year class (Pangeni, 2019).

Following the decision by the university's executive committee to implement the annual examination system in higher education, new regulations were introduced to ensure that examinations were conducted in a more organized, academic, and dignified manner (Sharma, 2005). The regulation, known as the 'Regulation on Annual Examinations,' was immediately enforced across both Tribhuvan

Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology
ISSN: 2576-8484
Vol. 8, No. 6: 8986-9005, 2024
DOI: 10.55214/25768484.v8i6.3926

University campuses and private institutions. This regulation outlined key terms such as the 'Examination Control Office' and 'Examination Controller.' Additionally, it specified that the examination conducted by Tribhuvan University annually, at a fixed time, would be referred to as the 'annual examination.' The 'Examination Control Office,' established for the purpose of conducting examinations under Tribhuvan University, was formally recognized under this regulation, with its head designated as the Examination Controller (Sharma, 1987). As part of the annual examination system, each campus was required to conduct an internal evaluation exam midway through the academic year. Students who failed or were absent from this exam were given the opportunity to retake it, in accordance with the regulations and the campus's available resources. However, students who failed the internal evaluation for any subject were not permitted to sit for the annual examination for that subject.

1.4. Restoration of Semester System under Tribhuvan University: Instability or Reality

The semester system, previously introduced during the National Education System Plan (NESP) period (1971-1975 AD) and discontinued in 1979 AD (Upadhyaya, 2002), has been reinstated, emphasizing its advantages (Maskey, 1996). Consequently, the university has reintroduced this innovative and globally relevant higher education system, the semester system, through its departments and open distance learning programmes. The semester system has remained a significant agenda in the meetings of the Faculty Board of Education, beginning with the meeting held on July 16, 2011 AD (Official Minute Record, 2011).

According to the record, the meeting decided to introduce the semester-based, four-year Bachelor of Teacher Education (B Ed) programme as a regular higher education programme, and the Bachelor of Teacher Education (B Ed) and Master of Teacher Education (M Ed) programmes in Open Distance Learning mode (Pangeni, 2019). The Board meeting held on September 23, 2012 decisively approved the accreditation of Physics Education at Mahendra Ratna Campus and Biology Education at Sanothimi Campus and Gorkha Campus. Similarly, the Board meeting on June 11, 2013 AD approved the implementation of a semester-based programme in Nepali Education, Health Education, and Curriculum and Evaluation at the Master's level through Open Distance Learning (Pangeni, 2019).

Beginning with the academic year 2014/2015 AD, Tribhuvan University launched the first phase of the university-level semester system at University Campus and Central Departments, drawing on the experiences gained from implementing the semester system in individual subjects (Pangeni, 2019). However, the transition from the annual education programmes to the semester system is still ongoing and has not yet been fully completed (Jha, 1987). The semester-based programmes in higher education have been gradually expanded, moving from one subject and department to others, and from M.Phil. programmes downwards, through continuous trial, feedback, and implementation.

1.5. Objectives of the Study

- To explore the lived experiences of master's degree students in English and Biology Education regarding the internal assessment in the semester system.

1.6. Research Questions of the Study

- How do master's degree students of English and Biology education perceive their internal assessments within the semester system?
- Which aspects of internal assessments within the semester system at the master's level require improvement?

2. Literature Review

This section provides a comprehensive review of the pertinent literature for the present article. The review commences with an analysis of the semester system, followed by a discussion of the reforms implemented in the assessment system. Subsequently, the literature on cognitive and non-cognitive skills is presented and critically analyzed. Finally, the review concludes with an exploration of the influence of bias in testing.

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ISSN: 2576-8484
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2.1. Semester System

The term *semester* originates from the Latin word *semestris*, meaning "six-monthly." In early 19th-century American usage, the term evolved from its original German connotation of a six-month academic period to denote a summer break typically lasting between fifteen and eighteen weeks (Mallah, et. al. 2023). Over time, the term came to describe the two primary divisions of the academic year adopted by many universities in the United States and other countries (Lin, et. al. 2016). Hamat, et.al. 2017). The semester system is an educational framework that divides the academic year into two sessions, each approximately six months in duration. Derived from the term *semester*, which signifies a "six-month period," this system has increasingly replaced the annual model in Indian universities. Its adoption for both undergraduate and postgraduate education is widely regarded as a progressive reform in the academic structure (Turel & Serenko 2020).

Literally, semester signifies half a year or one of the two divisions of an academic year, typically lasting 15 to 18 weeks each. A semester refers to either of the two usually 18-week periods of instruction into which an academic year is often divided or, more broadly, a period of six months. In other words, a semester as an alternative approach to segmenting the academic year into periods of student activity, employed by some institutions as a substitute for the traditional three-term model. This system, originating from North American higher education, organizes the academic year into two semesters. The semester system is an academic structure where each academic year is divided into two semesters. It provides a clear framework for teaching, learning, and assessing student performance in university programmes. Specifically, the academic year is divided into two independent semesters: Odd (July to December) and Even (January to June). This system is designed to organize coursework delivery, evaluate student progress, and ensure systematic monitoring of academic performance. In this way, the semester system serves as an effective approach to managing teaching, learning, and assessment within university programmes and their affiliated units.

Universities employ various systems to facilitate the education of students, with the two predominant models being the semester system and the annual system. In the annual system, examinations are conducted at the conclusion of a complete academic year, whereas in the semester system, assessments occur every five to six months. These systems exhibit notable differences in their structure and implementation. This paper aims to critically examine the advantages and disadvantages of both the semester and annual systems.

Malone (1946) observed that the semester system was initially articulated using academic terminology. Originally, it referred to a two-term educational structure, dividing the academic year into two parts. Over time, however, its meaning expanded to include three-term or even four-term systems of education. Similarly, Roshiah (1979) defined the semester system as a type of academic calendar in which the academic year is divided into two or more distinct divisions, each being self-contained in terms of course content and examinations. Patil (1984) emphasized that the primary objective of the semester system was to provide students with a meaningful and comprehensive education. The philosophy and essence of the semester system were aligned with addressing the challenges posed by a scientifically and technologically advancing society, thereby contributing to socio-economic transformation in a peaceful and systematic manner.

The semester system fosters continuous and interactive learning through regular assessments like mid-terms, quizzes, and assignments, promoting consistent engagement and incremental understanding. In contrast, the annual system relies on a single year-end evaluation, often leading to high-pressure, inconsistent study patterns. The semester system's distributed assessments provide a more balanced and sustainable academic experience. Khattak et al. (2011) found that most teachers preferred the semester system for its close student-teacher interaction, learner-centered approach, and continuous performance evaluation. In contrast, the annual system was seen as less focused on student performance. Notably, 80% of teachers viewed the semester system as a "modern necessity" and favored its structure over the annual system. Similarly, Pabla (2014) argued that the annual system is better suited for true education, noting that the semester system, borrowed from abroad, succeeds under specific conditions. In India, teachers could focus more on teaching and extracurricular activities, making the annual system more appropriate and suggesting the need to revert to it.

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Neog (2020) highlighted challenges in the semester system at the undergraduate level, noting increased student workload and a focus on exams over co-curricular activities. Only 40% of students studied concepts thoroughly, with many showing limited interest in deeper understanding. The study also found higher scoring potential due to internal evaluations and frequent syllabus completion delays. Similarly, Mehmood et, al. (2014) examined students' and teachers' perspectives on Pakistan's semester system in higher education. Students found it knowledge-based, performance-oriented, and effective in enhancing presentation skills and fostering a positive learning environment. However, it increased instructors' workload and raised concerns about favoritism, bias, and limited time for extracurricular activities. Despite these issues, most teachers viewed the semester system favorably. Accordingly, Bista (2016) conducted a survey on teachers' attitudes toward the semester system in mathematics education and found that teachers generally favored this approach. The study concluded that the semester system was more effective compared to the annual system.

2.2. Reform in Assessment System

Since the early 1990s, researchers have recognized that student grades often reflect a blend of sometimes conflicting value systems held by individual teachers or schools, rather than accurately representing a student's ability to synthesize and apply skills within a broader community context (Brookhart, 1993; Brookhart et al., 2016; Lipnevich et al., 2020). The transition to the 100-point/A-F grading scale was, in part, aimed at simplifying grading for secondary teachers, particularly as student populations grew substantially in the early 20th century. However, this shift was not driven by the belief that the 100-point system was the most effective means of reporting student achievement (Brookhart, 1993; Brookhart et al., 2016; Guskey, 1996; Lee, 2020). Despite the continued widespread use of the 100-point/A-F scale for reporting student achievement at the secondary level, Brookhart et al. (2016) noted that recent efforts have increasingly focused on reforming or replacing traditional grading practices.

The issues associated with the 100-point/A-F grading scale became evident shortly after its introduction, prompting the first attempts to reform grading practices. One of the earliest efforts at reform was the introduction of the bell curve in the 1930s, designed to standardize grading by aligning student performance with a predictable distribution (Brookhart et al., 2016; Guskey, 1996; Vatterott, 2015). However, this approach had its limitations and did not fully resolve the underlying problems with the grading system. A key issue highlighted by Olsen and Buchanan (2019) is the harmful effect of using grades as a form of punishment. When teachers use grades to reward or punish students for cognitive (academic) and non-cognitive (behavioral or social) tasks, it can be detrimental to students' learning. For instance, a teacher may lower a student's grade not based on their academic performance but as a means of encouraging compliance or promoting specific behaviors, which can negatively impact students' motivation and overall learning experience.

Research has demonstrated that teachers' personal biases can significantly affect their grading practices. Numerous studies have shown that teachers' subjective judgments about students - whether based on personal perceptions or stereotypes - can influence the grades students receive. These biases may impact both the assessment process and the final grades, potentially resulting in unfair or inconsistent grading outcomes (Angelo & Reis, 2021; Brookhart, 1993; Brookhart et al., 2016; Bygren, 2020; Finn et al., 2019; Guskey & Link, 2019; Quinn, 2020; Urhahne & Wijnia, 2021). This underscores the importance of adopting more objective and equitable grading practices that accurately reflect students' true abilities and achievements, free from external influences or personal biases.

2.3. Non-Cognitive Assignments

Brookhart et al. (2016) noted that teacher gradebooks often contain a combination of cognitive and non-cognitive tasks. Cognitive tasks are those that directly assess a student's academic knowledge and skills, such as tests or quizzes, and are relatively straightforward to identify and evaluate. In contrast, non-cognitive tasks are more subjective and can include factors such as effort, behavior, growth over time, the manner in which assignments are submitted, and the time spent on tasks. These non-cognitive

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ISSN: 2576-8484
Vol. 8, No. 6: 8986-9005, 2024
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factors can complicate the interpretation of what a grade truly indicates about a student's academic performance (Olsen & Buchanan, 2019; Guskey & Link, 2019).

The inclusion of non-cognitive tasks in grading can have significant implications. Angelo and Reis (2021) observed that when teachers factor in non-cognitive aspects, they may unintentionally introduce biases. Specifically, they found that female students often receive higher grades than male students, as girls are frequently perceived as more amenable (p. 105) or cooperative in traditional learning environments. This perception may lead teachers to reward girls for behaviors such as following instructions, staying organized, and being attentive - behaviors that are often considered non-cognitive elements of learning. Consequently, these non-academic traits can influence grades in ways that do not accurately reflect students' academic abilities or achievements, potentially resulting in gender biases in grading.

Guskey (2020) categorized cognitive and non-cognitive grading tasks into three distinct groups: process criteria, progress criteria, and product criteria. Product criteria encompass summative assignments that carry high point values, which Guskey (2020) noted are commonly used as evidence of what a student is capable of achieving. Progress criteria, on the other hand, focus on the cognitive and non-cognitive steps students take while demonstrating or creating a product (Guskey, 2020). Guskey (2020) defined process criteria as primarily involving effort, classwork submission, and homework. When teachers assign equal value to non-cognitive assessments (process criteria) as they do to cognitive assessments (product criteria), they risk inflating the value of formative tasks and diminishing the significance of summative tasks in determining the final course grade (Guskey, 2020).

While rewarding or encouraging students with high grades may offer some benefits, Olsen and Buchanan (2019) highlighted that this approach predominantly affects high-achieving students. Guskey (1996) argued that low grades should not be used as a form of punishment, as such practices have no legitimate place in education. Olsen and Buchanan (2019) criticized this behavior, describing it as teachers wielding grades as both the "sword and the shield" (p. 2005). Similarly, a student who consistently neglects homework may face significant consequences if the teacher places substantial weight on the non-cognitive task of homework in the grading formula. In contrast, a teacher who assigns minimal value to homework would have only a limited impact on that student's grade.

Griffin and Townsley (2021) underscored the potential risks associated with overemphasizing non-cognitive tasks in their study, which analyzed the final grades of 795 high school students in mathematics. They specifically investigated "the extent to which students' grades were inflated or deflated due to the inclusion of homework and employability scores in the grading process" (p. 1). In their study, Griffin and Townsley (2021) defined employability scores as "points awarded to students as part of their grades that reflect 21st-century skills demonstrated within the classroom environment" (p. 2). These skills encompassed class participation, citizenship, and the punctuality of work submission. By isolating the averages for homework and employability scores for each student, the researchers discovered that" 336(43.2%) students had their grades inflated or deflated by 5% or more, and 97(12.6%) students had their grades inflated or deflated by 10% or more" (Griffin & Townsley, 2021, p. 2).

2.4. Problem of Biasness

Urhahne and Wijnia (2021) conducted a review on how teachers make judgments about their students and found that biases can influence these judgments. They observed that teachers often form different expectations based on factors such as gender, the student's academic level, and the perceived difficulty of the class. Teachers were more likely to view well-adjusted or emotionally stable students favorably, while they tended to make negative judgments about students who exhibited behaviors such as messiness or hyperactivity. Additionally, the study revealed that male students who were organized and neat in their work received higher grades compared to their messier peers, even when the academic quality of their work was identical. The researchers also noted that teachers often provided more favorable treatment to students who were perceived as physically attractive or possessed stronger social skills.

Finn et al. (2019) conducted a study examining how teachers perceive and grade students with different body types, with a particular focus on obese students. Their findings indicated that teachers

Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology
ISSN: 2576-8484
Vol. 8, No. 6: 8986-9005, 2024
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often harbor negative stereotypes about obese students, viewing them as lazy, less intelligent, and less socially desirable compared to their peers. This bias can significantly impact the way these students are treated in the classroom, influencing both their learning experiences and interactions with teachers. The study also revealed that while grading on academic tasks such as mechanics and structure remained consistent between obese and non-obese students, obese students generally received slightly lower grades overall. This suggests that, despite teachers evaluating academic work according to the same criteria, other factors-likely related to the biases or perceptions held by the teachers - resulted in lower grades for obese students. This phenomenon highlights the subtle ways in which biases can affect students' academic outcomes, even when teachers believe they are grading objectively. However, it is important to consider the limitations of Finn et al.'s (2019) study. The sample size was relatively small, with only 133 teachers from the UK participating, which raises concerns about the generalizability of the findings. The study may not fully represent the experiences of all teachers or students, particularly in different regions or educational contexts. While the study provides valuable insights into teacher bias, the small sample size suggests that further research with larger, more diverse samples is necessary to confirm these findings and explore the extent to which such biases may be pervasive.

Quinn (2020) examined the issue of racial bias in teachers' evaluations, particularly focusing on how teachers may "give a racially biased evaluation of student work" (p. 375). This bias can have significant implications, as Quinn argued that the evaluations teachers make today influence their expectations of students in the future. Such biased evaluations affect both short-term performance and long-term educational trajectories, as future educators may form expectations based on these biased assessments. This cyclical pattern perpetuates racial inequities in education, as teachers may unintentionally set lower expectations for certain racial groups, influenced by stereotypes or preconceived notions.

In Quinn's (2020) study, 1,549 teachers in the United States were presented with a writing sample from a second-grade student. The only difference between the two samples was the student's name: one sample had a stereotypically Black name (Dashawn), while the other had a stereotypically Caucasian name (Connor). The study revealed that teachers were 4.7% less likely to rate the writing sample from Dashawn as being at grade level, despite both samples being identical in terms of content. This finding highlight how racial bias can affect teachers' evaluations, even when the work being assessed is of equal quality. Moreover, Quinn (2020) discovered that female teachers exhibited an even higher degree of bias, being 7% less likely than their male counterparts to rate the Dashawn sample as being at grade level. This suggests that gender, in addition to race, may also influence how teachers perceive and assess students' work.

Further research by Guskey and Link (2019) supported the idea that teachers' internal biases can be addressed through professional development. Their study found that, unlike some previous assumptions by Brookhart et al. (2016), teachers' grading practices did not naturally improve over time without intentional intervention. This implies that professional development programmes can play a crucial role in helping teachers recognize and confront their biases, potentially improving the fairness and accuracy of their assessments. Guskey and Link's (2019) findings also indicated that effort, often considered a significant factor in grading by teachers, was not as impactful on grades as previously thought, suggesting that other factors such as biases might play a larger role in grading decisions than teachers might realize. This highlights the importance of focusing on improving grading practices and addressing biases through targeted professional development initiatives.

2.5. Gaps in the Knowledge, Methods and Process

A review of the existing literature indicates that while extensive research has been conducted on assessment systems, studies focusing specifically on the semester system of Tribhuvan University remain limited. Although certain investigations have examined the master's degree semester system within the university, there is a noticeable absence of systematic research on the components such as attendance, classroom activities, term papers writing, and written examinations. To address these gaps, this study includes unexplored dimensions of the semester system. Furthermore, as most existing studies are grounded in quantitative survey methodologies, this research adopts a qualitative

Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology
ISSN: 2576-8484
Vol. 8, No. 6: 8986-9005, 2024
DOI: 10.55214/25768484.v8i6.3926

phenomenological approach to provide deeper insights into the phenomenon and lived experiences of the participants.

2.6. Research Method and Materials

This study utilized a qualitative research design, which encompasses five traditions: biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Creswell, 1998). According to Creswell, the choice of design depends on the research focus. Biography explores an individual's experiences, while grounded theory develops a theory from interview data. Ethnography examines group behaviors through interviews and observations, and case study investigates a specific case within a defined context using multiple data sources. Phenomenology aims to uncover the essence of meaning behind a phenomenon (Creswell, 1998).

The study employed a phenomenological design, rooted in Husserl's philosophy, to uncover the essence of a phenomenon through shared lived experiences (van Manen, 2002; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology examines how things appear in human experience and their meanings, seeking to reveal the "essences of human experience" through participants' narratives (Hatch, 2002; Groenewald, 2004). It aims to interpret how individuals construct meaning from their experiences and understand the significance of everyday life (Creswell, 1998; Van Manen, 1990).

> *Rooted in philosophy and psychology, the assumption is that there are many ways of interpreting the same experiences and that the meaning of the experience to each person is what constitutes reality. This belief is characteristic of all qualitative studies, but the element that distinguishes phenomenology from other qualitative approaches is that the subjective experience is at the center of the inquiry.* (pp. 471-472)

Phenomenology explores lived experiences to uncover the essence of a phenomenon, focusing on what was experienced and how it was experienced (van Manen, 1990; Moustakas, 1994). It integrates philosophical inquiry with qualitative methods, emphasizing meaning-making and the subject-object relationship (Husserl, 1999; Shah & Al Bargi, 2013). Data is collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed thematically or interpretatively, uncovering shared meanings while minimizing researcher bias (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). By setting aside assumptions, it provides deep insights into participants' perspectives and tacit understandings (Creswell, 2013; Cohen, 1987).

This study utilized a qualitative interpretive phenomenology design to explore lived experiences within natural, locally constructed realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Phenomenology seeks to uncover the essence of a phenomenon by examining how individuals experience and interpret it, suspending researcher assumptions (Laverty, 2003; Moran, 2000). Interpretive phenomenology identifies themes and explores meaning-making through interview-based data, thematic analysis, and researcher expertise (van Manen, 1997; Creswell, 2013). Rooted in the hermeneutic tradition, it emphasizes subjective experiences, situated freedom, and the interplay between description and interpretation to reveal deeper meanings (Smith, 2006; Moran, 2000). Phenomenology includes both inductive and deductive approaches. The inductive approach follows three steps: (i) observation, (ii) identification of patterns, and (iii) drawing generalizations based on these patterns (Khaldi, 2017). This study adopted an inductive approach, as interpretivists view theory as emerging from data collection rather than driving the research (Grix, 2004; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). The aim was to gather participants' experiences, identify patterns, and form generalizations, while acknowledging the subjective nature of each individual's lived experience.

This study aims to explore the lived experiences of eight master's degree students from English and Biology Education group regarding internal assessments at Tribhuvan University. It focuses on their perceptions of attendance, classroom participation, term paper writing, and examinations. The participants, selected through convenient sampling, included four students each from English and Biology Education, all enrolled in the Second semester of the MEd programme at Sanothimi Campus. In this study, students from the English education group are denoted by the letter *'E,'* and students from the biology education group are denoted by the letter *'B.'*

Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology
ISSN: 2576-8484
Vol. 8, No. 6: 8986-9005, 2024
DOI: 10.55214/25768484.v8i6.3926

In this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with the participants. Eight selected participants were interviewed for an hour each. Discussions explored various aspects of the internal assessment system implemented under the semester system, including attendance, classroom presentations, term paper writing, written examination and other related components. The interviews examined both the strengths and weaknesses of the system, as well as areas requiring improvement, from multiple perspectives.

This phenomenological study followed a systematic approach to data analysis, including identifying the phenomenon, conducting interviews, highlighting themes, and publishing findings. The researcher employed bracketing to minimize bias during interactions and interpretations. Initial interviews focused on building trust and rapport while collecting students' lived experiences through structured interviews. Participants were asked to bring materials related to their internal assessments, which were used as prompts to help them recall their experiences. Notes from the first interview informed the second meeting, where discussions delved deeper into their experiences. The interviews generated over 400 pages of transcripts, which were analyzed to identify seven key themes. The study concluded by presenting the complexities, challenges, and benefits of the internal assessment process.

3. Results

Based on discussions with the participants, this study primarily developed five themes: attendance, performance assessment, term paper writing, open-response questions, and written examinations. These themes are presented as follows:

3.1. Understanding the Semester System

Students are the focal point in an educational system. The semester system can only be successful if the development of knowledge, skills, and concepts in students occurs effectively. The primary foundation of the semester system is the successful classroom delivery and effective student assessment. The understanding of knowledge, regularity, course content, and teaching methodologies are considered fundamental elements of the semester system. However, the successful implementation of the semester system is quite challenging. The semester system was introduced in place of the annual system to produce high-quality human resources in the education system. The definition of the semester system and students' perceptions are also crucial for its effective implementation and overall success. In response to the question regarding the concept of the semester system, diverse perspectives were observed among the participants. One participant *(E4)* remarked:

> *In my opinion, the system implemented is intended to make teaching and learning, as well as assessment, more effective. However, its effective implementation has not been achieved. Consequently, it has become difficult to clearly define and understand. The real nature of the system, along with its shortcomings in implementation, has made it challenging to comprehend its true meaning and reality.*

Another student of Biology education group *(B3)* from the biology group expressed dissatisfaction with the semester system, presenting their thoughts as follows:

> *In the annual system, we only had to take an exam once a year. However, in the semester system, we have two exams a year. In my opinion, there are some tasks given in between, but overall, there is not much difference.*

Another student *(E3)* from the English group expressed their perception of the semester system as follows:

> *The main objective of the semester system is to make learning effective. However, in classrooms with a large number of students, this method has not been effective. For a few students or irregular students, this system does not hold much significance. Therefore, the failure in its implementation has made it difficult to present its meaning and understand it.*

3.2. Attendance

In the semester system, students are expected to be present and participate in every class, as their learning is assessed through various activities, including quizzes, assignments, group work, and class discussions. These activities help ensure that students are not only absorbing the content but also developing critical thinking and application skills throughout the term. Regular attendance and active

Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology
ISSN: 2576-8484
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participation are thus essential for successfully completing the required credit courses in the semester system, contributing to better academic outcomes and a more engaging learning experience. Thus, the faculty of education at Tribhuvan university has developed a comprehensive curriculum for all four semesters of the master's degree programme, incorporating a dual-assessment system comprising internal and external examinations. Subject teachers at the campus conduct the internal assessment and evaluate each student. The internal assessment accounts for 40 points out of 100 points marks, with 5 points specifically allocated for daily attendance. Students must attend at least 90 percent of the total instructional days to pass. This curriculum enforces strict attendance requirements, making 90 percent attendance the minimum standard for students.

During the deliberation on the mandatory attendance requirement, several significant insights emerged. The participants unanimously acknowledged that this provision is both effective and conducive to fostering academic progress. In this context, one student from the English group *(E2)* stated:

> *I, along with some of my peers, have maintained nearly perfect attendance in classes and actively engaged in regular academic activities, including coursework and study. However, some peers have consistently remained absent yet continue to advance in their studies.*

In this context, the discussion revealed several important points. It was noted that many students hold permanent jobs, which often limits their ability to attend classes regularly. However, it became clear that their academic performance was not significantly affected by their absences. This raised the challenge of balancing strict attendance policies with the need to maintain educational quality. Enforcing rigid attendance requirements may be impractical, while completely disregarding attendance could undermine the learning process. Therefore, it is essential for the Faculty of Education to take this issue seriously and explore alternative strategies. During the discussion, a student from the biology group student *(B1)* proposed adopting online or blended learning methods as a possible solution to address these challenges. He further said:

> *The current approach is impractical. Students often complete their master's degrees without following the core principles of the curriculum. Many graduates with only 20-30% attendance, and this practice is common across the country. To solve this issue, institutions should offer online or blended learning options. Alternatively, they could introduce private study combined with an annual examination system designed for the subject.*

Various universities across the country have implemented the semester system for master's degree programmes. However, the situation remains analogous to that of Tribhuvan University, with significant challenges in ensuring consistent student attendance. Addressing this issue requires serious consideration. In this context, a student *(B4)* specializing in the biology education discipline remarked:

> *Higher education should not be regarded as compulsory for everyone, like primary education. It should be developed as an advanced level of education accessible only to capable individuals. Therefore, the aim of higher education must be defined as producing skilled citizens, and to achieve this, 100 percent attendance of students in classes is absolutely essential.*

3.3. Classroom Participation and Activities

The semester system is centered on the process of learning by doing or active learning. Teachers create a conducive learning environment in the classroom, where students engage in various activities to acquire knowledge and skills. In traditional classrooms, teachers deliver content through lecture methods, and the extent of learning is often judged by how passively and obediently students absorb the material. However, in the semester system, the focus shifts from the teacher to the student, requiring students to be actively involved. Through active participation and engagement in various activities, students take responsibility for their own learning. This type of performance assessment offers an interactive approach for students to demonstrate learning through activities like presentations and collaborative problem-solving. It allows teachers to evaluate students' communication, innovation, and teamwork skills while highlighting their ability to integrate and apply knowledge effectively.

Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology
ISSN: 2576-8484
Vol. 8, No. 6: 8986-9005, 2024
DOI: 10.55214/25768484.v8i6.3926

Additionally, it assesses interpersonal skills such as collaboration and respect for diverse perspectives, as well as intrapersonal abilities like self-awareness and adaptability. This holistic method provides a comprehensive evaluation of students' academic and personal competencies.

In the context of Tribhuvan University, M Ed programme includes both major subjects and core subjects. In different semesters, core courses such as *Foundations of Education*, *Psychology*, *Curriculum and Evaluation*, and *Education and Development* are delivered to students from all major disciplines in a combined group. As a result, conducting classroom presentations for these compulsory subjects is not feasible, as managing presentations for a group of 80 to 100 students is impractical. Classroom presentations by students are another important aspect of internal assessment. In this process, the teacher assigns a presentation topic to each student, and the student delivers the presentation on the given topic. This approach facilitates both learning and assessment. A student from the biology group *(B1)* shared a poignant perspective on the teaching and learning of core subjects:

> *In major subject classes, the large number of students makes it nearly impossible for every individual to engage in activities and learn effectively. Furthermore, in core subject classes at our campus, students from nine different groups - English, Nepali, Mathematics, EPM, Population, Health and Physical Education, Biology, Economics, and ICT - are taught in the same classroom. Under such circumstances, it is difficult to envision effective learning. Teachers also face significant challenges in delivering instruction. Despite the provisions outlined in the curriculum, there is little perceived difference between the semester and annual systems.*

Despite the absence of adequate resources and facilities, instructors are implementing the activities outlined in the curriculum within the classroom, and students are participating in these prescribed activities. However, the effectiveness of learning remains limited. A student from the English department explained the main reason for this:

> *Delivering presentations on topics assigned by the teacher and participating in subsequent discussions can enhance engagement and enjoyment in the classroom. However, the large number of students often diminishes the overall effectiveness of the learning experience and reduces the level of active participation.*

It is seen that teacher often divided students into groups and assigned specific areas for discussion. A designated group leader would then present the group's reflections to the entire class, promoting students' interpersonal skills, communication abilities, and collaborative competencies. However, this approach frequently encounters challenges due to the large class sizes, typically comprising 45 to 50 students, which limits opportunities for every student to serve as a presenter.

The discussion also revealed that not all students actively participate in classroom presentations and discussions, often due to various reasons or hesitations. Additionally, it was observed that many students tend to focus more on strategies to achieve higher grades rather than prioritizing learning and skill development. This observation highlights that students' attitudes and the structured nature of the curriculum serve as barriers to effectively implementing performance assessments in the classroom. Teachers acknowledged that students often focus primarily on the grades associated with assessments rather than on developing learning skills. Consequently, not all students contribute equally to assigned group work. However, it was noted that group sharing and collaboration can still benefit students with lower academic performance.

3.4. Cognitive Abilities (Hard Skills) and Non-cognitive Abilities (Soft Skills)

Cognitive skills are essential mental abilities that enable individuals to learn, think, reason, remember, and collaborate effectively. They facilitate information acquisition, processing, and application in various contexts, such as work, education, and daily life. Encompassing processes like attention, memory, reasoning, problem-solving, and language comprehension, cognition represents a comprehensive set of brain-based capabilities vital for intellectual functioning and meaningful interaction with the world. From a psychological perspective, cognitive and non-cognitive abilities are key to human growth. Cognitive abilities involve gathering, understanding, and processing information, including comprehending objects, their relationships, and fundamental principles. Non-cognitive

Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology
ISSN: 2576-8484
Vol. 8, No. 6: 8986-9005, 2024
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abilities, such as emotional maturity, empathy, and interpersonal skills, enable individuals to navigate diverse situations effectively. When assessing students, it is beneficial to include questions and tasks that cover all levels of Knowledge. In response to the question, *"Do your written exams include questions from all levels?"* a student *(E3)* from the English group provided the following answer:

> *Generally, the questions are focused on the knowledge and comprehension levels. Occasionally, questions from the analysis and evaluation levels are included. However, the assessment tools do not incorporate questions from all levels in a balanced manner. This is because constructing balanced questions requires hard work an understanding of the curriculum, specific grids, and educational taxonomies.*

Non-cognitive skills, or soft skills, include motivation, integrity, attitudes, personal traits, and interpersonal interactions, reflecting personality and behavior patterns. These skills are vital for effective functioning and collaboration and can be developed through supportive environments and guidance. Teacher's involvement plays a key role in fostering these abilities in children. In this context, a student from the biology group shared the following relevant observation:

> *There appears to be minimal application of non-cognitive skills in the classroom. Teachers are not found to actively encourage learning enthusiasm, foster empathy towards others, promote social engagement, or develop a positive outlook towards all. Moreover, these aspects are neither incorporated into the curriculum nor assessed for their development. Due to such factors, our teaching-learning process and higher education system have been unable to achieve qualitative growth.*

Every student needs to develop both cognitive and non-cognitive skills. However, most of the testing tools have a limited focus on fostering students' non-cognitive abilities. This is largely due to examination-oriented teaching, which prioritizes "intellectual education" while neglecting the development of students' social and emotional skills. As a result, students are often treated as test-driven learners rather than as holistic individuals with independent thinking. Integrating non-cognitive skills into pedagogical research and school evaluation systems carries significant practical importance. This approach could address the current imbalance and encourage a more comprehensive view of student development. It is hoped that this study will inspire further discussions within the educational community about the importance of non-cognitive skills and contribute to their enhancement in students.

3.5. Open-Response Questions in The Classroom Delivery

Generally, teachers can assess students' knowledge, skills, and perceptions by asking questions in the classroom, either in groups or individually. However, in large classrooms, this method becomes quite challenging, as it is not feasible to question all students and assess their responses effectively. The use of open-response questions is a highly advanced and challenging assessment technique for learning; however, our current evaluation trends do not fully support its implementation, despite its incorporation into classroom assessment practices.

This assessment technique allows the teacher to evaluate students' understanding of real-world concepts and the relationship between analytical processes. It helps assess students' ability to synthesize information and apply analytical thinking, as well as their ability to connect context and content. All teachers agreed that they have used open-response questions in the classroom to assess students' knowledge and its application in real-world contexts. But the culture of creative questioning is scarcely practiced, particularly at the basic level. Specifically, in subjects such as English and Biology Education, students are often provided with questions directly from the textbook. Many students struggle to solve problems if the questions are modified or if solutions are not provided by the teacher.

Teacher can begin by teaching theoretical concepts and then provide context by applying the theory to real-life situations, linking both the content and context effectively. However, most of the teachers' questions are neither related to the text and real-life contexts nor aligned with the core essence of the lesson. In fact, questions themselves can serve as powerful tools for teaching and can be utilized as a pedagogical approach. A student *(B2)* shared with me:

Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology
ISSN: 2576-8484
Vol. 8, No. 6: 8986-9005, 2024
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Most teachers do not prefer to ask us questions or encourage us to ask questions as part of the teaching-learning process. However, this is not solely the teachers' fault. They face the pressure of completing the course on time. Additionally, it is not feasible to ask questions and engage all students in discussions in a large group setting.

3.6. Paper Writing

A term paper is a formal academic essay typically submitted at the end of a semester. It allows students to showcase their knowledge, skills, and viewpoints on a specific topic. Term papers are research-based, requiring detailed investigation and the use of reliable sources to support arguments. These papers usually range from 10 to 20 pages and may involve different writing formats. Writing a term paper emphasizes original analysis, fosters critical thinking, and encourages the development of unique perspectives. The process involves structured sections, including a title page, introduction, literature review, analysis or discussion, conclusion, and references. Additional elements such as an abstract or methodology may also be included, depending on the requirements. Term paper writing is a valuable tool for evaluating students' research, analytical, and writing abilities. It promotes independent learning and enhances critical thinking skills. Furthermore, it demonstrates students' understanding, skills, perspectives, and capacity to clearly articulate complex ideas about the subject matter.

A novel component incorporated into Tribhuvan University's semester system is academic writing. To promote academic or research-oriented writing, the internal assessment includes three distinct types of assessments. However, effective scholarly writing necessitates instructors who are both qualified and skilled. In addition, educators must possess proficiency in both research and scholarly writing. While the developed curriculum is highly effective in its design, there exists a considerable shortage of skilled human resources necessary for its successful implementation. Moreover, existing faculty members have not been sufficiently familiarized with the newly developed technologies and theoretical frameworks.

Major objective of this task is to develop students' knowledge and skills in conducting brief research. In writing a paper, students typically review relevant literature to address the research objectives and draw conclusions. However, collecting data directly from the field requires considerable time and effort. Nevertheless, this task is generally designed to help students develop an understanding of and skills in short research projects. As an alternative, the teacher can assign a project and have students work in groups. After completing the task, the teacher can conduct interviews to assess the development of students' knowledge, skills, and perceptions. However, due to a lack of timely and proper orientation for teachers, the tasks assigned under this approach tend to vary. In this regard, a complaint from a group of biology student *(B3)* is as follows:

Teachers assign various tasks, including answering questions, preparing research-based reports, or writing reflections on specific topics. The nature of these tasks varies depending on the teacher and subject.

Another English student *(E2)* says:

In our class, the teacher provides content for project preparation to students in groups, and after the submission of the work, the teacher conducts individual interviews to assess each student's knowledge, skills, and understanding of the content related to the project.

There exists a significant gap between the learning outcomes expected by the curriculum and the academic writing practices conducted in the classroom. Although the curriculum aims to develop skills in scholarly writing, teachers are often found assigning basic questions for students to write answers. Some instructors even ask students to write the introduction to research papers. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to possess proficiency in scholarly writing skills.

3.7. Written Examination

Currently, internal and external written examinations play a crucial role in the academic evaluation process across most universities globally. These examinations are widely regarded as the primary

Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology
ISSN: 2576-8484
Vol. 8, No. 6: 8986-9005, 2024
DOI: 10.55214/25768484.v8i6.3926

methods of assessment. In the annual examination system, written tests serve as the sole instrument for comprehensive evaluation. Conversely, the semester system employs a dual evaluation approach, consisting of internal assessment and external written examination. Internal assessments involve diverse strategies to measure students' performance, including attendance, class participation, term paper writing, and written examination. At Tribhuvan University, the semester system's internal assessment incorporates these activities, while external evaluation remains confined to written examinations.

This refers to the common practice of using written examinations as an assessment technique, which is widely employed for both subjective and objective tests. Teachers design test items specifically tailored to assess students' knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. Written examinations are the most frequently utilized method for classroom assessments, as they allow teachers to evaluate a broad range of student competencies in a structured and standardized manner. In the context *(E2)* says:

> *The semester system appears to have been introduced to make the teaching learning and assessment processes more effective. However, the system is expected to emphasize "learning by doing," which has not been fully achieved. Most class time is spent on lectures by teachers, and the evaluation process primarily focuses on written assessments. Consequently, the philosophy, values, and principles of the semester system have not been implemented satisfactorily.*

The effective implementation of the semester system is constrained by several challenges. These include overcrowded classrooms, limited and congested spaces, inadequate seating arrangements, insufficient room for participatory activities, reliance on lecture-based teaching methods by teachers, and a lack of essential physical infrastructure. While the university has developed new curricula and assessment strategies that appear highly effective in design, their practical implementation has been significantly hindered by insufficient resources and facilities. In this context, the insights shared by a student specializing in English are particularly relevant:

> *Semester system represents an effective approach to teaching and learning. However, its implementation poses significant challenges. The absence of dedicated, skilled, and adequately trained teachers, open and spacious classrooms, and sufficient resources and facilities has impeded its success. Additionally, effective monitoring and evaluation by the university, coupled with a firm commitment from the government, are critical for its proper functioning.*

Although written examinations are widely used, they are often not designed to meet high standards. Basic teacher-constructed achievement tests fail to effectively measure students' knowledge, skills, and perceptions related to the subject matter. The lack of extensive classroom discussions and activities, combined with the substandard quality of written examinations, has hindered the semester system from achieving its intended outcomes.

3.8. Problem of Biasness

Until assessment tools are adequately standardized, there remains a considerable risk that responses to subjective questions may be influenced by bias. In internal assessments, the familiarity of teachers with students increases the likelihood of subjective evaluation being affected by preconceived notions. Similarly, in external examinations, various indicators can reveal a student's affiliation with a particular institution, potentially leading to biased judgments. Furthermore, factors such as handwriting style, quality of expression, and other personal attributes may inadvertently influence a teacher's evaluation. Consequently, ensuring complete objectivity in the written examination system to eliminate both favorable and unfavorable biases poses a significant challenge.

In this context, a biology *(B2)* student stated:

Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology
ISSN: 2576-8484
Vol. 8, No. 6: 8986-9005, 2024
DOI: 10.55214/25768484.v8i6.3926

Biasness is a human tendency; it is a natural human trait. Therefore, rather than blaming teachers, it is essential to make written examinations reliable and valid. It is more important to improve the system than to focus on individuals.

Despite the potential financial implications, implementing measures such as dual evaluation of a single answer sheet by two examiners, developing structured outlines for subjective question responses, and preparing of answers in points can significantly mitigate the influence of bias in the assessment of subjective questions. The substantial number of students further complicates the evaluation process. Nonetheless, it is imperative to introduce immediate reforms to enhance the reliability and fairness of written examination evaluations.

4. Conclusion

Tribhuvan University has made several changes to its examination system over time to improve its effectiveness. Initially, when the university was established, the annual examination system was implemented. Later, in 1971, the semester system was introduced. However, within a decade, the semester system was discontinued, and the annual examination system was reinstated. Currently, the semester system has been reintroduced, although the annual examination system remains in place for some Bachelor programmes. However, it is crucial to study whether the semester system is functioning effectively. While students possess a basic understanding of the semester system, they lack a deeper comprehension of its core philosophy and essence. The inability of a key stakeholder, such as the student, to understand the fundamental principles of the system indicates a potential failure in its implementation. The central tenet of the semester system is that effective learning occurs only through active student engagement. Without this understanding and corresponding active participation from students, the system cannot achieve its intended effectiveness. Additionally, despite the introduction of the semester system, irregular student attendance remains a persistent issue. Although an 80% attendance requirement has been mandated, this challenge continues to hinder the system's overall success.

A significant challenge in education is the inability to actively engage all students in classroom activities. While large class size is a major factor, even smaller classes often fail to implement active learning effectively. This issue stems from multiple factors, including insufficient teacher expertise, a lack of spacious and activity-friendly classrooms, limited adoption of democratic teaching earning practices, inadequate institutional support for teachers, and the absence of orientation programmes to familiarize teachers with the curriculum. These challenges have prevented classrooms from achieving the active and participatory learning envisioned by the curriculum.

For effective learning, it is essential to foster open discussions, question-and-answer sessions, debates, and dialogues in the classroom. However, some teachers lack a democratic approach and do not favor open discussions. Additionally, they resist adopting paradigm shifts. This indicates that such teachers are unwilling to transfer their power to students. A classroom with an authoritarian teacher cannot effectively implement the semester system. Moreover, having discussions in the classroom does not automatically create a democratic environment, as teachers must value students' feelings, ideas, and arguments. They must also be able to critically analyze those ideas in a logical manner.

Teachers seem to lack adequate knowledge regarding term paper writing. It is observed that many teachers approach term paper writing with insufficient seriousness. Most teachers who have only completed a master's degree struggle to effectively implement the practice of term paper writing. In contrast, teachers with doctoral degrees generally understand the significance of term papers and are more capable of implementing them successfully. However, due to the prevalent culture in colleges of assigning simple question-and-answer tasks, even these teachers are often found assigning only basic activities. similarly, several challenges have been observed in relation to written examinations. Primarily, efforts to standardize written exams have been inadequate. Additionally, critical aspects such as the development of assessment tools, ensuring their reliability and validity, effective administration of examinations, and systematic evaluation of answer sheets have not received sufficient attention. Consequently, trust in the quality of teaching and learning is steadily diminishing.

Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology
ISSN: 2576-8484
Vol. 8, No. 6: 8986-9005, 2024
DOI: 10.55214/25768484.v8i6.3926

Funding:
The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology
ISSN: 2576-8484
Vol. 8, No. 6: 8986-9005, 2024
DOI: 10.55214/25768484.v8i6.3926

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Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology
ISSN: 2576-8484
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DOI: 10.55214/25768484.v8i6.3926