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Academic Performance Assessment of Students in Higher Education Institution in Nepal: Perspectives of Faculty Members and Students

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore the challenges of assessing student performance from the perspectives of faculty members and students. Student performance is evaluated through formative, summative, and diagnostic assessments during the academic session. A phenomenological research design was employed, using survey questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions with non-teaching staff, faculty members, and students of Bachelor Level and Master Level at Myagdi Multiple Campus (MMC), Beni Bazaar, Nepal. The study is grounded in Bloom's taxonomy, which helps educators specify learning outcomes and evaluate student learning at various cognitive levels. The findings of the study suggest that dual-language testing can be a valuable strategy to enhance student performance and academic outcomes. This study offers insights for educators and policymakers to improve assessment practices and support student success in higher education. Finally, the study concludes that using a dual-language test format enables students to grasp questions more easily, resulting in more accurate answers and improved exam results.

KEYWORDS: Higher education, performance assessment, language comprehension, dual-language testing

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores what faculty members and students perceive about the challenges of student performance assessment during the academic session. This study is conducted with Bachelor's and Master's students, faculty members and employees of

Myagdi Multiple Campus (MMC), Beni Bazaar, Nepal. Student performance assessment is a holistic approach to evaluate students' educational growth and focus on their ability to apply learned skills and knowledge in real-world contexts. Unlike traditional testing methods that emphasize rote memorization, performance assessment measures students' capacity to think critically, solve problems, and demonstrate their learning in a more authentic way. This process requires students to perform tasks that demonstrate their knowledge and skills. This could be anything from writing an essay, conducting a science experiment, delivering a presentation, or even creating a piece of art. The key argument is that students are actively showing their learning, rather than simply recalling information in a test format.

Performance assessment can be used as any of the classic assessments such as summative assessment, formative assessment, and Bloom's taxonomy is a model that describes the cognitive processes of learning and developing mastery of the subject, learning objectives are categorized into six levels: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating (1956). This taxonomy comprises three learning domains: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor, each with a hierarchy corresponding to different levels of learning. The cognitive domain taxonomy was originally developed by Bloom and his collaborators in 1956 and has since undergone revisions, notably by Anderson and Krathwohl in 2001, who redefined the cognitive domain and emphasized the importance of metacognitive knowledge.

Bloom's taxonomy is a classification system that arranges learning objectives into six hierarchical levels, each representing a different cognitive skill. The South African school curriculum encourages an active and critical approach to learning (Department of Basic Education, (2011). The approach aims to ensure that learners remain actively engaged in the learning process who involve in discussions with their faculty members and peers. However, the reality of South African classrooms is that learners take a passive role in learning processes while the faculty members do most of the talking (Msimanga & Lelliott, 2014). A study by Sedova et al. (2019) shows that learners who are given opportunities to talk during lessons, taking an active role in learning, achieve better results than those who talk less. Resnick et al. (2018) suggest that such results are possible because talk enables learners to actively engage with content. They add that conversation also enables learners to develop a repertoire of reasoning skills where they "reason about content, rather than to memorize facts or follow rules to solve a string of similar problems" (p. 331). This entails that conversation promotes the use of a high level of cognition and is therefore valuable in the teaching and learning process. Hence, Khong et al. (2019) maintain that conversation is important in learners' understanding and intellectual development.

This study particularly attempts to identify the issues related to the ways to improve the internal examination systems of MMC for the purpose of scoring higher marks in the board exams conducted by Tribhuvan University (TU). The students of MMC achieve valid questions from the concerned faculty members that would definitely assist the students in order to score higher marks in the board exams. Nevertheless, the data were collected from the faculty members, and students of MMC and employees working in the exam section of the same campus. To address the issues related to students' performance assessment, this study has attempted to answer the questions: What are the perceptions of faculty members who are teaching and employees are working in the exam section regarding the internal examinations conducted by MMC? How do the faculty members relate the scores of internal examinations secured by students of MMC with the scores of the same students in board examinations? And in

what ways do the campus authorities such as Campus Chief, members of the Campus Management Committee, and other stakeholders perceive such formative evaluations so that students get the genuine scores in both internal and external examinations? To address these research questions, this paper aims to identify the perspectives of faculty members on the issues of academic performance of students at MMC with a specific focus on enhancing student outcomes through formative evaluations, including three-term examinations, seminar papers, term paper presentations, practicum, report writing, thesis writing, and thesis proposals. In doing so, the study seeks to contribute to the improvement of academic performance and overall quality of education in the institution.

RESEARCH METHODS

This paper has employed the qualitative research method. This section explains the study site, participants of the study along with the data generation, analysis, and interpretation design. It also notes ethical considerations and procedures for accessing the research field.

The study was conducted at MMC, using students, faculty members, and non-teaching staff as respondents. It adopted a phenomenological approach, combining the Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and semi-structured interviews to gather insights from the faculty members selected through purposive sampling. Unstructured telephone interviewing and Google forms were also utilized as the tool for collecting the required information. This paper is based on the theoretical tenets of Bloom's taxonomy. Bloom's taxonomy enables educators to foster advanced thinking skills in students, from foundational to complex levels, and incorporate these skills into educational goals and assessments, enhancing student learning outcomes.

This study is based on the theoretical tenets of Bloom's taxonomy. According to Bloom, taxonomy helps educators specify learning outcomes and evaluate student learning at various cognitive levels (1969). The data were examined using thematic analysis such as narrative analysis to uncover the key themes and insights. The research method employed in this study has provided a rich and nuanced understanding of the factors influencing academic performance at MMC. Through narrative and thematic analysis, this study has uncovered valuable insights into the perspectives of faculty members on assessment methods and student outcomes. The findings of this study offer practical implications for educators and policymakers, seeking to enhance student academic achievement and institutional effectiveness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study has explored the perspectives of faculty members on the academic performance of students at MMC, which were presented and discussed in light of this study's objectives. The scope of the study was to investigate the factors influencing student academic performance, with a specific focus on formative evaluations, such as three-term examinations, seminar papers, and thesis proposals. The study has gathered insights from the faculty members on strategies to improve student outcomes and inform evidence-based practices to enhance teaching-learning processes. This section highlights the key themes and patterns that emerged from the data, providing a nuanced understanding of the complex factors, shaping student performance in this context.

Results

As presented in Table 1, four faculty members, two employees working in the examination section and two students of MMC were the participants in data collection

process. Two faculty members teaching at Bachelor Level, two faculty members at Masters Level, an employee of examination section, an employee working in examination administration, a student studying at Bachelor Level and a student studying at Master Level were selected as respondents purposively. The faculty members' ages ranged between 37-57 years. Similarly, the age of employees working in the examination section ranged between 42 to 57 whereas the age of students ranged between 20 to 24. In terms of working experiences, two faculty members had more than two decades of working experiences and two faculty members had more than one-decade teaching experience. Moreover, it can be noted that most of the participants mentioned here in this research, have almost one decade working experience at MMC.

Table 1

Demography of the Study

Faculty	Participant	Gender	Participant status	Age	Qualification
Management	Himanshu	Male	Reader	55	M.Phil
Education	Sajag Basanta	Male	Assistant Lecturer	43	M.Ed
Management	Sangita	Female	Assit. Lecturer	37	MBS
Management	Bhadra	Male	Reader	57	8 Pass
Exams Section	Gobinda	Male	Office Assistant	42	+2 pass
Exam Administration	Damber	Male	Lecturer	57	M.A
Education	Guma	Female	Master student	23	B.Ed.
Management	Rajendra	Male	Bachelor student	24	+ 2 Pass

Qualitative data were collected from the student scores in three-terminal examinations, which served as formative evaluations. Narrative analysis and surveying data from Google forms were used to compare the performance of students assessed using Bloom's taxonomy-based questions versus traditional assessment methods.

One of the experienced faculty members compared and contrasted the students' performance assessment between the previous years and the latest years in terms of the TU board results and formative evaluation conducted by MMC recently as he argues,

> I have been teaching at MMC for two decades. Recently, students' performance assessment at Bachelor Level and Master Level is found to be better than the past although the level of students' hard work and dedication seem to be poorer and declining. Likewise, the students' maturity level is lower at present than before. In my opinion, students' performance assessment is showing improvement due to the three term examinations conducted by MMC. Additionally, faculty members take other formative evaluations during an academic year and a semester as well. Finally, I would like to conclude that the TU board results of Bachelor Level and Master Level have been improved due to these assessments and the three term examinations conducted by MMC. However, the internal examination system of MMC have some shortcomings to be improved sooner in the near future.

The statement above suggests that the implementation of regular formative evaluations, specifically the three terminal examinations, has contributed to the improvement in the students' performance assessment at MMC. Despite observing a perceived decline in this level and labor of Bachelor Level students, a faculty member attributes the upward trend in student performance from the structured assessment approach. This implies that the

regular evaluations have helped students to better prepare and demonstrate their knowledge, leading to the improved results in the TU board examinations.

In addition, a closer examination of the narrative also highlights the potential disconnect between the perceived quality of student learning and the actual assessment outcomes. While the university teacher notes that students seem "immature" and less diligent, the assessment results tell a different story. This paradox suggests that the regular formative evaluations may have a positive impact on student performance, even if it does not necessarily translate to a perceived improvement in student quality. The university teacher's conclusion underscores the importance of regular assessment in driving student learning outcomes, and highlights the potential benefits of formative evaluation to improve students' academic performance in the higher education settings.

One of office assistants commented that the workload has increased in the examination section day by day at MMC. It includes the use of software to deal with students as he says,

> I have been working in the examination section at MMC for thirteen years. I did not have heavy workload when I had begun my career here, but now I have the heaviest workload in my workplace due to the different reporting tasks that I need to accomplish. As part of my responsibilities, I prepare reports and results for three-term examinations. I also need to help faculty members evaluate seminar papers and thesis. I have to work with supervisors while dealing with students' proposals and during the thesis viva. Furthermore, I maintain records of the three-term examinations and prepare the internal results. Lastly, I am also responsible for collecting the examination fees and penalties, ensuring that the administrative aspects of the examinations are handled efficiently. In contrast to the easier application that I apply to make my work simpler at the examination section, I work with different apps, but they sometimes become challenging to handle the tasks of examinations properly. Though I have heavy workload, students have tremendously improved the results of TU board examinations with higher scores.

The above narrative highlights the increased workload for non-teaching staff in the examination section at MMC due to the implementation of the three-term examinations and other formative evaluations. Despite the challenges, the non-teaching staff acknowledge that these efforts have significantly improved the TU board results and enabled students to score higher marks.

The non-teaching staff's account suggests that the benefits of the new assessment system outweigh the increased workload. The improved TU board results and students' performance indicate that the additional efforts are yielding the positive outcomes. However, the non-teaching staff's struggles with handling technology and managing workload raise concerns about staff well-being and the need for adequate support. The narrative underscores the importance of investing in non-teaching staff capacity building and technology infrastructure to support the increased workload associated with formative evaluations. If they are provided with adequate training and resources, the institution can ensure that non-teaching staff can effectively manage their workload and continue to support students in achieving better academic outcomes.

During the data collection period, this researcher also interacted with students. For instance, one of the students who had completed his Bachelor's Level study from MMC and is currently studying at Master's Level opines,

> As a current Master Level student, I have some typical experiences. I completed my Bachelor's study ten years ago from this institution. I believe that the faculty

> members working here are competent and diligent. Moreover, the classroom is modern and well-equipped with digital infrastructure. Students have to balance both work and study because of the low financial status and the rapidly changing pace of life. During the formative evaluations process, students need to compile three-term examinations as internal assessment, write assignments, and involve in practicum. Nevertheless, the faculty members at MMC submit the similar grades to the TU board for supporting the final exams. I think that it is very demotivating and disconcerting for the regular students due to the faculty members, who provide equal marks or grades for those who are less diligent in the formative assessment as well.

First, the students' narrative highlights the improvements in infrastructure and the faculty members' competence at MMC. All students appreciate ~~s~~ the modern facilities and acknowledges the hard work of faculty members. However, they express frustration with the internal assessment process, particularly the practice of sending similar internal marks to the TU board, which they find reflective of actual students' performance.

Secondly, the student's account suggests that while MMC has made significant strides in providing a conducive learning environment, there are concerns about the consistency and fairness of internal assessments. The student's experience of balancing work and study adds an extra layer of complexity to their academic journey. The criticism of faculty members providing the internal marks to less diligent students raises the questions about the integrity of the assessment process.

Finally, the narrative highlights the need for MMC to revisit its internal assessment processes to ensure that they accurately reflect student performance. Implementing more nuanced and transparent assessment practices could help address student concerns and enhance the credibility of the institution. Additionally, providing additional support for students who balance work and study could help them achieve better academic outcomes.

Applying Bloom's taxonomy in designing the questions for Bachelor and Master Level students' performance assessment can significantly enhance their learning outcomes and scores in the TU board examinations. For the Bachelor Level students, the questions can assess both Lower Order Thinking Skills (LOTS), such as remembering and understanding, and Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), including: analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

This allows for a comprehensive evaluation of students' cognitive abilities, from the basic recall to more complex critical thinking and problem-solving skills. For instance, in a three-terminal examination setup as formative evaluation, the questions can progress from recalling key concepts (remembering) to explaining relationships between the concepts (understanding), solving problems (applying), and comparing theories (analyzing). For the Master Level students, the emphasis can shift more towards HOTS, including evaluating and creating. The questions might ask students to critically assess research methodologies (evaluating) or design innovative solutions to complex problems (creating). By incorporating Bloom's taxonomy into formative assessments, educators can better prepare students for summative assessments like the TU board examinations, where higher-order thinking skills are often crucial for achieving higher marks. This approach not only aids in scoring well but also fosters deeper understanding and application of knowledge.

Bloom's taxonomy is a valuable framework for designing the questions that assess students' cognitive skills. The tables below show the way to apply and create questions for formative, summative, and diagnostic evaluations:

Table 2

Bachelor Level Evaluation

Evaluation Type	Cognitive Level	Description	Example Questions / Tasks
Formative	Remembering	Define, describe, or recall key concepts	What is the definition of...? What are the key features of...?
	Understanding	Explain, summarize, or interpret concepts	How does this concept relate to...?
	Applying	Use concepts to solve problems or complete tasks	Calculate the... Use this theory to explain...
Summative	Analyzing	Compare, contrast, or break down complex information	Analyze the differences between... Compare and contrast...
	Evaluating	Make judgments about the value or quality of information	Discuss the implications of... What are the implications of...?

Table 2 outlines the evaluation types and cognitive levels used in Bachelor's Level assessments. It categorizes evaluations into formative and summative types. Formative evaluations focus on lower cognitive levels such as remembering, understanding, and applying, which involve recalling, explaining, and using concepts. These evaluations use the example questions or tasks that test students' foundational knowledge. Summative evaluations, on the other hand, assess higher cognitive levels like analyzing and evaluating, which require students to break down complex information and make judgments. Table 3 provides the example questions and tasks for each cognitive level to illustrate the types of assessments used. Overall, the table provides a framework for designing assessments that measure students' knowledge, understanding, and application of concepts.

Table 3

Master's Level Evaluation

Evaluation Type	Cognitive Level	Description	Example Questions / Tasks
Formative	Applying	Apply theoretical concepts to real-world scenarios or case studies	Design a solution for...
	Analyzing	Critically evaluate complex information or research studies	Critique the methodology of...
Summative	Evaluating	Develop well-supported arguments or judgments	Argue for or against...
	Creating	Generate original ideas, solutions, or products	Design a research proposal for... Design a plan to...

Notes:

- Use **action verbs** aligned with the cognitive level (e.g., define, compare, design)
- Ensure questions are **clear, concise**, and **relevant** to the course material
- Use a **variety of question types** to assess a range of cognitive skills

As this paper reviews the evaluation types and cognitive levels, it is noticed that formative evaluations focus on applying the theoretical concepts to the real-world scenarios, allowing students to demonstrate their ability to think practically. In contrast, summative evaluations assess higher-level thinking skills, such as critically evaluating complex information and developing well-supported arguments. When applying the theoretical concepts, students are tasked with designing solutions to the real-world problems. Analyzing the complex information requires students to critique the research methodologies and identify the areas for improvement. In evaluating information, students must develop arguments that are supported by evidence and logical reasoning. Furthermore, creating the original ideas and solutions is a key aspect of the evaluation process, as students are tasked with designing the research proposals and plans. By evaluating students' ability to apply, analyze, evaluate, and create, educators can gain a comprehensive understanding of their learning and development. By applying Bloom's taxonomy, faculty members who are teaching different subjects at the Bachelor and Master levels at MMC can create assessments that evaluate students' knowledge, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.

The study's results on the application of Bloom's taxonomy in designing the questions for Bachelor's Level and Master's Level students at MMC underscore its significance in enhancing student academic performance. By incorporating higher-order thinking skills, such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, into assessment questions, the faculty members can encourage students to move beyond mere recall and memorization, fostering a deeper understanding of the subject matter. The results suggest that this approach can lead to the improved student outcomes, particularly in the board examinations and formative evaluations, such as seminar papers and thesis proposals. By adopting Bloom's taxonomy in the question design, educators can create assessments that accurately measure student learning and promote academic excellence, contributing to the development of competent and critically thinking graduates.

Discussion

The discussion section of this study highlights the significance of applying Bloom's taxonomy to enhance student academic performance at MMC. The findings of the study demonstrate that the application of Bloom's taxonomy in teaching-learning processes and assessment methods enables students to develop higher-order thinking skills, such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. This, in turn, helps students to score higher marks in board examinations, as they are able to demonstrate a deeper understanding of the subject matter and apply their knowledge in a more effective manner.

The study also reveals that involving the students in different formative evaluations, such as seminar papers, term paper presentations, teaching practicum, student presentations, writing reports, thesis writing and thesis proposals, is an effective way to help them score the higher marks in board examinations. The faculty members are of opinion that these evaluations enable students to develop their critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills, which are essential for achieving an academic success. The feedback provided to students during these evaluations helps them to identify areas for improvement and work on their weaknesses, leading to better performance in board examinations.

The analysis of data collected from faculty members and employees working in the examination section also highlights the importance of proper design of the questions in term examinations during an academic year. The findings suggest that the questions

that test higher-order thinking skills, such as analysis and evaluation, are more effective in assessing student learning outcomes than those that only test recall and memorization. The faculty members believe that the well-designed questions can help students to develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter and apply their knowledge in a more effective manner, leading to better academic performance. Overall, the study provides valuable insights into the perspectives of faculty members on the factors influencing student academic performance and highlights the importance of applying Bloom's taxonomy, involving students in formative evaluations, and designing the effective assessment questions. The study found that students struggled to answer test questions written in English due to difficulties with language comprehension, which negatively impacted their exam performance and overall results. In other words, there were language barriers that hindered students' ability to understand and respond to questions, affecting their academic achievement.

The findings of the study show that the three-term examinations are being conducted by the campus and the final board examination at the end of the academic year or semester is conducted by the TU board. Both types examinations are supposed to be the valid and legal achievement for the different authentic purposes in the lives of the students. Likewise, the faculty members of the concerned subjects are not bound to complete a particular part of the course before the terminal tests and design the question papers based on the accomplished courses before the terminal tests due to the lack of the course break down. Therefore, this study suggests that the campus needs to break down the courses of all the subjects of Bachelor Level and Master Level, formulating the subject committees to break down the course and design questions on the basis of Bloom's taxonomy and the syllabi of TU. The MMC has precisely followed the format for internal assessment that TU has developed for Bachelor Level students and Master Level students; however, an application of the format seems to be different from the multiple voices of faculty members working at MMC. This means that the faculty members sometimes fail to provide the internal marks accurately under the pressure of the campus and students, even without completing the tasks that are given to students as the formative evaluation except the paper-pencil system. The study found that students struggled to answer the test questions written in English due to difficulties with language comprehension, which negatively impacted their performance and overall results. In other words, the language barriers hindered students' ability to understand and respond to the questions, affecting their academic achievement. Therefore, the question designers need to choose dual languages like English and Nepali in formative evaluation for students' better comprehension in order to improve their performance assessment not only in formative evaluation but also in summative evaluation. It can also be argued that pure examination culture is to be developed for the institutional identity and dignity that the quality assurance (called as QAA) certified institution holds in the history of higher education in Nepal as recommended by University Grants Commission (UGC). The campus should be responsible and accountable for the purpose of training its faculty members, raising the academic achievement by hiring experts from other institutions.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has explored that MMC has adopted terminal examination systems with its own norms and values to improve the results of students and score the higher marks in the board examinations; however, the campus has not broken down the courses of higher education yet. Moreover, it can be argued that the course provided by TU need to be broken down for giving information to faculty members and students before

appearing in the internal examinations and board examinations as well. Before this, the campus needs to formulate the team of the subject experts existing in the campus in terms of breaking down the courses into three portions for the three-term tests respectively. Overall, the study found that using a dual-language test format enables students to grasp questions more easily, leading to more accurate answers and ultimately the improved exam results. In short, dual-language testing helps students understand questions better, which in turn, boosts their performance.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION

There is no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

I declare that this manuscript is my original work.

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