Assessment System of Master's Level at Tribhuvan University: A Review

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Abstract

The assessment system at the master's level at Tribhuvan University (TU) has undergone significant reforms, particularly in its grading and evaluation methods. The university follows a semester-based and annual-based assessment structure, with internal evaluations, practical assessments, and final examinations contributing to students' overall grades. This paper reviews the examination policies, grading system, evaluation criteria, and recent changes implemented by TU to enhance academic quality. The study highlights the current assessment system's strengths and challenges and suggests areas for improvement.

Key Words: *Assessment System, Higher Education, Master's Level Examination, Internal Evaluation, Final Semester Examination*

Introduction

Tribhuvan University (TU), established in 1959, is Nepal's oldest and most projecting institution of higher education. Over the years, it has adapted its assessment system for master's level programs to meet the evolving educational landscape in the country. The university employs a mixed assessment system that varies by faculty and specific program, incorporating internal and external evaluations. Historically, TU utilised an annual examination system aligned with educational practices prevalent across many institutions in Nepal. However, recognising the need for a more rigorous academic

structure, various faculties have transitioned to a semester system in recent years. This shift aims to increase student engagement and foster a more continuous learning environment (Sharma, 2020). The assessment framework at TU includes diverse components: continuous assessments, which may involve quizzes, assignments, and presentations; practical examinations, particularly in applied fields; and final written tests that evaluate comprehensive knowledge at the end of each semester (Khadka, 2019). This multi-faceted approach is intended to provide a holistic evaluation of a student's capabilities and understanding of the subject matter.

Similarly, Tribhuvan University (TU), recognised as Nepal's oldest and largest public university, serves many students. TU significantly influences the country's educational landscape with various faculties and associated colleges. Throughout its history, TU has adopted multiple assessment methods at the master's level to maintain educational quality, which include internal assessments, practical tests, and final exams. However, shifting from a percentage grading system to a CGPA format has introduced advancements and challenges to the assessment framework. TU traditionally followed an annual examination system, where students were assessed once a year through final written examinations. However, with the growing need for a more dynamic and continuous assessment approach, TU introduced a semester-based system in certain faculties such as Management, Science, and Education. This system allows for internal assessments, semester-end evaluations, and research-based projects, providing a more holistic measure of student performance. The current master's level assessment system at TU follows a two-component structure. Internal Evaluation (40% weightage) – Includes assignments, presentations, quizzes, and practical exams, ensuring continuous monitoring of student progress. Final Examination (60% weightage) Conducted at the end of each semester, strongly emphasising conceptual understanding and theoretical knowledge. Despite these reforms, TU's assessment system still faces challenges in implementation, such as inconsistencies in evaluation criteria across faculties, limited opportunities for re-examinations, and delays in result publication. Compared to international standards, where universities emphasise continuous assessments, flexible retake policies, and digital grading systems, TU's system remains partially traditional and rigid. This review explores the current assessment policies, grading system, re-evaluation practices, and areas for

improvement in TU's Master's level education, providing insights into how Nepal's higher education system can evolve to meet global academic benchmarks.

Moreover, in light of recent educational reforms, TU has shifted from a traditional percentage-based evaluation system to a grading system grounded in the Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA). This transition reflects a broader trend within higher education to adopt more standardised and transparent evaluation metrics. The CGPA system allows for better differentiation among students and promotes a clearer understanding of academic performance (Rai, 2021). While these reforms aim to improve educational quality and outcomes, they also present challenges for students and faculty members. Students often grapple with adapting to the new evaluation criteria and the increased frequency of assessments, which can contribute to stress and anxiety (Gautam, 2022). On the other hand, faculty members face the challenge of aligning their teaching methods and assessment practices with the new system, necessitating professional development and training (Bhandari, 2020).

The educational reforms at Tribhuvan University signify a crucial advancement in Nepal's higher education system. By adopting a mixed assessment approach and transitioning to a CGPA grading system, TU aims to enhance academic rigour and improve student engagement. However, ongoing support and resources are essential to address the challenges during this transitional phase.

Materials and Methods

This comprehensive review study depends on secondary data from various trustworthy materials, including the official policies and academic regulations published on Tribhuvan University's official website. In addition to these primary sources, the analysis incorporates reports from Edusanjal and Educate Nepal, which provide valuable insights into the landscape of higher education in Nepal. Furthermore, a thorough examination of news articles and scholarly papers explored current trends and developments in assessment practices within Nepalese higher education. This multi-layered approach allows for a deeper understanding of the existing policies governing education in the country. The study provides a detailed overview of these policies while conducting a comparative analysis of assessment practices. Doing so highlights the

strengths and areas for improvement within the Nepalese education system, offering a framework for potential enhancements aligned with global standards.

Results and Discussion

The master's level examination system features semester-based and annual assessments, varying by faculty. Most faculties, such as science, management, and education, utilise a semester system that includes ongoing internal evaluations and final exams at the end of each semester. However, some faculties continue to adhere to an annual examination format to a certain level.

Internal and External Assessment

The assessment system is divided into internal evaluations (40%), which include class tests, assignments, presentations, and practical exams. Students must pass internal assessments to qualify for final exams. The Office of the Controller of Examinations comportments the final Semester Examination (60%), covering the entire syllabus.

Grading System

Since 2017, TU has introduced a Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) system, replacing the traditional percentage-based Evaluation. The grading system is as follows:

Grade	Grade Point Average (GPA)	CGPA Range	Marks (%)	Remarks
A	4.0	4.0	90% & Above	Distinction
A-	3.7	3.70 - 3.99	80-89.9%	Very Good
B+	3.3	3.30 - 3.69	70-79.9%	First Division
B	3.0	3.00 - 3.29	60-69.9%	Second Division
B-	2.7	2.70 - 2.99	50-59.9%	Pass in Individual Paper
F	Below 2.7	Below 2.7	Below 50%	Fail

Source: *Educate Nepal & Edusanjal*

Key Observations

Students must achieve a minimum passing mark of 50% in each course, corresponding to a Grade Point Average (GPA) of 2.7. This threshold ensures that

students have a foundational understanding of the course material. Additionally, to successfully pass the entire semester, students must preserve a cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of at least 3.0, equating to a score of 60% or higher across all courses taken during that semester.

Furthermore, the academic system is designed to support students who may be struggling. Makeup exams are permitted for those who fail up to two subjects. This policy allows students to improve their grades and meet the necessary academic standards.

Practical and Research-Based Assessments

Certain academic faculties strongly emphasised experiential learning, encompassing hands-on activities such as laboratory experiments, field studies, and various research projects. This approach enhances theoretical understanding and equips students with essential practical skills that are vital in their respective fields. Practical examinations are scheduled two weeks before the final semester exams to assess students' practical competencies (Educate Nepal, 2024). In addition, programs that focus on research-oriented subjects require students to undertake significant thesis or project work. This aspect of the curriculum is essential as it allows students to investigate their chosen topics profoundly and contributes considerably to their final grade. Through this process, students develop critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and the ability to conduct thorough investigations, which are invaluable in their future careers.

Challenges in the Assessment System

While significant strides have been made in educational reform, numerous challenges persist within the academic landscape. One notable issue is that many faculties rely on the traditional annual examination system, which has not yet fully transitioned to the more progressive Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) model. This resistance to adopting the CGPA framework limits opportunities for a more holistic approach to student assessment and learning progress. Moreover, there are considerable inconsistencies in the internal assessment methods employed across various faculties. These disparities lead to confusion and fairness issues, as students may be graded on different scales and criteria depending on their specific disciplines. Such variability complicates the student experience and can impact overall academic performance. The

situation becomes increasingly pressing for students who face educational challenges, particularly those who fail more than two subjects. These students often face stringent policies restricting their ability to participate in re-examinations, mainly through makeup exams. This limitation significantly reduces their chances of improving their academic standing and can lead to increased stress and anxiety about their educational futures.

Additionally, administrative and bureaucratic inefficiencies further exacerbate these issues. Delays in publishing exam results and scheduling subsequent examinations are commonplace, often due to complex administrative processes that hinder timely decision-making. These delays affect students' ability to plan their studies and revisit materials effectively, creating a backlog that can dampen morale and hinder overall learning outcomes (Entwistle, 2015).

Comparisons with International Practices

Unlike many Western universities that emphasise continuous assessment throughout the semester, TU (the specific institution you refer to) predominantly relies on final examinations to evaluate student performance. This traditional approach can limit opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning over time and may not accurately reflect their overall understanding of the coursework (Boud & Associates, 2010). In addition, many universities globally have adopted flexible policies regarding re-examinations, allowing students to retake exams or assessments under varying circumstances. For example, UK and US institutions often provide second chances or "supplemental exams" to support student success (Harris & Thomas, 2011). In contrast, TU's restrictive re-examination policies can significantly pressure students, particularly those struggling with high-stakes testing environments. Research shows that the stress associated with rigid examination policies can negatively impact students' mental health and academic performance (Eisenberg et al., 2009).

Moreover, some faculties at TU may lack the appropriate digital assessment tools, leading to inefficiencies in grading compared to global standards. Technology in assessments has been shown to enhance the grading process, provide timely feedback, and improve the overall learning experience (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Institutions that invest in robust digital platforms streamline the assessment process and align more

closely with contemporary educational practices that promote student engagement and active learning (Shute, 2008). TU could enhance its academic offerings by addressing these issues, shifting towards continuous assessment models, adopting flexible re-examination policies, and integrating digital tools into the grading process to support student learning outcomes better.

Conclusion

The master's level assessment system at TU has seen significant enhancements by introducing a CGPA-based grading system, which provides a more nuanced understanding of student performance through a cumulative point average. This system aims to foster a more holistic approach to Evaluation, considering continuous assessment mechanisms such as regular quizzes, projects, participation, and midterm exams rather than relying solely on final examinations. Despite these advancements, several challenges still impede the system's overall effectiveness. One major issue is the inconsistent implementation of the CGPA guidelines across different departments, leading to confusion among students regarding grading criteria and expectations. Additionally, the rigid re-examination policies can be overly punitive; for instance, students who do not meet the passing criteria may face limited opportunities to retake exams, which can disproportionately affect those balancing academic and personal challenges.

Moreover, administrative inefficiencies, such as delays in grade processing and communication breakdowns between faculty and students, further complicate the assessment landscape. These issues can erode trust in the grading process, ultimately undermining student morale and engagement. The optimisation of the assessment system's future improvements should prioritise several key areas. First, increasing flexibility in retake exams is essential; implementing more accessible policies for retaking assessments would give students a fair chance to demonstrate their knowledge and skills after initial setbacks. Second, standardising internal assessment criteria across all programs is crucial for ensuring equity. Clear guidelines should be established to minimise department discrepancies, fostering a more transparent assessment environment. Lastly, enhancing digital evaluation processes can streamline administrative operations. By incorporating modern technology into the grading and assessment

procedures, TU could improve the efficiency and accuracy of evaluations, allowing for timely feedback, which is invaluable for student learning and development. Aligning these improvements with global best practices will not only elevate the quality of education at TU but will also prepare students to compete on an international scale.

Recommendations for Improvement

Several key initiatives are proposed to enhance the academic experience and maintain high standards at TU. Standardisation of Internal Evaluation Across Faculties involves creating a unified framework for evaluating student performance across different departments. By establishing standard criteria and assessment methods, TU can ensure consistency in grading and feedback. Regular training sessions for faculty on standardised evaluation practices could be implemented to foster a cohesive understanding of expectations and minimise grading discrepancies. TU can introduce flexible re-exam policies, recognising that students may face various challenges impacting their academic performance. It would entail allowing students who fail multiple subjects to have tailored support, such as dedicated study sessions or the option to retake exams staggered.

Additionally, providing resources such as tutoring or counselling can help these students recover and improve overall pass rates. Digitalising grading and examination systems that transition to a digital system for grading and examinations can significantly enhance transparency and efficiency. It could involve the development of an integrated online platform where grades are recorded, tracked, and communicated to students in real time. Such a system would allow easier access to examination results, facilitate prompt instructor feedback, and streamline the administrative process. By addressing these initiatives comprehensively, TU can improve the academic quality of its programs. Establishing a robust and student-friendly Master's level assessment system will enhance students' educational outcomes and ensure that TU remains a higher-education leader.

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