



International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS)
A Peer-Reviewed Bi-monthly Bi-lingual Research Journal
ISSN: 2349-6959 (Online), ISSN: 2349-6711 (Print)
Volume-II, Issue-V, March 2016, Page No. 132-142
Published by Scholar Publications, Karimganj, Assam, India, 788711
Website: <http://www.ijhsss.com>

An Analysis of the Question Papers of the B.A. End-Semester Examinations of Dibrugarh University

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Abstract

The present study was to analyze the question papers of the B.A. End-Semester Examination of Dibrugarh University. Content analysis was used as a technique to analyze the question papers. The rules and regulations for setting question papers as well as guidelines for paper setters of B.A./B.Sc./B.Com. Examinations of Dibrugarh University mentioned in the Dibrugarh University Examination Ordinance 1972 (as amended up to date) were used as a basis to analyze the question papers.

The study revealed that in most of the question papers the distribution of marks against each unit was not as per the syllabus. Repetition of questions from alternate year was very common in number of question papers. Internal as well as overall options were also found in many of the question papers of B.A. Examination of Dibrugarh University under semester system. The study also revealed that the optional questions given in the question papers were not comparable with respect to objectives, content, difficulty level, etc.

Introduction: Written examination occupies the most important place in assessment of students' achievement in the present education scenario in India. The question papers used in the written examinations are therefore instrumental in the assessment process. With the help of question papers one tries to evaluate the teaching-learning process and to see whether the set educational objectives are realized. Quality of question paper reflects the quality of education imparted to students at any level of education. It also determines the quality of teaching learning process. In fact, the entire teaching learning process is now organized by keeping an eye on the questions asked in different examinations. Teachers and students prepare their respective plans of teaching and learning on the basis of questions set in the examinations. However, a number of studies revealed that the question papers of different examinations conducted by different universities and other examination bodies merely measure students' memorizing and recalling abilities (NCERT, 2005; Hazarika, 1998; Nongkhlaw and Nongbri, 2013; Kumar and Patel, 2014). Majority of the question papers fail to measure higher abilities such as application, analysis, creativity etc. which are very important for every individual to live effectively in the present society. Thus, important aspects of examination reform at any stage of education include the improvement of question papers too. Improving quality of question papers will certainly help in improving the quality of teaching learning as well as evaluation scenario of an educational institution. Keeping this in mind, the present study is an attempt to analyze the quality of question papers of B.A. examination of Dibrugarh University.

A study was undertaken by Griffiths and McLone (1984) to gain insight into the training which is given to mathematics degree students by the Universities. They analyzed mathematics questions set

in the final examination of a sample of British Universities and classify them not on levels of difficulty but rather by qualities-manipulative skill, memory, sustained thinking, etc. They found that applied mathematics questions concentrate more on mathematical manipulation, and less on logical development. They also found that the skills of seeking out an unstated “answer” are consequently rarely developed in pure mathematics examination questions and questions in pure mathematics appear to concentrate much less than the other areas on mathematical content (i.e., **Mathematical Content apart from Jargon and Bookwork**), and require no initiative on part of the student in determining the way any solution should develop.

Hazarika (1998) reported that in the question papers of B.Sc. and B.A. examinations of Dibrugarh University, emphasis was given more on evaluating knowledge and comprehension while only 24% and 10% of the total marks were allotted to application type questions.

Nongkhlaw and Nongbri (2013) analyzed MBOSE (Maghalaya Board of School Education) question papers at higher secondary examination and found that knowledge objective got the attention with a very high percentage of marks for all four subjects (viz. Education, Economics, History and Political Science) in Arts stream. They also found that understanding level questions was moderately represented in Economics, History and Education. The paper setters did not consider application objective in all the subjects except Political Science.

Gogoi and Hazarika (2013) conducted a comparative study of the question papers of Class-X Board Examinations conducted by CEBA and CBSE and found a vast difference between the SEBA and CBSE question papers. It was also observed in the study that the question papers were organized on the basis of their types and the within a specific type they were organized unit-wise. However, the organization of questions in the SEBA question papers does not follow a definite systematic pattern.

Kumar and Patel (2014) analyzed the Mathematics question paper with respect to its pattern/design, content coverage, difficulty level, objectivity in marking and its impact on achievement of students. They found that though there was no effect of different pattern/design of question papers or different sets of question papers used during particular year on students' achievement there was effect of content coverage, objectivity in marking and cognitive level of questions.

Objectives of the Study: The main objective of the present study was to analyze the question papers of the B.A. End-Semester Examination of Dibrugarh University. The specific objectives of the study were:

- To study how far the University rules and regulations were followed in setting question papers of the B.A./B.Sc./B.Com Examinations of Dibrugarh University under semester system.
- To study the question papers of B.A. examinations conducted by Dibrugarh University in terms of the following:
 - Weightage given to different objectives.
 - Weightage given to different types of questions.
 - Coverage of content.
 - Appropriateness of marks allotted to different questions.
 - Nature of options given.

- To provide suggestive measures to improve the question papers of the B.A. Examinations of Dibrugarh University.

Delimitations of the Study

The study is delimited to the following aspects:

- The study is delimited to analysis of the question papers of the B.A. Programme under Semester System only.
- The study is also delimited to the question papers of the B.A. first semester examinations of Dibrugarh University.
- The question papers of only two subjects *viz.* Education and Sociology (both Major and General) are selected for the present study.
- The question papers of the first semester examinations held in the years 2011, 2012 and 2013 are selected for the present study.

Method used in the Study: Taking into consideration of the objectives, content analysis was considered to be the best technique for the present study. Thus, content analysis was used as a technique to analyze the question papers.

Population of Question Papers: All the question papers of B.A. Examination of Dibrugarh University are considered to be the population of question papers in the present study.

Sample of Question Papers: The question papers of B.A. First Semester Examinations of 2011, 2012 and 2013 were selected purposively for the study. Question papers of both general and major were included in the study. Moreover, the question papers of only two subject areas *viz.*, Education and Sociology were selected for the present study. There were 12 (twelve) question papers in these examinations (Education: 6 and Sociology: 6).

Analysis of Question Papers and Findings of the Study: Analysis of the question papers and findings of the study are presented in the following heads:

- a) Weightage given to Different Objectives:** An ideal question paper should include questions covering all the objectives *viz.*, knowledge, understanding, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation proportionately. In the HSLC level, the weightage to be given to different objectives (*viz.* knowledge, understanding and application) is prescribed by the concerned Boards. However, no such instructions are found in the rules and regulations followed in setting question papers of Degree Examinations of Dibrugarh University. The following observations are made regarding weightage given to different objectives after content analysis of the question papers of B.A examination of Dibrugarh University: Table-I shows the coverage of objectives in the question papers of B.A. Examination of Dibrugarh University.

Table I : Coverage of objectives in the question papers of B.A. End Semester Examination of Dibrugarh University

Subject	Year	Major/ General	Objectives					
			Knowledge		Understanding		Application and other higher order objectives	
			Marks	%	Marks	%	Marks	%
Education	2011	Major	8	10	72	90	Nil	
		General	13	16.25	67	83.75	Nil	
	2012	Major	12	15	68	85	Nil	
		General	18	22.5	62	77.5	Nil	
	2013	Major	13	16.25	67	83.75	Nil	
		General	25	31.25	55	68.75	Nil	
Sociology	2011	Major	---*	---**	---*	---	14 (An)+14(A)	
		General	30	37.5	50	62.5	Nil	
	2012	Major	35	---	81	---	Nil	
		General	25	---	73	---	Nil	
	2013	Major	26	---	72	---	4(A)+14(A)	
		General	24	---	88	---	Nil	

* Break up of marks was not shown against the questions.

**As there were overall options in the Sociology question papers, exact % of marks allotted could not be calculated.

It is evident from table-I that application and other higher order questions did not find any place in any of the question papers of Education irrespective of both general and major courses. However in the question papers of sociology major (2011 and 2013), a few application and other higher level questions are found. For example: (i) Q. No.3(d) 'Critically analyze the formal school and analytical sociology with support from the founders of sociology.' (Marks=14) and Q. No.3(f) 'Critically discuss the contents of any essential reading prescribed by your syllabus for basic understanding of sociology.' (Marks=14) of Sociology (Major) 2011. Example: (ii) Q. No.2(f) 'Write a short note on horizontal mobility with an example from Assamese society.' (Marks=4) and Q. No.3(e) 'Critically make a review of any essential reading prescribed by your syllabus for basic understanding of sociology.' (Marks=14) of Sociology (Major) 2013.

b) Options given in the Question Papers: The study reveals that 'internal' options were provided in almost all the question papers of the B.A. Education and Sociology Examinations. Moreover, 'overall' options were also observed in the B.A Sociology (Major) question paper of 2011. However, the Guidelines for the question setter mentioned in the **Dibrugarh University Examination Ordinance 1972** (as amended up to date) clearly point out that the practice of giving open choice should be discontinued. Moreover, there is also an instruction in the Guidelines that the question papers should provide minimum scope for selective reading on the part of the students. It was also found from the study that there were internal options in each essay type question in each of the question papers of B.A. in Education (major). Provision of optional questions in a question

paper makes the question papers less reliable because it makes the question papers different for different students. It also inspires the students to adopt selective reading.

The study also revealed that the **optional questions** given in the question papers were **not comparable** with respect to **objectives, content, difficulty level**, etc.

For example:

i) In the question paper of Education (General,2013), the options given in the Q.No.7 were not comparable with respect to the objective and content as well as difficulty level. [Q.No.7 What is curriculum? Write about different types of co-curricular activities (Knowledge question). Or, Discuss the importance of examination and evaluation in the education system (Understanding question)].

ii) In the question paper of Education (Major, 2013), the options given in the Q.No.7 were not comparable with respect to objectives, content and difficulty level. [Q.No.7 What is meant by the term 'idealism'? (This part of the question is knowledge level which carries 3 marks). Explain its influence in the field of education in relation to curriculum and discipline (It is an understanding level question which carries 8 marks). Or, Discuss the contribution of pragmatism towards the method of teaching and role of teacher (This is an understanding level question which carries 11 marks)].

Table-II: Number of Options in the Question Papers of B.A. Examination of Dibrugarh University

Subject	Year	Major/ General	Number of questions against which options are given		
			Objective type	Short Answer type	Essay type
Education	2011	Major	Nil	Nil	All the 5 questions
		General	Nil	Nil	1 out of 5
	2012	Major	Nil	Nil	All the 5 questions
		General	Nil	Nil	2 out of 5
	2013	Major	Nil	Nil	4 out of 5
		General	Nil	Nil	2 out of 5
Sociology	2011	Major	Nil	Answer any four out of five	Nil
		General	Nil	Answer any four out of six	Answer any four out of six
	2012	Major	Nil	Answer any four out of six	Answer any four out of six
		General	Nil	Answer any four out of five	Answer any four out of five
	2013	Major	Nil	Answer any four out of six	Answer any four out of six
		General	Nil	Answer any four out of five	Answer any four out of six

It is clear from table-II that number of questions with options was more in the question papers of Education major in comparison to general courses. It is also evident that overall options were very

common in the question papers of sociology. Internal options were provided in essay type questions of all the question papers of Education irrespective of general and major courses.

c) Defective and Ambiguous Questions in the Question Papers: An ideal question paper must be error free in terms of language, ambiguity, printing error, etc. However, a number of defective questions were found in almost all the question papers.

For example:

i) In the question paper of Education (General, 2012), Q. No.7 ‘Discuss the need of evaluation in our **examination system**. Suggest any two tools of evaluation and **discuss** their merits.’ was a defective question. It should have been ‘Discuss the need of evaluation in our education system. Mention any two tools of evaluation highlighting their merits.’ Similarly, the Q. No.3 ‘Is education a science or an art? Discuss the nature of education. (Marks=4+7) was an incomplete question (first part). It should have been ‘Is education a science or an art? Explain.’

ii) In the question paper of Education (Major, 2011), the Q. No.3 ‘Discuss the use of philosophy of education for the teacher’ was also a defective question. It should have been ‘How does the knowledge of philosophy of education help a teacher?’

iii) In the question paper of Education (Major, 2011), the Q. No.5 ‘Discuss the eight-fold yoga in Indian Philosophy’ is an ambiguous question. It should have been, ‘Describe the significance of eight-fold yoga in the Indian Philosophy’. Similarly, the Q. No. 7(a) i.e. Write short note on ‘Education for leisure’ can be made more meaningful by framing the question as ‘How does education help in effective use of leisure time’.

iv) In the question paper of Education (General, 2011), the Q. No. 2(b) Write short note on ‘**difference between Sociology and Educational Sociology**’ is a defective question because educational sociology is a branch of sociology, thus it is meaningless to distinguish between sociology and educational sociology. The question could have been ‘Distinguish between **sociology of education** and **educational sociology**’. The same question is also found in the question paper of 2013.

vi) In the question paper of Sociology (Major, 2011), the Q. No. 2(c) i.e., ‘**What do you mean by Quasi group?**’ is a defective question. The correct form of the question is ‘What is meant by Quasi group?’ Similarly, the meaning of Q. No. 3(c) i.e., ‘Is co-operation always voluntary or is it enforced? If enforced, is it sanctions or is the strength of norms than ensure co-operation? Discuss with examples’ is not clear. The meaning of the Q. No. 3(f) i.e., ‘Critically discuss the contents of any essential reading prescribed by your syllabus for basic understanding of sociology’ is also not clear and *perhaps asking too much from the students*.

vii) In the question paper of Sociology (Major, 2013), Q. No.3(b) ‘**What do you understand by social change**’ is a defective question.

d) Break up of Marks: A good question paper must show break up of marks clearly against each part of the question. However, in the question papers of Education and Sociology, in a number of questions, breakup of marks was not shown clearly.

Example: (i) In the question paper of Education (Major, 2013), no break up of marks was shown in the Q. No. 7 (second part) i.e., ‘What is meant by idealism? Explain its influence in the field of education in relation to **curriculum and discipline**’. Marks shown against this question is 3+8=11.

Example: (ii) In the question paper of Education (General, 2012), no break up of marks was shown against Q. No.7 (second part) i.e., ‘Suggest *any two* tools of evaluation and *discuss their merits*’. On the other hand, unnecessarily break up of marks was shown against Q. No.7 (Education, 2013) ‘Discuss the importance of examination and evaluation in the education system’ as 3+7=10. Here, importance of examination and evaluation cannot be discussed separately.

Example: (iii) In the question paper of Sociology (Major, 2011), break up of marks was not shown against Q. No. 2(a) ‘What is community? Show three differences between society and community.’ (Marks=4); 2(c) ‘What do you mean by Quasi group? Give two examples of Quasi group in Indian Context.’, 2(d) ‘Define social process. What is the significance of conflict in social process?’ (Marks=4); 3(a) ‘Discuss in brief the development of sociology in India and write on its importance in context of the present-day society of India.’ (Marks=14); 3(b) ‘What is reference group? Discuss the significance of reference group from sociology understanding.’ (Marks=14). Similarly break up of marks was not shown against Q. No.3(c), and 3(e).

Example: (iv) In the question paper of Sociology (Major, 2013), break up of marks was not shown against Q. No. 2(a), 2(b) and 2(c).

e) Repetition of Questions: It is a general convention and practice not to set the questions which were set in the previous year. This practice encourages selective reading in the part of the examinees and reduces the reliability and validity of the question paper. On the other hand, repetition of questions from alternate year again encourages selective reading in the part of the examinees.

The study reveals that in number of papers repetition of questions from alternate year is very common.

Table-III: Repetition of Questions in the Question Papers of B.A. Examination of Dibrugarh University

Subject	2011		2013	
	Q.No.	Marks	Q. No.	Marks
Education (Major)	2. What is the function of education towards individual and society?	5+5	3. Write a note on the functions of education.	11
	5. Discuss the eight-fold yoga in Indian philosophy. Or, Write the eight-fold path in Buddha’s philosophy and four noble truths of Buddhism.	12 , Or, 8+4	6. Write the eight-fold yoga in Indian philosophy and its educational implications. Or, Explain the Four Noble Truths of Buddha and justify their educational implications	8+7, Or, 7+8
	6. Point out the influences of idealism in the field of education in relation to aims of education and methods of teaching. Or, Discuss the aims and curriculum of education according to pragmatism	5+7, Or 5+7	7. What is meant by the term ‘idealism’? Explain its influence in the field of education in relation to curriculum and discipline. Or, Discuss the contribution of pragmatism towards the method of teaching and role of teacher.	3+8, Or 5+6
Sociology	3(b) What is reference	No break	2(a) What is reference group?	No break

	group?	up marks		up marks
	3(f) Critically discuss the contents of any essential reading prescribed by your syllabus for basic understanding of sociology.	14	3(e) Critically make a review of any essential reading prescribed by your syllabus for basic understanding of sociology.	14

It is observed that there was a general tendency of the question paper setters to repeat some questions every alternate year.

Moreover, it is also found that

i) In the question paper of Education (Major, 2013), two questions are such that the answer to both the questions were almost same. [Q.No.2(b) Write short notes on Philosophy and aims of Education. And Q.No.4 Explain how philosophy has influenced the determination of the aims of education]

f) Coverage of Different Types of Questions: A question paper in any subject should include all the types of questions i.e., objective, very short answer, short answer and essay type. As per the guidelines to the paper setter for the B.A./ B.Sc./B.Com End Semester Examinations of Dibrugarh University, 10% of the total marks should be allotted for objective type questions, 20% of the total marks should be allotted for short answer type and 70% of the total marks should be allotted for essay type questions. However, in the question papers of Education (General, 2012 and 2013), it is observed that more marks (20 out of 80 which is 25% of the total marks) were allotted against short answer type question whereas less marks (52 out of 80 or 65% of the total marks) were allotted against essay type questions which were not as per the guidelines.

g) Marks Allotted to Types of Questions: The Table-IV shows the maximum marks allotted to each type of questions as per the guidelines for question paper setter:

Table-IV: Maximum Marks allotted to Types of Questions:

Types of Questions	Maximum Marks
Objective Type questions	1 mark for each question
Short Answer Type questions	2-4 marks for each questions
Essay Type questions	5-15 marks for each questions

The present study reveals that in the question papers of Education all the short answer type questions carried 4 marks each. It is also observed that in all the Education question papers, 'writing short notes' was the only short answer type question. The other short answer type questions did not find any place in the question papers.

h) Coverage of Syllabus: A good question paper covers the entire syllabus prescribed for a particular programme and follows the distribution of marks against each unit as per the syllabus. However, the study revealed that in most of the question papers the distribution of marks against each unit was not as per the syllabus.

Table-V: Unit-wise distribution of marks as per the syllabus and as per the Question papers

Subject	Unit	Marks as per the Syllabus	Marks as per the Question Papers		
			2011	2012	2013
Sociology (General)	I	16	20	18	21
	II	16	22	18	19
	III	16	1	19	19
	IV	16	19	19	16
	V	16	22	22	33
Sociology (Major)	I	16	33	21	38
	II	16	14	38	24
	III	16	20	20	18
	IV	16	15	19	18
	V	16	18	18	18
Education (General)	I	16	18	16	16
	II	16	12	16	16
	III	16	18	16	16
	IV	16	16	16	16
	V	16	16	16	16
Education (Major)	I	16	16	16	16
	II	16	16	16	16
	III	16	17	17	16
	IV	16	17	19	16
	V	16	14	12	16

Table-V reveals that the unit-wise distribution of marks in the question papers of Education (general) of 2012 and 2013; and question papers of Education (Major) of 2013 were as per the syllabus. However, unit-wise distribution of marks was not as per the syllabus in all other question papers viz. question papers of Sociology (general) of 2011, 2012 and 2013; Sociology (major) of 2011, 2012 and 2013; Education (general) of 2011 and 2012; and Education (major) of 2011 and 2013.

Suggestions for Improvement of Question Papers

On the basis of the analysis made above, following suggestions may be provided for improvement of the question papers:

- i) As the number of essay type questions increases in a question paper, the coverage of content decreases. Keeping this in mind, following break up of weightage to be given to different types of questions is suggested: Objective type: 10%; Short Answer Type: 40%; Essay Type: 50%.
- ii) An essay type question should not carry more than 10 marks. In the existing guidelines, the marks range from 5 to 15.
- iii) At least 30% marks should be allotted to higher order questions (Applications and other higher order questions) that require reflective thinking.

- iv) There should not be any overall options in the question papers. Moreover, internal options should also be limited to maximum of two essay type questions. There should not be any options for objective type and short answer type questions.
- v) The optional questions should be from the same unit, of same difficulty level and of same level of ability.
- vi) Repetition of questions in the same form in the alternate years should be avoided. Repetition of previous year's questions may be allowed to maximum of 30%. However, the wordings of the questions should not be the same.
- vii) Training of paper setters and moderators should be arranged by the University and only trained personnel are to be entrusted with the responsibilities of paper setting and moderation. A guideline for the moderators should also be prepared and given to the board of moderators.
- viii) The paper setters should be instructed to prepare and submit detailed 'scoring key' and 'marking scheme' of the question papers. The scoring key and the marking scheme should be distributed to all the examiners.

Conclusion: The study reveals that in most of the question papers the distribution of marks against each unit is not as per the syllabus. Repetition of questions from alternate year is very common in number of question papers. Internal as well as overall options are also found in many of the question papers of B.A. Examination of Dibrugarh University under semester system. The study also reveals that the optional questions given in the question papers are not comparable with respect to objectives, content, difficulty level, etc.

The present study reveals that the overall quality of question papers of B.A. End Semester Examination of Dibrugarh University is not much satisfactory. It needs improvement in terms of coverage of objectives, language used, coverage of syllabus, inclusion of number of options, etc. Guideline to paper setters of B.A./B.Sc./B.Com End Semester Examination of Dibrugarh University also needs modification related to some of the aspects. University authority should organize training programmes for paper setters as well as moderators from time to time to improve the quality of question papers.

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