

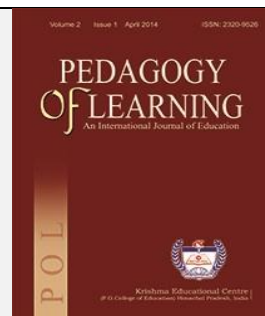
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## **Examination in Higher Education of the 21st Century: A Multidimensional Issue**

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### **Abstract**

The development of a nation and its citizens depends on the quality of higher education which is also directly and indirectly related to its curriculum transaction like examination, evaluation, teaching, placement and research and extension services etc. Currently, in India total universities are 858 universities (47 central Universities, 369 state Universities, 125 Deemed to Be Universities and 317 Private Universities) and 621 autonomous colleges (170 Government colleges and 451 Non-Government colleges) as on 8th September 2017 (UGC, 2017). The Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) in higher education is a multidimensional issue such as traditional programmes, self-financed courses, private sector, MOOCs, contractual faculty, contractual administrative staff, lack of accountability, and new examination procedure. Higher learning must play a role in identifying and addressing the issues that affect the well-being of communities, nations and global society. Efforts must be made by everybody at every level and at various phases in higher education system. CBCS in higher education can also be judged by the perception and benefits received by the stakeholders of education, namely students, parents and faculties. It is a matter of common knowledge and belief that proper growth of higher education in the country depends on the quality of teaching, research and extension services which is also related to examination process like CBCS. Presently CBCS in higher education is the top concern for academicians, administrators and the government. The Choice Based Credit System in higher education process should also change as per the requirement of the society and it is right time that the stakeholders realize their responsibilities to ensure a bright future. The aim of CBCS in higher education to institutions is intended upon producing an individual who is socially responsible, globally aware and useful to the nation.

**Keywords:** Choice Based Credit System (CBCS), Higher Education, Examination

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### **Introduction**

The quality of higher education, which is directly and indirectly connected with its curricular processes such as examination, assessment, teaching, placement, research, and extension services, is crucial for both national development and individual progress. Higher education is undergoing rapid transformation due to emerging disciplines and new trends, and it plays a significant role in equipping individuals with the skills required to achieve important personal, societal, and professional objectives. It provides individuals with “an opportunity to reflect on critical social, economic, cultural, moral, and spiritual issues” (GOI, 1986). The implementation of the National Policy on Education in the mid-1980s marked the beginning of structural changes in India’s education system (GOI, 1986; GOI, 1992). This process gained further momentum with the introduction of the New Economic Policy in 1991, which emphasized liberalization, privatization, and globalization. The way higher education is organized and run in India varies greatly. The higher education institutions in India are regulated by different statutory bodies such as Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)-1929, Medical Council of India (MCI)-1933, Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)-1942, Indian Nursing Council (INC)-1947, Dental Council of India (DCI)-1948, Pharmacy Council of India (PCI)-1948, Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR)-1950, University Grants Commission (UGC)-1956, Bar Council of India (BCI)-1961, Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR)-1969, Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM)-1971, Council of Architecture (COA)-1972, Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR)-1972, Indian Council of Philosophical Research (ICPR)-1977, Veterinary Council of India (VCI)-1984, All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)-1987, National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE)-1993, Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI)-1993, National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)-1994, National Council of Rural Institutes (NCRI)-1995 and Quality Council of India (QCI)-1997 (AISHE, 2015-16; AISHE 2016-17). According to the National Knowledge Commission's 2009 report, enrolment in higher education is expected to rise by 15% by 2015, and it has suggested establishing roughly 1500 universities in the next years. As of September 8, 2017, there were 858 universities in India (47 central universities, 369 state universities, 125 deemed to be universities, and 317 private universities) and 621 autonomous colleges (170 government colleges and 451 non-government colleges). The CBCS in higher education represents a complex issue that includes traditional programmes, self-financed courses, private sector involvement, Massive Open online Courses (MOOCs), contractual faculty, administrative challenges, and evolving examination practices. Higher education is expected to contribute to addressing societal challenges. The effectiveness of CBCS can be assessed through stakeholder perspectives. The overall development of higher education is closely shaped by the quality of teaching, research, and extension activities, all of which remain strongly connected to examination processes. In recent years, the functioning of CBCS has drawn increasing attention from academicians, administrators, and policymakers.

Students’ diagnostic and terminal behaviors are significantly influenced by examination patterns and their effectiveness. Ideally, examinations are designed to assess the development of students’ knowledge and skills. Their effectiveness depends largely on the methods of teaching and the extent to which students internalize knowledge. In the context of globalization, education is increasingly expected to act as an instrument for social, cultural, and economic transformation. Consequently, examination reform has gained importance due to the significant changes occurring in higher education and the central role examinations play within the curriculum. This highlights the need to strengthen existing examination practices. Educationists, policymakers, and practitioners must work collectively to improve examination practices and develop models that ensure validity, reliability, and objectivity while supporting holistic student development (Singh, 2015). These shortcomings must be addressed to improve student competencies as well as the overall quality of higher education.

In the context of higher education in India, there are a number of exam-related difficulties which are presented as under:

**Lack of Finance:** The effective functioning of higher education institutions depends largely on the availability of adequate resources. In many cases, state governments face constraints in generating

sufficient funds to support a robust and efficient examination system (GOI, 2017).

**Online Resources and Courses:** With technological advancement and environmental considerations, traditional classroom methods are no longer sufficient. Educational resources are increasingly required to be accessible online. Traditional library-based resources are also part of this transition. By integrating e-books into your website or online platform, this reduces concerns related to the preservation and accessibility of resources. To help students, some institutions have further developed an immersive online learner portal where all course materials, class notes, study schedules, research sites, etc. are located. The budget was also used by the government to refocus on providing online higher education in India. Platforms such as Study Webs of Active Learning for Your Aspiring Mind (SWAYAM) have been developed to allow Indian residents to access about 2000 courses and widespread learning material online. The program's goal is to enable students to enrol in classes at universities that might not have the internal resources to accommodate more students. Additionally, the platform will enable students to access resources, take exams, receive marks, take part in debates, and learn from instructors from some of the best universities in the nation. Online courses are acceptable by international standards, but they might not be feasible in India because of power outages, rural, mountainous, and tribal areas.

**International Standard:** The rising cost of education, particularly in state universities, poses challenges for economically disadvantaged students. Finance Minister Sh. Arun Jaitley declared plans to make large investments in higher education in India during the 2017–18 budgets. This is especially true for the management, medical, and technology institutes, all of which will get more financing. Alignment with international standards has become an important priority for India's higher education system.

**Technology Based Infrastructure:** The current era demands technology-driven infrastructure, including smart classrooms and digital examination systems. Large sums of money are needed to set up SMART classrooms, and the state government is unable to supply these funds due to other problems. The high costs associated with such infrastructure often limit its availability, thereby affecting the conduct of examinations.

**Private Sector:** Currently, 317 of India's 858 universities operate in the private sector, and even within state institutions, a significant number of universities operate in the private sector, where concerns regarding commercialization sometimes overshadow the focus on quality education and assessment standards.

**MOOCs:** While MOOCs offer accessible and flexible learning opportunities, issues related to assessment and examination fees may create additional burdens for students.

**Contractual Faculty and Administrative Staff:** The increasing reliance on contractual faculty and administrative staff, often due to financial constraints, can lead to inefficiencies in the management and conduct of examinations.

**Introduce New Policy:** Frequent changes in policies and examination frameworks have, at times, reduced the effectiveness and consistency of the system.

**Defective Curriculum and Examination System:** India's examination system reflects broader issues within curriculum design and instructional practices. The existing examination system often emphasizes passing examinations rather than acquiring meaningful knowledge. It is an obligation of the state government to provide suitable curriculum to students at the higher education level. Not only this, it is to ensure that in time-to-time higher education is of maintain quality standards under initiatives such as Rastriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA).

**In-genuine Courses:** According to certain IT industry reports, nearly eighty percent of graduate lack employable skills, highlighting deficiencies in both assessment methods and curriculum relevance. This indicates the need to focus on developing students' communication skills and overall personality.

Greater emphasis should be placed on skill development and job-oriented education.

**Administrative Difficulties:** Administrative challenges, including lack of coordination and a casual approach toward examination processes, can adversely affect the timely and effective conduct of examinations. Such issues need to be addressed at the administrative level.

**Quality Issues in Examinations:** Ensuring quality in examinations requires addressing administrative inefficiencies and maintaining consistency, fairness, and transparency in evaluation processes. Key issues include the quality of question papers, fairness in practical examinations, exam scheduling, management of malpractices, evaluation processes, and delays in result processing.

**External examination versus Internal examination:** The external examination system is often associated with selective learning, rote memorization, and reliance on simplified study materials, while discouraging continuous academic engagement habits, the use of quality textbooks, and innovations. Students frequently prioritize final examinations over regular coursework. The most serious criticism of external exams is that, rather than serving as a useful aid to improve the quality and standard of education and teaching, education itself becomes subject to exams. However, external examinations are generally considered more objective and less influenced by local pressures. For this reason, though academically more unsound than the internal assessment system, they are preferred and advocated by certain educationists. Therefore, a balanced approach that integrates the strengths of both systems may be more effective (Singh, 2015).

**Use a variety of assessment methods:** The selection of appropriate assessment methods remains a significant concern in higher education. The most appropriate response is to employ a variety of evaluation techniques in each course, but at least in the educational program. It is advantageous to diversify the evaluation. In addition to extending their learning and preparing them for their professional jobs, this allows students the chance to demonstrate their complete knowledge and abilities in the subject or subjects they have studied. This cannot be achieved solely by testing students' factual in-depth knowledge. The goals and objectives of the course and the educational program should be connected to the assessment techniques. Continuous evaluation plays a crucial role throughout a course, as examinations significantly influence students' learning. Most students will put off studying till the very end if the exam is only at the end of the course. Short-term knowledge is typically poorly recalled and won't be used in the course. Methods such as assignments, group discussions, case studies, and problem-based learning activities can support ongoing evaluation. These kinds of exercises are essential for helping students assess their comprehension and pinpoint any knowledge gaps.

Incorporating continuous assessment into final evaluation, with of say, 25–50% weightage, can enhance the overall assessment process. In order to give students a comprehensive understanding of the course material, it is crucial to incorporate some of the key topics from the sections that are often reviewed into the final exam. Regardless of the evaluation method, providing regular feedback is essential and students should be given opportunities to improve their performance within a reasonable timeframe.

**Open-book Examinations:** Open-book examinations allow students to use textbooks and other resources during assessment. This approach allows for the assessment of students' understanding, analytical ability, and application of knowledge. However, limitations such as lack of access to relevant materials may affect its effectiveness (AGTR, 2011).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that educators, students, policymakers, and intellectuals to recognize their respective roles in strengthening the examination system. Examinations must evolve in response to changing educational and societal contexts. An essential component of higher education is examination. How and when students study, as well as what they learn, are greatly influenced by the exam questions and procedures. They should function not only as tools for evaluation but also as mechanisms that support learning and intellectual development. At its core, higher education aims to develop individuals who are globally aware, socially responsible, and capable of contributing meaningfully to society.

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