

How rational are admission test questions in our universities?

ROBIUL KABIR CHOWDHURY

EACH year when the admission test result of Dhaka University is published, there is a hue and cry about the poor quality of secondary education in the country—the reason being lower pass rates in the admission tests. But if the quality of education at the secondary level was so poor, then a lot of seats would have been vacant in public universities or medical colleges. Whereas in reality, no seats are vacant.

Students are going abroad for higher studies after doing SAT, GRE, TOEFL or IELTS. They are also participating in international Math or Physics Olympiads and returning home with prizes. Then why is the pass rate so low each year? Some of the reasons could be inadequate time allowed, negative marking or multi-linked conditions for pass mark.

Time is an important factor for a valid test. There are four things a candidate has to do to answer a MCQ. He/she has to read the instructions, try to understand what the question is asking, try to figure out the answer, and fill in the correct circle. Considering these four points, along with the difficulty level of a question, the standard time allotted for a MCQ is at least one minute. If the time limit is not generous enough, candidates may be penalised for being compelled to resort to guessing (the wrong answer) and thus the merit of a candidate will not be accurately reflected. In this respect, the test would not be considered valid.

This is why in any international aptitude test comprising MCQs, at least one minute, on average, is allotted. For example, admission tests for the undergraduate programme of commerce and humanities faculty in Delhi University have a duration of two hours (120 minutes) and a student has to answer 100 MCQs. The GRE test has 25 MCQs for verbal and quantitative reasoning

sections with 35 and 40 minutes, respectively.

But the DU admission tests of KA (science), KHA (humanities) or GA (business) units have inadequate time limit for students which leads to negative marking and thus an increase in the fail rate in the admission test. Ninety minutes for 120 MCQs in KA unit and 60 minutes for 100 MCQs in KHA and GA units denote that less than one minute, on average, is allotted for a MCQ in each unit which is less than the time allotted in international tests. Some of the MCQs demand at least two minutes due to extensive reading and calculation. So the total time duration is not enough for the candidates and, as a result, candidates often resort to guessing the answers. Negative marking adds fuel to the fire and this is why the fail rate is so high.

Besides, there are multi-linked conditions for qualifying in KHA and GA units,

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Obtaining 48 marks will not guarantee a student's success in the admission test unless and until he/she satisfies all the conditions. There is an individual pass mark for English, Bangla and General Knowledge. Securing the pass mark in one subject and not in the

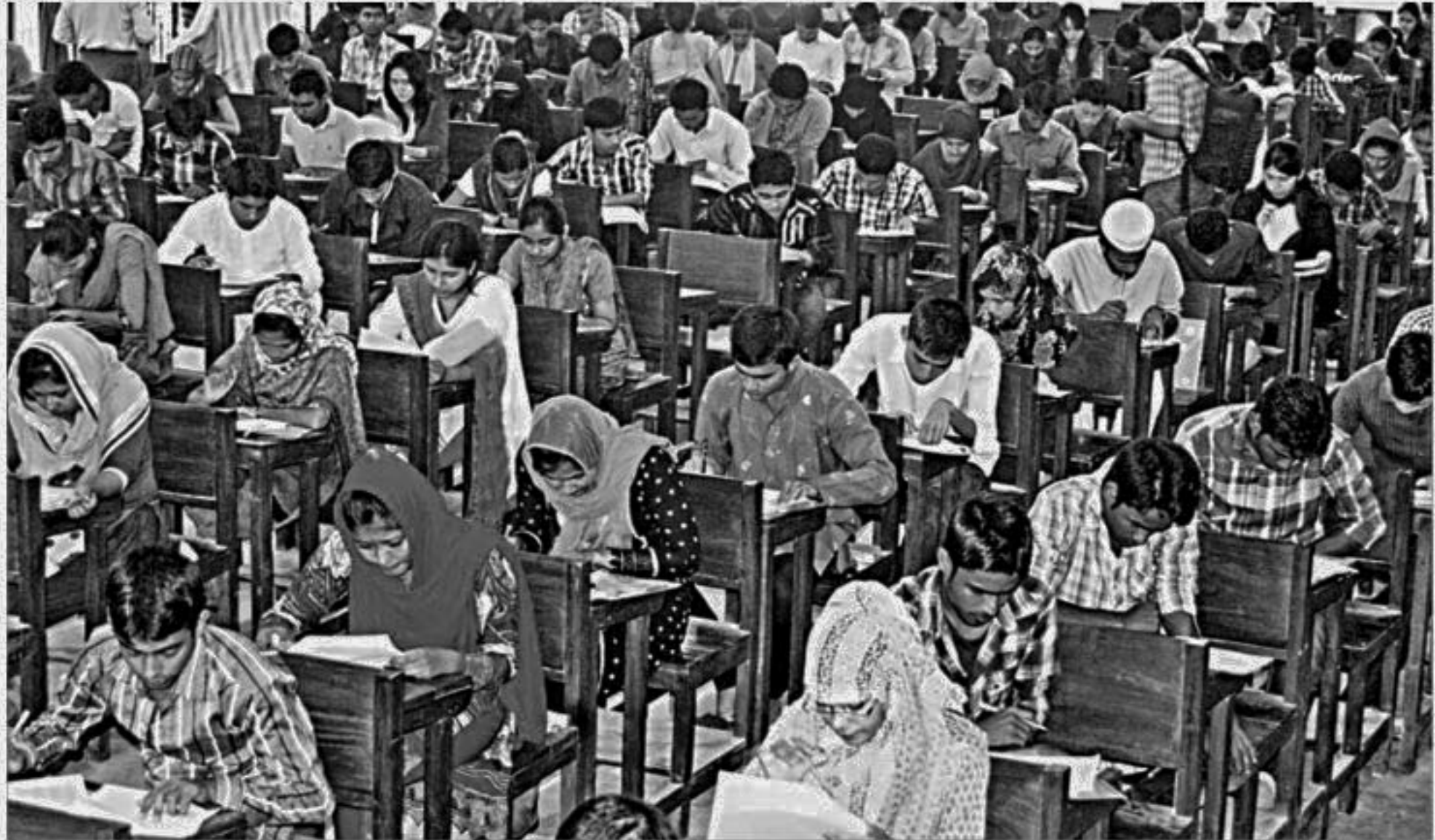


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others means the student has failed. These multi-linked conditions drag down the pass rate in KHA and GA units of DU.

So if the cut-off point for the pass mark is determined with an invalid time limit, negative marking and multi-linked conditions, a lower pass rate is expected in an elimination test such as DU admission tests. Our assumption is corroborated by the following session-wise low pass rate seen throughout the years (GA unit): 11.19 percent, 9.97 percent, 7.27 percent, 17.56 percent, 5.52 percent, and 14.75 percent in sessions 2009-10, 2010-11, 2011-12, 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18, respectively. If the results were published on a scale score maintaining the rank order as is the practice for aptitude tests (SAT, GRE, GMAT) worldwide, there would be no question of a pass or fail rate.

Now, the question is: To what extent do MCQs in DU admission tests assess the quality of learning of students? Bloom's taxonomy is "a set of three hierarchical models used to classify educational learning

objectives into levels of complexity and specificity." Questions demanding analysis, evaluation, problem-solving and application skills of students belong to higher-order skills and have the scope of application of knowledge to formulate an "original" response to an "unknown" situation. Knowledge means reproducing the same learnt knowledge and thus belongs to lower-order skills—assessing the ability of memorisation.

So if a student is asked to write down only the information he can recall from textbooks, his or her lower-order skills will be assessed.

An analysis of this year's DU GA unit MCQ paper shows that almost 99 percent of MCQs in the subjects of business principle, marketing and finance merely require recalling textbook information (e.g. "Who is the innovator of functional organisation?", "Which one of the following is related to the Solar Chain Principle?", "What is meant by Jettison?", etc). There is no room for candidates to show their application or analytical ability necessary for assessing

higher-order cognitive skills associated with quality learning.

It's the same case with the MCQs of KHA unit. But the quality of MCQs in KA unit is much better than that of the other two units, i.e. most of the MCQs of KA unit give room to students to formulate an original response to an unknown situation.

RL Thorndike and EP Hagen, in their book *Measurement and Evaluation in Psychology and Education* (fourth edition), advise against using negative instructions as negative knowledge is not as important as positive knowledge, and negative instructions cause confusion. The MCQ paper of GA unit this year has a lot of questions with negative instructions (10 questions) which led to students being confused; this is an example of not prioritising important learning outcomes.

For example, knowing which accounting concept is considered while preparing the balance sheet of a firm (Q16, GA unit, 2018) is much more important than knowing which accounting concept is not relevant from an educational point of view. As it is, students are nervous during an exam. And even a fraction of a second is very important for them. So it is unfair if the nature of questions causes students to be confused. Such questions will inevitably lead to a low pass rate.

Quality education does not mean regurgitation of information from textbooks. It is much more than that. It includes the ability to think critically. Zhu Xi, the famous Chinese philosopher and idolised recluse, had said, "Education is about acquiring knowledge and skills, about development and growth, resulting in betterment of mind and heart. Education is not teaching to test; it is also not about focusing on getting ahead of others."

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The double standard of outrage

The very society that marches against violent rapes is also telling women to stop playing the victim when they share their stories of harassment and misconduct by men.

HOME > ENTERTAINMENT > BOLLYWOOD

Alok Nath on sexual assault allegations: 'It (rape) must have happened, but someone else would have done it'

Alok Nath has reacted to the accusations of sexual assault leveled on him by a veteran TV writer-producer. The woman, in a Facebook post, accused the actor of sexually violating her almost two decades ago.

By: Express Web Desk | New Delhi |
Updated: October 9, 2018 1:44:11 pm

SOURCE: TWITTER



RUBEENA MAHATO

Just last week, dozens of Indian women took to Twitter to out some of the country's most prominent personalities: actors, comedians, editors, and media bosses in cases ranging from assault to incidents of workplace harassment. The effects were felt across the border in Nepal, as women opened up about their own experiences of abuse and harassment. These reports confirmed to us what many of us already knew: that when it comes to perpetuating a culture of silence and male privilege, no industry and no country is different.

Unsurprisingly, there is also a growing backlash against women who have bravely spoken up, including from people who claim to be feminists and allies. Unshackling oneself from years of social conditioning and internalised misogyny is not easy. In every country where these cases have come up, people—mostly men—have been invalidating women's experience of harassment and attacking them if their stories fall anything short of serious sexual assault or rape.

In Nepal, too, women have been told to stop playing the victim by bringing up cases of minor transgressions and misconduct. They have been accused of trivialising sexual violence, and of undermining the feminist cause with their flimsy accusations.

The problem is not just that our societies are forgiving of men and dismissive of women and their pain. We have normalised gender violence to the extent that only serious manifestations of gender crimes have any effect on us. This normalisation allows people to simultaneously become marching crusaders against violent rapes and assaults while also participating in the various ways women are broken, humiliated, and dehumanised every day. The very society that is outraged against rape also socially sanctions predatory and menacing male behaviour. We sympathise with men for failing to take a hint and "unwittingly" distress women they pursue, but we do not discuss the tilted power dynamics in which sexual pursuit, romance, and flirtation take place.

We do not find it problematic that women have to navigate a hyper-sexualised professional space, operating in a constant state of fear, guilt, and self-doubt. There is an endless debate on the fine distinctions between a romantic overture and sexual harassment but hardly any addressing of the underlying issue: male entitlement and how it affects women.

We partake in women's objectification; male promiscuity is valorised and narratives of toxic and violent masculinity are popularised in the media. We marginalise women from public discourse by trolling, bullying, and slut-shaming them into silence. Women's contribution to the economy is devalued, the gender wage gap is institutionalised, and we make it extremely difficult for women to rise to positions of power unless they ingratiate themselves to the system. We almost always punish women for speaking up. These behaviours are normalised as we simultaneously fight rapes and sexual violence. By taking such a narrow view of what constitutes gender-based violence, we allow men and women to escape

accountability for their roles in creating an environment where larger crimes against women become possible.

There is no question that there are hundreds of cases of sexual and domestic violence, rapes and assaults that need greater attention and championing. But we also need women to stand up against everyday humiliations, harassment, and injustices that pass as accepted behaviours. One fight does not undermine the other, they are inextricably linked. No amount of stringent legislation or societal policing can reduce violent crimes against women if the general environment against them remains hostile and discriminatory. To say that women are diverting attention from the "real issues" in telling these stories is to tacitly support and enable an oppressive system.

No doubt, there are valid concerns about unsubstantiated accusations, lack of due process and the lynch-mob mentality that often accompanies accusations that need to be addressed. But they should not be used as justifications for dismissing women's experience of abuse and harassment. Speaking up has never been easy for women. They have to put their safety at risk, deal with having their personal and professional lives ripped apart in media, and resign themselves to the possibility that their perpetrators might never face any consequences.

A profound sense of injustice, an instinct to protect and warn vulnerable women like them, and a blithering refusal to be complicit in the crimes of patriarchy motivate women to come forward. The least we can do is to listen and acknowledge.

Rubena Mahato is a Nepali writer. She writes on global politics and development policy.
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MICHEL FOUCAULT
(1926-1984)
French philosopher, historian of ideas, social theorist, and literary critic

In its function, the power to punish is not essentially different from that of curing or educating.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Staff symbol
- 5 "The Merry Widow" composer
- 10 Irani coin
- 11 Sober
- 12 Gumbo base
- 13 Followed
- 14 Failed totally
- 16 Shift-6 on a typewriter
- 20 Igneous rock
- 23 Fade out
- 24 Not drowsy
- 25 Flour factories
- 27 Quarrel
- 28 Diamond sides
- 29 Major movie on a studio's schedule
- 32 How a super may live

DOWN

- 1 Be boastful
- 2 Similar
- 3 Bring home
- 4 Rail carrier
- 5 Minimal amount
- 6 Does paper work
- 7 "2001"
- 8 Stopped fasting
- 9 Cardinal
- 11 Publicity act
- 15 Stiff drink
- 17 Not active
- 18 Having a shiny coat
- 19 Lawman Eliot
- 20 Homer's son
- 21 Soothing plant
- 22 Put in stitches
- 25 Brewer's need
- 26 Northern sea sight
- 28 Computer type choices
- 30 Warble
- 31 Flies and gnats
- 33 Hindu hero
- 34 Mideast ruler
- 35 Diner chow
- 36 Jay-Z-specialty
- 37 Sports drink
- 38 Pool need

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9-27

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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TESS BEER

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