PERCEPTIONS OF THE ASSIGNMENT MARKING EXAMINERS ON THE ASSIGNMENT MARKING MECHANISM OF THE POST GRADUATE DIPLOMA IN EDUCATION PROGRAM

Jalaldeen Careemdeen
Lecturer, Department of Secondary and Tertiary Education,
Sri Lanka
Email: jdcar@ou.ac.lk

ABSTRACT
A variety of assessment methods are used at the Open University of Sri Lanka to provide feedback to students and to assess their performance. Students who follow the Post Graduate Diploma in Education Program in The Open University Of Sri Lanka have to complete 16 take home assignments. The aim of this study was to find out the perceptions of the assignment marking examiners on the assignment marking mechanism. There are 158 Sinhala medium assignment marking examiners and 109 Tamil medium assignment marking examiners from all regional and study centers of the Open University of Sri Lanka for the Post Graduate Diploma program. The random sampling method was used in the selection of a sample representing 50% each Sinhala and Tamil medium marking examiners. The sample consisted of 135 examiners, 80 Sinhala medium and 55 Tamil medium assignments marking examiners in all regional and Study centers of the Open University. The survey method used to analyze data. It was revealed that 63% teachers indicated that the role of assignment marking is to help them to improve their career. Only 37% teachers stated that their critical thinking any analyzing skills were improved because of their involvement in making Post Graduate level assignments. However, 71% of assignment marking examiners mentioned that the grade given by them for each and every assignment matched their comments. Nearly 74% of assignment marking examiners mentioned that the workshop conducted by the department is useful for them to update their knowledge of the subject. Nevertheless, 80% of them stated that their assignment marking mechanism improved after the assignment marking examiners’ workshop.

Keywords: Marking Mechanism; Education

INTRODUCTION
A variety of assessment methods are used at the Open University of Sri Lanka to provide feedback to students and to assess their performance. In open and distance learning, assessment has many dimensions; it can be formal or informal carried out by the learners themselves or by lecturers. In the faculty of Education the main types of formative assessments that are being carried out are: home assignments and activity – based assignments. Depending on the credit rating of the courses, student teachers have to complete either three (6 credits) or two (3 credits) assignments satisfactorily for eligibility to sit the final examination. Thus the total number of assignments handled annually in this programme amounts to 40000. A large number of visiting academics attached to different regional and study centres mark those assignments using the marking schemes prepared by themselves at the training workshops conducted by the central faculty. Students who follow the Post Graduate Diploma in Education Program have to complete 16 take home assignments. Students have to submit the assignments before due date of each assignment. After the submission date of each assignment
relevant marking examiners will be provided written assignments and marking schemes. Marking examiners, apart from marking the assignments are expected to critically review the content so as to stimulate the students concerned to pursue the subject with greater relevance. Therefore, there is need to study the perception of these marking examiners as a result of their continued commitment to this procedure through a number of years in order to accommodate any changes if necessary as suggested by them in order to ensure improvement in the quality of the both assignment mechanism and the marking scheme.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

There are five objectives in this study. They are:

1. To examine assignment marking examiners’ perception of improving their skills,
2. To assess assignment marking examiners’, perception on marking scheme,
3. To identify assignment marking examiners’ perception on writing comments and duration they were given for marking an assignment,
4. To examine assignment marking examiners’ perception on assignment workshop conducted by Faculty and problems related to assignment marking.

LITERATURE REVIEW

“Assessment methods and requirements probably have a greater influence on how and what students learn than any other single factor” (Boud, 1988). Further many studies stress the educational value of students learning together (e.g. Barnett 1994; Boud, Cohen & Sampson 1999; Jacques 1991; Johnson & Johnson 1999) such as improved analytical abilities, development of higher order cognitive skills, fostering deeper learning as a result of pooling of labor and peer teaching. Some studies refer to more pragmatic reasons such as increased staff workloads, fewer resources available for academics structuring their units, subjects and courses around group projects (James, McInnis & Devlin 2002; Morris & Hayes 1997).

According to Slater (1992) the benefit of assignments for student teachers can be listed as follows. First of all, they force student teachers to think professionally because in order to do assignments, student teachers have to gather data and then think about this data and process it. Also, they have to draw conclusions from the data gathered. This means that they have to work to meet high academic standards. In other words, they have to demonstrate that they are thinking professionally in answering the assignments, which is important for a teacher because thinking professionally and expressing ideas professionally is a crucial feature of an effective educator.

Assessment plays a vital role in the teaching learning process. According to Granados-García et al (2011), continuous assessments assess students throughout the course with periodic testing and they would ease their assimilation of contents and progressive development of skills. Further, Granados-García et al, (2011) pointed out several advantages and drawbacks of a continuous assessment mechanism in Open Distance Learning.

Jayathilake (1997) had studied the Continuous Assessment System of the PGDE programme of the Open University of Sri Lanka with a view to identify strengths and weaknesses of the system, problems faced by students and tutors and to propose possible solutions for the existing problems. The study revealed the need for redefining the objectives of using CA as a method of evaluating student achievement, restructuring the format of assignments and establishing a supervision system to reduce turnaround time of assignments.

According to Lekamge, Karunanayake, Nawaratne, Kugamoorthy, Hewapathirana and Weerakoon (2015) marking examiners were fully satisfied with the introduction given on their roles and explanation given on how to make comments on the assignments though they expressed less
satisfaction about the relevance and usefulness of activities, the time allocated for the activities and the strategies used at the training workshop.

METHODOLOGY

The study followed Quantitative and Qualitative research techniques including questionnaires and interviews. Quantitative techniques such as percentages, tables and charts were used to analyze data. Qualitative techniques were also used for data analysis. The survey design has been the basic research method used in this study. There are 158 Sinhala assignment marking examiners and 109 Tamil assignment marking examiners from all regional and study centers of the Open University of Sri Lanka for the Post Graduate Diploma program. The random sampling method was used to select a sample representing 50% each Sinhala and Tamil medium marking examiners. The sample consisted of 135 examiners, 80 Sinhala medium and 55 Tamil medium assignments marking examiners from all Open University regional and Study centers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A majority (59%) of marking examiners stated that their knowledge was getting updated in certain subject areas through their involvement in marking assignments. 63% teachers indicated that the role of assignment marking helped them to improve their career and win recognition from society for being involved in a high level academically intellectual activity. Only 37% teachers stated that their critical thinking and analyzing skills were improved through making Post Graduate level assignments while 31% of examiners were neutral regarding this statement and others held positive views in this regard.

All the marking examiners stated that they received assignments written by students on time without any delay. At the interview a majority of the examiners mentioned that they went to regional and study centers to obtain written assignments from assignments coordinators appointed for certain centers. However, a small minority of examiners mentioned that assignment coordinators directly came to their places and handed over written assignment to them. However it is indicated there is no any issue with regard to handing over assignments to marking examiners. All the marking examiners stated that they received marking scheme prepared by the department. When they questioned with regard to comprehensiveness of marking scheme 69% assignments marking examiners expressed satisfaction while only 31% of examiners responded negatively. A considerable percentage of assignment marking examiners (55%) expressed that the marking scheme prepared by the department included all the guidelines and appropriate content materials while only 30% were neutral and the others responded negatively.

At the interview one of the marking examiner noted.

“We could receive very comprehensive marking schemes with all guidelines, if the marking scheme included more updated content it would be easy for us to gain more knowledge and mark assignments accordingly”

Another examiner mentioned:

“The marking scheme prepared by the department helped us to gain more knowledge in certain subject areas”

Nearly, 81% examiners have agreed that writing comments in each assignment was of benefit to students. They mentioned at the interview that writing comments for each and every component was a very risky task and a time-consuming factor.

When a marking examiner marks an assignment one has to write two types of comments: they have to write for each and every paragraph of assignment and overall comments after the marking has been completed. A majority of the assignment making examiners mentioned that they had to spend a lot of time in marking assignments. As such, 61% of them noted that writing comments was a difficult task.
However, 71% of assignment marking examiners mentioned that the grade given by them for each and every assignment matches with the comments. The reason being that if the examiner puts high grade once has to write comments accordingly, but if a lower grade is given one has to justify once decision. 

Under problems related to take home assignments most of the marking examiners have mentioned that the handwriting of the student was difficulty to read. 61% of marking examiners mentioned that bad handwriting had an impact when they gave marks. However, they mentioned at the interview, that there some students who had typed their assignments. But assignment marking examiners have been instructed not to consider students’ handwriting when they gave marks. Nevertheless, the marking examiners mentioned that they had read through the assignment whatever conditioned of the handwriting of the student was.

An average number of marking examiners (52%) mentioned that the duration given them for marking was adequate while 48% of examiners mentioned that the duration allocated to mark assignments was not sufficient and they mentioned that the duration for marking assignments should be increased.

A one day work shop for the assignment marking examiners is conduct by the department every academic year. The workshops are conduct by professors and academics of department. The main objectives of this workshop are to explain the purpose of assessment component, preparing making schemes and how to allocate marks accordingly. There are 3100 students all around the nation who follow post graduate diploma in education program from 24 regional and study centers with over 150 assignment marking examiners involved. Therefore, to main quality and reduce deficiencies when giving marks to each and every assignment, marking examiners are instructed regarding this function at the workshop conduct by the department.

Nearly 74% of assignment marking examiners mentioned that the workshop conducted by department was useful to them to update their knowledge of the subject. 80% of them stated that their assignment marking mechanism improved after the assignment marking examiners’ workshop. 76% of marking examiners mentioned that the inauguration session of assignment marking examiner workshop was helpful to them to understand the aim of the assignment marking mechanism. 85% of examiners mentioned that the skills of marking assignment improved after the workshop. All the marking examiners were divided into 12 groups based on their subject discipline and were asked to discuss and present the themes given by the department. Almost all the participants at the workshop mentioned that the group activity helped them to improve their knowledge and skills of assignment making effectively.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

It can be summarized that assignment marking examiners benefitted through marking assignments and designing appropriate comments. There were also positive factors of their reinforcing the knowledge they already processed and perceiving student expressions through novel angles. However, a majority of the marking examiners mentioned that writing comments for each and every component was very onerous task and a time consuming factor. A majority of assignment marking examiners mentioned that the workshop conducted by department is useful them to update their knowledge on the subject area. It was recommended to reduce the number of Take Home Assignments and to introduce Continuous Assessment Test (CAT).

REFERENCES


