

Conduct and Management of General Papers: A Case Study of School of General Studies, Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil, Kano State

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ABSTRACT In most universities, the general papers are conducted and managed by School of General Studies and ‘service departments’. They are papers generally taken at the lower levels of the universities and they are mostly ‘core’ courses. The collective nomenclature—general—by which such papers are referred to, tend to make them prone to misuse or even abused by some staff and many students. The thrust of this paper is examine the best practice in setting the general question paper, marking and processing of general papers, challenges associated with proper shading of answer sheets, use and accuracy of the OMR machine, cases of missing results and ways to minimize them. This paper recognizes the critical role of the teacher, the examination officer, and that of the invigilator, under whose watchful eyes such examinations are conducted. In addition, paper touches on the positive impact of Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) on the conduct and management of the general papers.

Key words: Conduct, Management, Transmissive pedagogy, measurement, learning

Introduction

It is obvious that the conduct and management of any examination which involves a large number of candidates is open to chaos, if not properly planned for. Therefore, the preparatory stage, which include the teaching and hence the setting of the examination questions and the careful selection of the venue as well as the commitment of all the staff involved, is the most important stage in the conduct and management of any general paper, the importance of this preparatory stage can be over emphasized. Its analogy is

that of preparing for and the handling of a large class – such exercise needs a flexibility and meticulousness. Thus, at any given point, it is pertinent for educational institutions to keep on making effort at sanitizing and improving the management and the administration of examinations especially when it comes to the conduct and management of the general papers. Hence, the concern for this paper is to examination, in practical terms, the conduct and management of general papers under the auspices of the School of General Studies (SGS), Kano University of Science and Technology (KUST), Wudil, Kano State,

The Role of the Teacher

The major role of the modern teacher is develop turn around ideas on transforming the classroom for effective teaching and learning. One way of doing this is to embrace the concept of communicative approach to classroom management: once the learner, not the teacher or the textbook, is made the centre of teaching and learning activities, students will become comfortable, which will in turn stimulate their minds for learning to take place. The position of the teacher, presently, changes from Mr. Know-All to that of a facilitator: his function is to form a bridge over which the students pass from simple to complex learning experiences.

Objective of the teacher

The main objective of a teacher is to bring a change in the behavior of the student. Change is complex and does not involve only the teaching format; instead it is vital to understand that the students' and the teachers' understanding of what constitutes a proper learning experience, as well as their individual histories of learning, play an important role in the evolution of any change in the overall experience of learning. When learning takes place in isolation, supported only by the material given out or suggested by or demanded by teachers, this is referred to as 'transmissive pedagogy'; this is teaching based on an assumption that students receive information from the teacher and slot it straight into an empty place in their knowledge base, or, at best, work on it later to make it their own. However, it has been gradually realized that students do not learn well in a passive transmissive environment but that they learn through a variety of knowledge building processes, and that teaching should encourage students to work actively. This important realization has led educationists to question some concepts in the teaching profession such as '*good learning and good teaching*'. '*Good Learning*' has been largely based on success recorded by students in examinations designed to test the quantity and the quality of what individual students have learned, in the sense of giving back, in an appropriate form, that which the teachers

taught and the text-books told. However, this may not be the best way to approach the concept of learning which has been defined as a change in behavior due to certain experience. Examination based measurement and evaluation tend to reveal less than the truth; as we all know that students study only in order to pass the examination and after that largely nothing remains or that no change in behavior occurs. Rather, 'good learning', should be seen from the perspective of students as being able to find information and knowledge by themselves; of being able to look critically at what they find; of being able to question their teachers; of being able to collaborate with colleagues; and of being able to discuss what they know with their peers and with the public. Similarly, the notion of 'good teaching' ought to shift away from the role of the teacher being an all knowing presenter of facts and/or figures towards the much more complex role of guide and tutor. This is because there is a variation in ways of experiencing the conditions for learning, and that the variation in experience is critical for the outcome of learning.

The genesis of the School of General Studies (SGS)

The school of general studies (SGS) started as General Studies Programme Unit (GSP) with the inception of the University in 2001. However, due to the shortage of man power, the Unit started not as a full academic unit as is the tradition in all Nigerian universities, but it started as an appendage to the Faculty of Science and Science Education.

The philosophy of the unit

Being a service department, it has a dual philosophy, on the one hand, the unit tries equip the entire student population with the techniques of learning in the university, including resource units and how to get the best from them as well as equip them with effective skills of communication so as to be able to cope with the language (that is English language) demands from their various fields of study and beyond. On the other hand, the students are equipped with the overview of the Nigerian societies and the Nigerian economy so as to turn them into eventual members of their society who can contribute positively. In addition to this, the student population, in their first year, is taught aspects of morality which ensures that they turn out to be members of the society who are morally conscious and thus able to be guided by their religious tenets.

Objectives

1. to equip the students with such a level of the mastery of the English language, as it is the language of instruction, in order to achieve adequate self-expression and self-actualization in the language;

2. to enable students to harmoniously live with other members of the Nigerian society
3. to enable students to be aware of rudiments of the Nigerian system of government and its economy in order to know the areas that they can contribute positively in future as contributory members of their society
4. to immerse students into the basic moral tenets so as to further consolidate them as members of the society who are morally sound;
5. to enable students to overcome certain language deficiency in their English as well as in their entry requirement without compromising standards

Mission

The SGS's mission is to prepare graduates who creatively address the challenges of the world. Specifically the mission emphasizes critical thinking, problem solving, interpretation, learning through experience and reflection, and expressing ideas articulately and distinctively in speaking and writing. Furthermore, the Unit encourages students to develop a global perspective and an appreciation and tolerance for a more diverse society vital for living in an increasingly interdependent world. The mission of the Unit is to empower students as intellectuals for membership in a society still moving towards its democratic ideal, by modeling and engaging a vision of social justice and commitment to taking reflective action for the common good.

Courses taught

There are General Studies course units known as Use of English are offered by students at both one and two hundred levels. These are compulsory courses taken by every student concerned. According to the preface to the BUK's syllabus for the Use of English(2005), in general, the purpose of such a course is to develop the English usage skills of the undergraduates and by so doing help them to become more effective users of the English language within the context of their main programmes of study. Hence, to achieve this goal, the syllabi of the GST 1201, 1202, 2203 and 2204, cater for the development of library skills, as well as all the four recognized language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. Similarly, importance is attached towards helping the students to grasp the general need for the basics such as clear and accurate expressions, wide reading and communicating in English in real life as well as the moral aspects of life.

The Nigerian society being a heterogeneous one, courses taught to cater for this need include GST 2201 and 2202. This is done with a view to cater for the need by the students to harmoniously coexist with other members of the Nigerian society.

In addition, students are to be taught study skills. Due to the ever increasing volume of information that need to be digested by students, learning how to learn by the students of especially colleges and universities is increasingly taking a centre stage in the world of academia. Probably that is the reason for the change in the nomenclature; from *study skills to study technology*. Study and communication technology is normally a first semester level 100 course, in most Nigerian Universities, that attracts one credit. In KUST, this is supposed to be taught together with the library skills; that is GST 1201. However, due to shortage of staffing the study technology is not being taught presently. Study technology is designed to acquaint students with healthy study habits. This is done through helping students to look inwards in an effort to understand who they are for the purpose of effective studying, as well as to be able to utilize their time effectively during their stay in the University and eventually during their interactions as contributing members of the society. In addition, the course will help students to study and make effective use of the University environment through offering them effective ways for the discovery and utilization of the multifaceted resources available in the University. Similarly, the course aims to help students to communicate well with others using both the written and the spoken media. To most students, getting admission into a college or university is more important than staying successfully in such institutions. This is far from the truth, which is staying successfully in an institution of higher learning is equally strenuous as getting the admission into the university. Hence, to conclude, *STUDY TECHNOLOGY* helps in introducing the students to the university as a work-place, with all its resources such as the internet, the library as well as the human resource within it.

Present situation in Kano University of Science and Technology

It is a fact that the proficiency levels of most of the students are nothing to write home about, in spite of the taught courses in English. There is the absence of an essential facility that helps students to become autonomous learners. This is none other than absence of a *Self-Access Centre*. In addition, there is a general negative attitude towards extensive reading among the students; they tend to be satisfied with reading only the courses' books. There is also the problem of handling large classes; a single teacher handles over five hundred (500) students! However, it is worth noting that these problems may not be peculiar to this University alone.

Suggestions

The above stated problems may look daunting, however, if properly tackled the problems are surmountable. The following steps need to be taken:

The creation of self access centre

This is to be a physical building within which students, as a rule, speak only English. This is because getting students to use English with each other is a problem which is often difficult to overcome. And the self-access centre is one way to help students recognize the importance of using English and to motivate them to do so in the classroom and outside. Similarly, the *self-access centre* will encourage students to become independent learners; knowing what, when, and how to study. With such a centre, it is easy to create learning circles among students. This is to be done with the view to encourage students to use English in real-life situations/activities.

Employment of more staff

It is obvious that effective teaching may not take place if a single teacher is to handle too large a class. Hence, there is the need to employ more teachers so that each large class may be divided into smaller groups for easier handling by the teachers.

More lecture theatres

The population of this university is ever increasing. Hence the need for more lecture theatres to be built.

The mechanics of handling GST courses

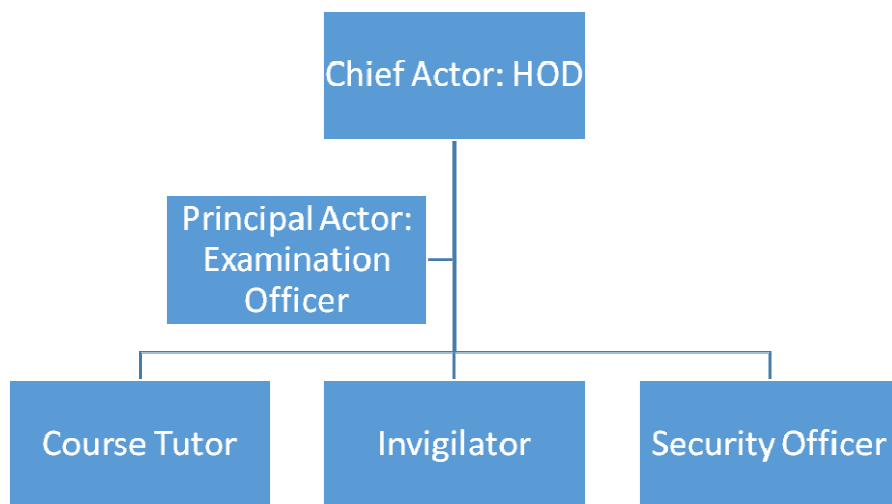


Fig. 1: showing the major actors involved in the conduct and management of general papers

The above figure shows the major actors involve in the mechanics of handling GST courses. This of course do not mean that other actors are not important. The students are also important without which there will not be any examination at all.

The best practice in setting the general question paper

As it was already mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the successful conduct and management of a general paper starts with careful preparation. This means at the initial stage, the availability of competent and committed staff who teach effectively and conscientiously. This is the right step in the right direction for the best practice in setting the general question paper. It is important for teachers to understand the difference (s) between test and assessment. The former (that is Test) is one way, and one way only, of finding out about the performance or progress of learners. Examples would include giving learners a picture dictation (this gives us information about listening and spelling) giving them a correct the error text (this gives us information about writing/spelling/vocabulary/ grammar), or a giving matching exercise (this gives us information about reading/listening comprehension, vocabulary/grammar). However, the latter (that is assessment) refers to the different ways we can measure our learners' progress or performance. We can measure progress or performance, for example, by observing learners' work in class, asking them what they find easy or difficult, testing them, or by looking at their homework. This means that as teachers we can use assessment for what is popularly known as C.A. This means Continuous Assessment! This is probably the reason why there should be CA1, CA2 and CA3.

The next step is to set the actual examination paper. The most suitable task type for a general paper (considering the large number of students involved) is the multiple choice, otherwise, known as the objective questions. This involves choosing one correct answer from a set of possibilities. This set of possibilities starts from two—to choose either True or False—to a desired number a–e. Using the computer as a veritable tool, the course tutor is free to develop set a–e of the same question paper. This is done with the view to minimize examination mal practice by the students. This is due to the fact that while student A is answering set A of the question paper, his/her neighbour may be answering set B. So, no. 1 in set A, may be found to be no. 20 in set B.

The process of the marking starts with the generation of the question paper and the marking scheme. These two important documents are taken to the academic office for proper mass production of the question papers and to the Management Information System (MIS) to ensure proper in put in to the OMR machine. The OMR machine will generate individual OMR for each student. The information included on each OMR is enough to identify the

student in question. This is because it has his/her admission number, department, as well as the name of the student. The importance of this procedure is that it reduces mix-up in the conduct of the examination of the general papers.

The above information notwithstanding, there are challenges associated with proper shading of answer sheets by the students. One of the most important of such challenges is when the student by omission or commission does not shed the type of question he/she has answered. The column for the type is printed at the top middle of the OMR. It may come as surprise to many to know that some students use pen to shade their answers! Some students may shade their OMR faintly to the extent that the machine will not recognize the answer. One of the challenges that was noticed previously, was the case of students not shading properly either their names or the name of their department. This has become history, because the present OMR comes with these information already. Another challenge is the case in which some students will photocopy the OMR and shade answers, which is subsequently rejected by the machine.

The role of the invigilator

The role of the invigilator in the conduct and management of the general paper is a critical one. The invigilator is the single individual that controls and supervises the conduct of the entire examination. The only peculiarity in the case of the general papers is that some of such papers demands the presence of two and above invigilators due to the large number of the students in the hall or auditorium.

Duties of Invigilators

Drawing on the extract from the Student Handbook/University General Regulations (on examinations).

All invigilators are required to:

1. Be present at the examination venue at least 30 minutes before the commencement of the examination.
2. Collect the question papers and all the examination materials from the Faculty Examinations Officer, 30 minutes before the commencement of the examination.
3. Check that there are sufficient desks and chairs and that answer scripts and any other material/s required are set out in good time. Instruct the students to write their scripts numbers on the attendance register.
4. Duly sign all scripts and supplementary answer sheets.
5. Check that there is an adequate supply of additional answer scripts, supplementary answer sheets, etc, send a signed request to the Faculty

- Examinations Officer if additional quantities of these things are required.
6. Search candidates (where possible) before entering the examination hall, to rid them of all illegal materials.
 7. Admit the candidates 15 minutes before the commencement of the examination. Remind the students of any special instruction and to complete the attendance register in earnest.
 8. Open the packet of question papers in the examination hall 10 minutes before the commencement of the examination. Check that there are sufficient copies and that all materials required are available.
 9. Give question papers directly to each candidate. Avoid the passing around of question papers in the examination hall.
 10. Maintain discipline during the examination as set out in the extract from the Students' Handbook/University general regulations.
 11. Ascertain all cases of malpractice and submit a duly signed report to the Faculty Examination Officer.
 12. Collect the attendance register and make sure the number tallies with the number of students in the hall at the end of the examination.
 13. Collect answer scripts directly from each candidate before they are allowed to leave the examination hall at the end of the examination.
 14. Take full control of the examination. Attendants should not be allowed to have direct verbal exchange with the students. Reports of examination malpractice from attendants are not valid.
 15. Sign all answer scripts and graph sheets.
 16. Enforce the University Senate Resolution on Dress Code. Any student indecently dressed should not be allowed into the examination hall by the invigilator.
 17. Ensure that all students have their examination and identity cards. No student shall be allowed into the examination without the identity or examination cards.
 18. Ensure that the signature of the student on the examination card tallies with the one on the attendance register.

The use and accuracy of the OMR machine

The use and accuracy of the OMR machine is a feature of the advancement in technology and its consequent impact on the lives of the people today. A machine is a machine nothing or nothing less. This means that if correctly used, it will perform all its assigned tasks perfectly—faster than the way humans are likely to do the same task. Hence, the OMR machine is really a handy tool for the processing of the marking and the coming up of the results for the general papers.

The cases of missing results and ways to minimize them

With the use of the OMR machine, the cases of missing results are on the decline. Such cases are bound to decrease until what will remain will 'be only minimal number. However, this situation can only be reached if and only if the machine is handled effectively. This effective handling is assured if the machine is kept in a good working condition and when it is assigned to perform only such tasks that that the machine is made to perform. At this juncture it is worth noting by all staff concern on how to sensitize the students on the filling of the verification of result form. This is a form designed to be filled and sent to the department concerned by the level coordinator. There are many instances whereby this particular procedure is misused. For example, when students get their hands on such forms and they unilaterally fill it without the consent of the level coordinator. Another case of abuse is the situation where a student and his/her level coordinator know that the the result of that particular student is **F** and still the verification form is filled and sent. This causes a lot of time wasting on the part of the affected department.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to explore the mechanics of the conduct and management of general papers, especially in the way such papers are handled within the School of General Studies, Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil.

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