

The Boy in Red Shirt is My Nephew, Make Him Easy for Writing: Lived Experiences of Invigilators' Chaotic and Tense Three Hours

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ABSTRACT

Invigilators are the central pillars responsible for maintaining and executing the writing environment in examination hall. This study deals with the challenges and problems faced by the invigilators in the board examination conducted in the campuses affiliated to Tribhuvan University. The qualitative method was applied to explore the lived experiences of the participants to understand the world they lived in and the constructs they conceptualized regarding the higher education examination invigilation in the public campuses. I developed themes for conducting thematic analysis to interpret the field texts. Vignettes and excerpts are used in analysing the understanding of the real social world of my participants. The themes used include viewpoints about nepotism and favouritism, distress and dissatisfaction being locals, the political characters of the campuses and misuse of power and authority. The entrance of neoliberal schooling in the university campuses carried by the student' unions, authorities, local politicians and faculty has victimized the honest and diligent invigilators. The unwanted pressure from various areas arises during the board examination due to which invigilators face serious challenges like threatening, assaulting, disobeying and direct cheating, which ruins the environment of examination, also it deteriorates academic quality.

Keywords: invigilators; students' union; board examination; threatening; QAA noncertified

INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

"The world is full of negative attitudes and behaviour that show themselves in almost every human endeavour and examination settings are not an exception" (Awoniyi et al., 2024, pp. 1962)

It was May 15, 2024, examination supervisor asked me about my time schedule for five days. I used to give time for invigilation duty for examination before, so he expected the same. The examination was supposed to be held from May 19, 2024. He was in search of invigilators for the board examination of Bachelor Level program. I said that I was free at least for ten days from the date he asked me for the time. Consequently, we made an oral agreement for the same on that day based on 'obligation of trust' (BSA, 2017, p. 5). The next day he assigned me as an invigilator officially handing me a contract letter for the board examination.

I was excited to fulfil my responsibility of being an invigilator of the examination to be held. I followed the instructions provided in a contract letter handed over to me for the duty to be carried out throughout the examination period. I tried my best to supervise and follow the students' examination rules in the hall. However, my duty as an invigilator was defined and described by students as 'very strict' invigilator by the examinees of Bachelor level students. One of the students accused me on my first day duty "You spoiled my future" albeit I made the examinees to follow rules. It was meant to be free for cheating inside the examination hall.

A day later, it reached to all the stake holders (concerned students, guardians, student unions, faculties, Campus management committee, etc.) which created a hard time for me to implement the rules to conduct examination which did not make me feel free for the next examination. On third day of the examination on May 21, 2024 (Tuesday), I went to the examination hall. After the students were seated as usual, I distributed answer sheet and question paper too. As a duty of responsible invigilator, I instructed them to follow the rules and regulations of examination. I added that I do my duty, and it is their duty to follow the examination rules.

After ten minutes, a gentle man with Dhaka cap on his head showed himself on the door of the examination hall and signalled me to come to him and briefed me that ‘The Boy in Red Shirt is My Nephew, Make Him Easy for Writing’. I had no words to speak to. I was wondering why on the earth is he telling me this? Is this the way to standardize the board examination of the University? How do other invigilators deal with such silent threatening of the so-called local leaders and student’s union leaders of the college during the board examinations? Such questions in my mind stroke to venture into this research journey.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gamage et al., (2022) posit that the invigilators are the eliminator of opportunity of cheating and malpractices that go in the physical examination. Although, invigilation is a crucial educational process, the public institutions particularly the public campuses running higher education programs lack integrity and credibility due to which invigilators face challenging situations. Nevertheless, the exception remains on this regard to.

In the examination, invigilators play important roles to safeguard the quality of educational process manoeuvring to sustain educational advancement in the country (Awoniyi et al., 2024; However, the researchers have not addressed much of invigilators’ issue. In this context, this research adds a brick on building a literature regarding invigilators’ world views delving into the lived experiences of invigilators.

Awoniyi et al., (2024) posit that the role of invigilators is to ensure free and fair examination environment based on regulations and achieving this goal means to identify the cheating examinee during the examination and penalizing them. They further argue that whenever regulations or the guidelines of examination are followed honestly, the invigilators fall under the risks of being threatened or blackmailed, intimidated and even physically abused.

I agree in the line of Minott (2018) that the significance of this study is because there is scarcity of researched literatures examining the roles of invigilators in the higher education. Describing the roles of invigilators he defines that the word invigilator (UK) and proctor (USA) are the people assigned with the jobs to ensure that examinations are conducted as per the guidelines set by board of examination or various schools or universities governing bodies.

In this study, my curiosity in temporality (O’Connor & Mcleod, 2023) on being invigilator is to explore the lived experiences which has, argumentatively, received less attention until today. While discussing the purpose of his research work Minott (2021) mentions the context to continue redressing the lack of attention given to invigilators in the research literature. Cheating in examination is taking place rampantly at an alarming rate which has prompted research worldwide (Salehi and Gholampour, 2021; p. 1). At this juncture, it is relevant and significant to dig out the experiences of invigilators.

Invigilators’ Duty and Difficulties

Majority of the invigilators job descriptions included the roles dividing into three categories: Before, During and After duties. For example, before the examination invigilator must sign in at the examination venue at least fifteen minutes before start of each examination, lay out examination papers, answer papers, answer books and the like. During the examination invigilators need to seat the students as per the seating plan and assigning a desk to any students not on the list and check no mobile phones or unpermitted materials are brought in, allow students to the nearest toilet facilities if required and so on. After the examination an invigilator should collect students’ answer sheet and question papers off desks, check the answer books against the attendance list, sort out answer sheets and hand over to examination committee of the campus.

In the UK and USA, the schools, colleges and universities employ external invigilators that ensure intact implementation of examination regulations. However, the culture of assigning invigilators from the same institution can be detrimental to maintaining regulations which is the practice of public campuses in Nepal. Being an invigilator in the examination of public campus is challenging and sometimes risk taking in terms of personal security. Sometimes invigilators face challenging situation as the examinee and or external forces threaten and assault physically.

Alabi (2024) mentions that the invigilators are the determining actors of quality examination. They are the performer of good or bad examination leading to exact and appropriate evaluation of the skills and capacity exhibited by the examinees. Although, invigilators are responsible for responding malpractices inside the examination hall, nevertheless, they face external and internal pressure while doing so. The invigilators are dehumanized, humiliated and threatened for being strict inside the examination hall.

Lockey (2023) mentions that the duty of invigilator is to ensure that examinations are carried out in accordance with its regulations, and to provide candidates with a positive and supportive, yet strict exam experience. It connotes that the examination should be strict, although helping examinees positively is a righteous part, in terms of following the regulations which are necessarily required. Minott (2021) brings out the experiences of invigilators' job as either easy or demanding and the difficulties vary based on the type of examination i.e. whether it is conducted by board or the internal examination of the public campuses. I deal with the difficulties created by internal and external human actions which is presented in detail in this research paper.

Invigilators: Victims of Irregularities

In the context of public campuses conducting higher education programs, the faculties are assaulted, and the strict invigilators are threatened and humiliated and or locked inside the room converting it as a student political movement ((Joshi, 2023). He comments that the existence of student unions and their activities are questionable at present due to inappropriate political happenings in the campuses. For example, student unions' leaders are treated higher than and or equal to invigilators who are also the faculty members of the campus. Rai (2024) finds that student unions are the largest stakeholders in the affairs of university that manipulate university governance, extensively exercising the political influence. The invigilators fall as a major victim during the board examinations of the university in Nepal.

The invigilators face internal pressure from the students, faculty colleagues, campus management committee, student union and the like. It is meant for free them for writing examination paper without being hindering during the examination. If it becomes otherwise, there are always consequences to be borne by the invigilators in any forms. My self, as an invigilator researcher, have experienced the same phenomena while being positive but strict (Lockey, 2023) in the examination hall. He further posits that invigilators are not always in spotlight, nevertheless, its importance is unquestionable in maintaining conducive examination environment.

As the largest stakeholders in university affairs, student organizations wield substantial influence over university governance. Hence, this study provides ample space to understand how invigilators in public campus in Nepal bear chaotic and tense three hours while applying regulatory tasks to maintain quality educational process through invigilating actions.

Shah et al. (2024) discuss that "The quality of higher education depends heavily on faculty expertise and dedication" (pp. 32). I argue that the academic quality of higher education does rely on faculty expertise and their dedication. However, their expertise and dedication, and the integrity are hilariously traumatized in the examination due to the irregularities practised in the public campuses in Nepal. Therefore, it is crucial to understand that the quality of higher education also depend upon how effectively is examination being run, how conducive is examination environment created by the invigilators and how do higher authority of the campus, local leaders, popular personalities, student union leaders, local neighbours, relatives and so on act with invigilators and the examination procedures?

Neoliberalism, and the Examination as Privatization

The political change of 1990 provided a conducive environment for the process of privatization in education (Poudyal, 2013). This is considered as the entrance of liberalism and that sowed the seed of neoliberalism in the higher education sector after 2006. He further argues that the neoliberalism assures the role of authority to be positive and creative by complying with the necessary regulations. However, the examination regulations during the board examination become futile and the examination regulators- are made mere spectators due to neoliberal political affairs like students' political organizations and politically appointed faculties and management in the public campuses affiliated to TU (Rai, 2024). Neoliberalism was introduced in the higher

education system of Nepal in 1997 (Pandey, 2023) since then it has become a part and parcel of public campuses and is causing academic blunder with heavy interference in the academic governances.

Peters (2012) argues that neoliberal policies have transformed the educational asset as public goods, reducing the welfare benefits, by promoting privatization and this paradigm shift is seen in education. Because of this influence, the campus authority, faculty, student unions and local politicians are involved in developing a free or cheating environment in the examination devaluing the examination regulations. Pandey (2023) mentions that higher education has undergone with several changes due to the influence of neoliberal ideas. He further asserts that it is also influenced by neoliberally based structure of local culture, social and political factors. The most profoundly, almost all the public campuses have developed a neoliberal social and political culture evolving as patron-client relationships between political parties and student union and other governing bodies (Rai, 2022) which influence the campus governance, toughly includes the invigilation during the board examination.

Mintz (2021) comments that the neoliberal thought has provoked the perception of education contributing to marketization of higher education. He argues that treating higher education as commodity has created infidelity in the academic process such as in examination process. The ever-growing effect of neoliberalism in terms of higher education in Nepal, infiltrated democratic thought (Mintz, 2021; Poudyal, 2013) which is being misled by the political activities in the campuses. Mintz (2021) argues that such neoliberal policies have exacerbated social inequality. I believe that the rise of neoliberal effect practiced by the stakeholders in the public campuses has deteriorated the examination environment and consequently invigilators are being victimized.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I used a qualitative research methodology (Creswell, 2018; Denzin, 2019 as cited in Dix et al., (2020) to interpret the constructs of my participants through lived experiences gathered in the form of field texts who are involved in invigilating job during the board examination navigating with chaotic and tense circumstances due to internal and external pressures. The field texts gathering and analysis were primed by neoliberalism theory (De Lissovoy & Cedillo, 2016; Oleksenko et al., 2018) which commercializes the education and its system (Oleksenko et al., 2018). My belief system of knowledge that is constructed socially is unpacked by lived experiences. This paper critically deals and tries to reveal the odd circumstances faced by being invigilators during the examination.

I believe in the subjectivity of reality constructed, epistemologically, with social interactions (Haynes, 2012) with relativistic ontological perspective of being. I followed Heideggerian philosophical ground of hermeneutic phenomenology as a method to interpret the lived experiences of invigilators. I choose this paradigm to interpret invigilators social construct through lived experiences that helped me bring out the social reality (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022) as shaped by their socio-cultural world. It helped me to emphasize and delve into subjective experiences, individual values and belief system (Lewis, 2024; Nickerson, 2024; Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022) of invigilators contextualizing the interpretive meaning making process. Ramsook (2018) comments that Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology highlights individual's insights and interpretation are manipulated by his/her lived experiences based on a certain historical and cultural context. Being a faculty member and practice invigilation, my engaged involvements (Phyak, 2021) with the participants for innumerable places and times helped generate my research questions for the study.

El-Sherif (2017) defines a method to interpret the meaning of being which treats the researcher as the essential part of research journey as being along in the world of research participants. Following the Heidegger's (1889-1976) concept of unbracketing self for better understanding of ontological issue of being, the hermeneutic phenomenological method is used in this research journey to deepen the meaning making by "placing priority on the study of "being", on how we find ourselves in the world" (Friesen & Saevi, 2012; p. 2) of being invigilators.

The approach I adopted was also propelled by being an invigilator and faculty member facing the same chaotic and tense situation caused by neoliberal forces. My familiarity with the participants helped me for easy access and provided valuable insights being an insider (Barret-Rodger et al., 2023) in the construction of understandings of the world being lived in.

I used engaged communication with my participants from which I extracted a field note (Phillippi and Lauderdale, 2017) using a natural setting, open-ended questionnaire checklist was distributed to the participants for writing their responses and semi-structured interview was conducted for gathering field texts. My semi-structured interview was designed with open-ended questions (Dix et al., 2020) which enhanced rich descriptions of the participants lived experiences. The method of coding of field texts into themes emerged from the field notes and the field texts from the interview and open-ended questionnaire's responses.

Research Participants

Eight research participants are recruited in this study to represent extensive voices of the invigilators' subjectivity. I choose eight participants from public campuses located in Morang and Jhapa districts. As per their consent, I recruited them based on the following criteria:

- a. who are recently working as faculty members in the public campus.
- b. who involves in an examination invigilation duty during the board examinations
- c. Who can express their views without fear regarding the board examination hall conducted in the campus.
- d. Who voluntarily can support for this research journey-for free of cost.

The research participants are represented as speaker 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 in this research paper.

Filling up the Open-Ended Questions, Semi-Structured Interview and Conversations in Natural Setting

For the concrete evidence to cater the contradiction upon the sensitive issue, the verbal consent of the participants was sought to be used only for this research purpose with pseudo form. I provided an open-ended questionnaire checklist to all eight participants but to be only filled up by five. It denotes that three of the participants did not have consent upon the written evidence for this research study. They avoided writing by citing the reasons as being sick or busy schedule.

All eight research participants were working individuals, involved in education sector as I do. So, I made an oral consent for filling up the open-ended questions and sitting for semi structured interview. Semi-structured interview was conducted one time each separately with the participants. Some examples of questions were, "what are some of the key challenges you face in fulfilling your role as an invigilator?"; "how do you ensure the integrity and fairness of the examination process?"; "can you share any specific incidents or challenging situations you have encountered as an invigilator?"; "what kind of external and internal pressures have you faced during the examination as a strict invigilator?". Ramsook (2018) notes on Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology that interpretation can be derived from different forms of communication that includes verbal, non-verbal and written (p. 15). For this study, I based my study on Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology to unpack the odd experiences of the invigilators from the examination hall.

Further, I was involved in constant open conversations with the research participants for fusion of horizons (Oerther, 2020) that helped to generate field texts during the information gathering process. The practice of asking questions regarding the research issue in informal conversations in a naturally available space led me to understand my field texts enhanced by open ended questionnaire checklist and semi-structured interviews.

All participants authorized me with their verbal consent to use the gathered information in the pseudo form in this research journey, but they did not allow me to record semi-structured interviews instead they suggested me to note down. I noted down some of the significant information and exercised a journal writing after interviews at home.

Analysis

Initially, I exchanged informal conversations with the possible research participants within the public campuses using natural inquiry. According to Beuving and de Vries (2014) it refers to studying people in everyday life by normal ways that includes finding people's daily business, their interactions, listening to their talks, understanding their stories and reporting back to them. Based on this conceptual framework, I involved

digging into intrinsic constructs through conversations in staff picnic, teeing in the campus cafeteria, off duty hours, social gatherings, etc.

Having a good time in an informal talk, an engaged communication for me, for three months (January, February and March of 2024) without revealing me as a researcher. I made a choice of my participants who seemed probable candidates for the issue to be raised. Hence, conveniently, I made a sampling plan with the appropriate participants of the two QAA certified campuses and two non-certified campuses. I discussed the issue being unknown as a researcher until I could decide to reveal them by asking for consent who agreed orally to be involved in the research process.

During informal conversations, I wrote journals and kept notes of their ideas and opinions. While doing this, I coded the related information and tried to fit into thematic analysis but when the writing was in progress, I believed some of the themes could not be used because of the sensitive issue related to campuses and the research participants. For example, cases of corruption in public campuses, local politicians and academic environment, student unions and invigilation duty, campus management committee in favoritism and nepotism, students' behaviors during the board examination, Hooligans, etc. However, by realizing that those themes could derail the issue of the invigilators lived experiences, I drew findings into four emerging thematic areas.

Findings

After receiving written responses of the open-ended questionnaire checklist and semi-structured interviews all the thematic analytical coding were decided and finalized for drafting the research paper. The interview notes, and responses in written were transcribed. Four themes are categorized as a finding representing the common perceptions of the participants in the meaning making process based on Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenological approach. My participants, whom I presented as speakers providing them with numeric of 1 to 8, shared their views and concerns of invigilators in the public campuses. The four themes include pointless pressure: a practice of favouritism and nepotism, desk and bench arrangement: a source of chaos and tension in the examination hall, distress and dissatisfaction: the impact of being local/neighbour, troublemaker: the futile cheater and misuse of power and authority.

Pointless Pressure: A Practice of Favouritism and Nepotism

My participants suffered heavily on regulating the examination due to favour and preferences rendered in the examination hall by different power players. All the participants agree that it is quite not easy to control examination environments due to illegal entrance of power holders. Speaker 6 who is a working professional in one of the campuses asserts:

Examinees belonging to student union of the campus exert pressure to loosen the invigilation. Making free to cheating because s/he or they are members of student unions and must be freed to cheat. Denying them means, you are the victims of blackmail, threatening or even physical assault.

This sort of malpractices during the board examination is common. But all public campuses do not fall in this category because only in some campus's local politicians, politically appointed employees, and the student organizations do influence negatively (Joshi, 2023; Bista et al. 2019) to the invigilators. This indicates how powerful are the students' union in the public campuses in Nepal.

All participants agree that there are always pressure from the higher authority, including student union, campus authority, campus management committee, local leaders, political activists, etc. when their near and dear one falls to be examinees in the hall. Bista, et al. (2019) discusses that political influence including sociocultural status quo are the influential facet that is blocking the potential changes in the higher education of Nepal. In this regard, Speaker 3 tells his experience, how he faced the pressure:

I have faced pressure from higher authority to work in favour of examinees for many times during the board examination. Whenever you happen to be the invigilator of their kin and kith, you may receive phone calls before or during the exam or personally they visit you to ask for favour. They over run the university's rules for examination and try to overrun them.

In addition, speaker 7 added, “I was directly asked to act favour and when I ignored, he sent another person to convey the same”. Many times, the invigilators face this kind of challenge and are unnecessarily threatened indirectly by them. Being an invigilator and the faculty member, I also have faced the same kind of pressure during the examination process. Ghimire, et al. (2023) discuss about the cheating practices of university students which is due to the lack of proper communication of value and coherence of academic integrity by the university and the concerned departments. However, me and my participants believe that the cheating during the examination does not come only from students; such malpractices are conducted and directed by faculty members, campus management committee, student unions, local leaders, and the like in favour of their kin and kith. There are several prompting factors in this part, as Speaker 2 claims:

Some of the invigilators in the home centre are so flexible that they provide mobiles and cheating papers themselves to the examinees who are kin and kith in relation. The practice of giving attention warning to examinees if someone come from the examination board or the higher officials. When it is over; they continue with the same.

On one hand, this sort of favouritism and nepotism are rampantly practiced in the examination hall by the invigilators. On the other hand, sometimes the invigilators with integrity are avoided from invigilation duty by the authoritative body in the public campuses. Such activity of the invigilation practices has prompted antagonistic actions to other invigilators who follow the rules and principles of integrity.

Speaker 3 did not find anyone directly threatening her but many times she felt that she might be getting assaulted or blackmailed. She says, “sometimes I feel so terrified. Specially on the day when I snatch their cheating sheets and find their mobile phones”. As speaker 3 expresses her mental disturbance that she suffers for practicing honesty and integrity in the examination hall. All the participants fall the victims of such mental torture due to the absence of good governance in the public campuses.

Desk and Bench Arrangement: A Source of Chaos and Tension in the Examination Hall

The second theme evolved from the semi-structured interview delving with the lived experiences of my participants on management of examination hall. Three of my participants raised the issue of desks and benches used in the examination hall. The arrangement of writing desk and bench play great role in the examination that add effectiveness in invigilation. The desks and benches in the public campuses are of traditionally antique made of wooden plank which is lesser than a foot gap in between two examinees.

Speaker 7 raises the issue of management system of examination hall due to which invigilators face challenging situations. He says, “our examination hall itself has several problems that detriment the integrity and dutifulness of invigilators”; he points out:

The desk and bench arrangement in between two examinees are so close together which prompt examinees for cheating. It is lesser than a foot between one to another examinee in a column arrangement, and on six feet long bench two examinees are seated. This is a grave default of public campuses which causes chaotic moment inside the examination hall.

The arrangement of desks and benches for the examination are congested and much uncomfortable to be seated. The traditional wooden desks and benches are the common tools for seating in the examination. Some of them are so small that even two examinees cannot be seated together but compelled to be adjusted.

Castellucci, et al. (2016) discuss that the size variations of desks and benches directly affect the academic performance of examinees which also bring hazardous situation in the examination hall. Speaker 8 finds that invigilating examinees in a congested arrangement of desk and bench that measures less than a foot gap is a kind of crushing stone by your teeth. It is difficult to maintain conducive environment for writing because examinees easily cheat from each other and discursive noise and whispering cannot be controlled. It is a very common malpractice in the public campuses in the context of country like, Nepal.

Ergonomics and anthropometric designs are considered appropriate for accommodating human performance and behaviour which helps improving practicality of the working environment (Ikubanni, et al. (2017). They

define the term ergonomics as a study dealing with the design of tools of work environment that accommodates human behaviour and performance. The desks and benches in the public campuses are beyond the definition and philosophy that what should have, that is why the performance of examinees is highly negative-in terms of cheating and malpractices. According to Taifa and Desai (2016) the fundamental philosophy of ergonomics is to make the furniture's design that provides comfortability, physically appropriate for health of students, accounting safety and wellbeing for the better performance.

Speaker 2 has been working as an invigilator for more than two years in the public campus. He claims that "maintaining discipline and preventing or controlling cheating is almost impossible in the present system of examination due to the arrangement of writing desk and bench". Being experienced as an invigilator he points out that:

More number of examinees in the examination hall makes much chaotic and hectic moment during the examination. Handling forty to fifty examinees in a traditionally set examination hall is not a joke. In my point of view, the invigilators working in this condition are great at least they are working for better future of the students but ridiculously risking their own.

The invigilators face critical problem as expressed by speakers 7, 8 and 2 in the examination hall. It is a common phenomenon to handle forty to fifty examinees by an invigilator in a congested seating. The invigilators are involved in impossible but making it possible combined with several challenges inside as well as outside of the examination hall.

Distress and Dissatisfaction: The Effects of Being Local/Neighbour

I developed third theme from the responds of semi-structured interview which featured lived experience on being locals and neighbours. All most all participants have experienced the silent and indirect threatening from their relatives, neighbours or friends being lived in the same place and time. Speaker 7 reiterates: "The neighbours, relatives and friends in the village questions and see vicariously as if their children were being put by the invigilators in trouble writing their examination". The locals assume that their children were strictly treated while writing a paper in the examination hall. They feel that the children were not guided well, and they were disturbed in writing their examination paper smoothly when an invigilator seeks integrity. Speaker 5 feels guilty and distress of being an invigilator and puts forward his sad experience:

My neighbourhood aunt's son study in the campus where I am a faculty member. I happened to be an invigilator during his board examination. I accomplished my duty and went home. During the evening, three persons including herself came to me and complained about my duty of being invigilator during the examination. It was an indirect threatening.

Speaker 1 adds: "it had happened to me some years back. My neighbours had complained to campus chief about me being strict in the examination. I had snatched chits and digital watches from examinees. They did not like the duty of invigilation, and a complaint was made against me".

In this context Speaker 4 expresses his dissatisfaction about the concept of education and examination as understood by the neighbours and relatives:

During the board examination time, my maternal uncle came to me and asked about his son's study at campus. He ultimately told me to help him in the examination if he would happen to be the invigilator in the examination hall. He informed me that his son was sick for some days and could not prepare well.

Being in the same locality, the people of higher social status and political access put their demands straight forward and such privileges are used by their kids more advantageously that destroys the examination environment. All most all the participants face the challenges of this kind during the board examination time.

Speaker 2 talks about his distress being an invigilator who he believed was a powerful person to supervise, maintain discipline and administer the rules and regulations in the examination hall. He voices his reflection:

Being an invigilator is to add extra stress. It is very difficult to maintain discipline and preventing cheating. It is like a far fetch star to me. Supervising forty to fifty examinees at once and dealing with diverse need and demand of examinees add more chaos and intensity. It is difficult to avoid misconducts in a traditionally arranged examination hall.

Invigilator is, as mentioned in the job description of Longridge Towers School, that s/he should provide examinees with a positive and supportive environment. All participants agree that strict examination experience should be felt by the examinees through firmly enforcing the regulations to maintain quality academic environment of the campus. As Lockey (2023) states that s/he should not be just keeping watchful eyes, one would be a guardian of educational integrity, focussed facilitator and upholder of bastion of best practice in examination environment. However, in the context of public educational institutions of higher education in the country like, Nepal has menacingly distressed.

Troublemaker: The Futile Cheater and Misuse of Power and Authority

The fourth theme was developed when I assessed written responds of the questionnaire by the faculty members in Nepali language. I had coined the theme “Hooligan: A Futile Cheater” however, after assessing and consulting my participants on this regard, the written responses and the suggestions directed me to change into “troublemaker”, who are only the futile characters that exist to ruin the environment of the examination hall trying to create situation in their favour. The invigilator whose duty is to minimize potential cheating (Stack, 2015) is being threatened by the troublemaking forces who have been admitted but not attended campus for study for whole semester or year. He further emphasizes the need for further research to explore the effects of exam environments in academic institutions.

Speaker 5, as an invigilator talks about dishonesty of examinees firmly disagreeing and disobeying the threat “I was threatened by some examinees telling me that he would show his power after the examination. I said to him, I follow the rules, and you follow the rules, that’s all”. Speaker 4 was quite critical on telling his experience of examination hall:

Whoever they may be, but in the examination hall they are examinees, and they should act as according to the rules. Few years ago, after the examination, when everyone was exiting, I went to the gate and stood there by waiting for what he would do. By that time, he looked calm and could not see me directly. There are many such incidences that have happened in my life being invigilator.

My participants consciously avoided indelicacy which would fit nuisance activity of the internal and external forces against invigilators. They avoided in doing so because they fear for any consequences. For example, susceptible for getting obstruction in promotion, salary increment, (the public campuses are independent to act upon individual progress of faculty members), mental torture and even physical assault.

Speaker 8 put her weird experience regarding the invigilation duty of the board examination. Many of the invigilators experience such phenomena in the board examination:

Sometimes, so-called high-profile individuals come to exhibit their political power and access, some come to disturb in the examination taking the name of political leaders. Sometimes, in some examination halls invigilators face serious threat from the student leaders of the campus.

Me and my participants conceptualized that the troublemaker: a futile cheater, as a behavioural mark, by its etymological insight (Fulford, 2022) it is not believed to be an individual. It denotes that behaviour is learned and achieved entity. In this study it is learned and achieved through political culture practiced in the public campuses dealing with higher education programs in Nepal (Rai, 2022; 2024). Fulford (2022) finds that the university sector is in dangerous state and various potential reasons play crucial role in this affair. Rai (2024) writes that “the relationships between student leaders and professors, employees, and university management are inherently political and are primarily defined by their connections to political parties” (pp.81). He further states that the professors and employees belong to political parties in public campuses in the whole nation.

Speaker 7, once being a strict invigilator, he had a life-threatening attempted assault. He was escorted by the police security force from campus to home. He asserted that “it was politicized by the student union leaders who had good link with the powerful leaders at that time”. Students’ politic is common in the universities all over the world raising voices against corruption and asking for good governance but politicizing the university’s academic environment is commonly felt (Sinha, 2022). He notes that student union represents a powerful and informed political agency, and it is motivated by the desire to bring about changes or address campus specific issues. However, the students’ union active in public campuses, local leaders and faculty members in Nepal noticeably influence governance particularly in the board examinations.

Speaker 7 has an extremely bad experience, the consequences of being honest:

I found a boy with cheating papers and grabbed them all. I warned him that if he would be seen doing any malpractice next minute he would be punished as per the regulations. Next minute, I found him showing his answer sheet to other examinees and again warned him for second time. However, he disobeyed and challenged my instructions for the third time and at this moment I snatched his paper. But after examination, I knew from my colleague that he and his outsider friends were waiting me at the campus gate to attack physically. At this moment, I was escorted by police force to my home.

My participants did not expect this sort of arrogantly politicized behaviour of the examinees. Me and my participants believe that this sort of activity ruins the holistic academic environment and must be eradicated addressing the privileges created by neoliberal forces represented by political parties and student unions which wiped out the non-partisan nature of student political activism (Rai, 2022; pp. 12).

The practice of politics in the university is well established platform (Stockemer, 2012) advantageous to a political career building and, solving student’s problems and promoting good political culture (Al-Khaza’leh & Lahiani, 2021) in the country. They find that there is high level of political awareness among the students in the campus, differing the faculties and departments. My all participants point out that the campus politics could be a big platform for political enhancement which can produce great politicians for the country. It is also beneficial for the country to have incredible politicians produced from the university for the construction of the nation (Al-Khaza’leh & Lahiani, 2021). Nevertheless, the political affairs in the public campuses are considered factious and is found disturbing for the smooth running of academic programs, most frequently in the public campuses.

Speaker 1 points out the period in which there used to be conducive environment in the examination hall:

Before the Maoist Insurgency, all examinees used to follow the rules. Invigilators were respected in the examination hall. But after people’s movement II of 2006, the trend of disobeying and misbehaving to invigilators, breaking regulations of examination and threatening or even assaulting activities grew in large extent. Now, it is difficult to deal with.

My participants clearly demarcated the timeline, when this sort of malpractices took its stage and destroyed the examination environment. It is clear that the neoliberal forces were in action hilariously destroying the academic environment of the public campuses. Rai (2022) discusses that student political activism in Nepal remains strong due to the patron-client relationship between student organizations and political parties and this relationship has evolved from semi-autonomous to subordinate since the institutionalization of multi-party democracy in 1990.

The politics in the campus is being used for personal benefits using student union as façade (Joshi, 2023) and thus politically affiliated students stay away from the classroom teaching-learning. They destroy the examination environment by threatening invigilators, locking them inside the room, even assaulting physically. Two of my participants expressed their views that “unethical political activities within the campuses can indeed be contentious and disruptive to smooth functioning of academic programs of the campuses. In this connection, Speakers 6 and 8 had irritating experience of such student political activities in the campus:

The political activities of student unions do not only disturb during the examination but also during the class hours. Various illogical students’ movement like; locking the campus chief or teaching faculties in the office

for days, harassing teaching faculties in the class and locking classrooms, fighting and beating teaching faculties, etc. My participants claim that almost all the public campuses become the victims of such actions which is performed, ultimately, to support an individual member who has intimate membership of the political organizations.

DISCUSSION

My findings provide ample space to believe that invigilators in the public campuses face insecure situations ranging from harassment and embarrassment to physical abuses during the board examination. They expressed their beliefs how their invigilating world has been created which has become much chaotic and tense. From the lived experiences as being in the invigilators' world, the three hours seem a short period of time, however, these 180 minutes period is the hardest part of the invigilators in the examination hall. It seems like trekking 180-degree longitudes with huge hurdles to cross along. My participants understand that there are many such negative forces which are active in deregulating the examination and creating and crafting the dishonest environment in the examination halls. The themes suggest critical implications on being invigilators in the board examination of the public campuses which are running higher education programs in a traditional setting.

Who is Responsible?

My participants presumably ask this question and provided different denotations towards the stakeholders of the public campuses including student unions, management team, faculties, campus authorities, local politicians, faculty members and the like. But could not resist to blame to the political parties and students' wings for the destruction of academic environments including board examination process. The self and vested interests of the stake holders generated by neoliberalism in the higher education system is a dangerous sign of destruction of higher education system of the country. This institutionalized structural intervention into the higher education system should have urgent panacea to uphold the quality education in higher education in the country.

My research participants arguably presented student unions as the major role players to destroy the examination environment of the campuses. They have made the campus ostensibly the politic practice ground and preparing themselves for the national politics. Sometimes, it seems that they are not under the control of the campus though they are the students of the same campus. My participants expressed the reason that the patron protection comes from the political parties of the nation that use the students as a means of community mobilizers to achieve political aims. Rules are made and broken by the makers. So, where does the support come from and who is responsible for destroying the academic environment of the public campuses in the country like, Nepal.

The invigilators, in the same traditional setting of examination, are surrounded by the pandoras boxes ready to open and strike and dwindle the quality of education. The neighbours, relatives, local political organizations, politicians, and the like resemble the external forces and the campus authorities, students' union, faculty members, examinees are the internal forces that try to influence upon the invigilating functions inside the examination hall

Schooling and Affiliation: The Grave Concern

My participants expressed their experiences how and from when the campus environment began deteriorating? The new type of political schooling began after the restoration of democracy after 1990 which got enhanced strongly by republic politics in Nepal after 2006, the neoliberal entrance to the university. This gave rise to political parties' direct control over the university as major positions and portfolios are distinctively separated for each political party. This institutionalized, systematic and structural political encroachments inside the university set the trend of destructive environment in the campuses which is clearly reflected in the examination halls. At present, it is acting perversely and rampantly destroying the academic environment of the public campuses. My participants expressed that almost all the faculties, management committee, campus authority, etc. stand with different political panel due to which local political leaders and local political

activists play foul games in the internal and academic affairs of campuses. This has strengthened the practice of favouritism and nepotism in the board examination.

Learning Attitude of the Students Versus Examination Hall Management

All research participants identify that the learning attitude of students is very low due to the various reasons. They argue, for examples, the campus authority gets easily influenced by the student unions' demand because of the political inclinations, the home centre in which favourable examination condition is prepared and so on. The home centre is arranged with the due political influence using all political powers through political leaders of national level. This sort of academically dishonest activity, systematically performed by the educational institutions, has discouraged the students for learning hard and becoming independent examinees but use hook and crook style of academic performance. My participants argue that students do not care about the learning, but they need to receive the academic certificates required by the institutions wherever they are employed. There is huge gap in between curriculums presented to the students and the requirement of skills which needs extensive exploration and improvements in terms of the higher education.

My participants also made a critical comment on the arrangement of desk and bench for writing an examination paper. The desks and benches arranged for writing examination is an antique wooden plank made which is separated not even a foot from each other seating in a column wise manner and two examinees adjusted in row wise manner seating them at the two edges. The traditional desk and bench method of examination hall management has invariably caused a chaotic and tense circumstances for the invigilators. The neoliberally influenced examinees are difficult to deal with in such an antique method of examination hall management.

CONCLUSION

The board examination invigilation seemingly plays a great role to develop an academic environment in the higher education in Nepal. If performed with integrity by all the stakeholders, this role can lead to quality education. However, like me and my participants, learned that there are multiple forces which are enacting to destroy the academic environment of the campuses disregarding the education system of the nation.

My participants and myself found the situation compelled to be with due to the circumstances created by systematic, structural, and political means. The research participants were aware of the trend, and some followed what it was, and some went against it who were mentally harassed, threatened and attempted for physical assault.

Implications

The circumstances faced by the invigilators of the two QAA certified and two non-certified campuses have significance and relevance which extends afar the institutions that it was being studied. Such circumstances are extensively faced by invigilators throughout the country in the campuses that hold board examinations. This perspectival study needs further investigation to better understand how important is invigilating job and what measures need to be taken for the resolution of the problem.

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