# Relevance Of Oral Comprehensive Exam In A B-School Environment

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*Abstract: In today's complex business environment, management education has been considered as vital and necessary for the future managers' growth and development. Academician and business leaders, policy makers, thought leaders continuously strive to improve the quality of education to make it more relevant. There are developments being happening in all areas of teaching-learning including the evaluation patterns. Business schools are trying to implement evaluation system which helps them in determining the quality of the offerings in order to improve it.*

*The present paper tries to examine the relevance of comprehensive exam as an evaluation method in a B-school environment. And, specifically details the positives along with the challenges of the oral format of this evaluation method.*

*Keywords: Evaluation, Comprehensive, B-school, Education, Oral-exam*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In today's complex business environment, management education has been considered as vital and necessary for the future managers' growth and development. Academician and business leaders, policy makers, thought leaders continuously strive to improve the quality of education to make it more relevant. The quality of the students is very important for the industry and society to lead the business. Institutions takes persistent effort to bring improvements in the quality standard of education through various means. There are developments being happening in all areas of teaching-learning including the evaluation patterns. Business schools are trying to implement evaluation system which helps them in determining the quality of the offerings in order to improve it.

Achieving quality of education are approached through various modes like quality faculty, institutional infrastructure, syllabus, evaluation, collaboration and so on. The definition of quality could vary from institution to institution depending on their focus of attention. However, it primarily depends on factors like environment, an institute's vision and mission statements. Accreditation bodies like AACSB stress on creating learning goals or outcomes as well as effective means to evaluate them.

## II. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this paper is to examine the relevance of comprehensive exam as an evaluation method in a B-school environment. The paper examines specifically the oral format of this evaluation method.

## III. WHAT IS AN EVALUATION?

According to Kauppila et. al(2015), it is a process which involves judging and valuing phenomena. The effectiveness of the evaluation primarily depends on the purpose of evaluation and the mission of the evaluator (Scriven, 1991). According to Stufflebeam (1985), the ultimate purpose of evaluation is not to prove one is able or not; instead, it is to provide feedback. However, evaluations are used for various purposes in institutions such as screening and elimination, promotion, and also to provide comments for improvement.

## IV. WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE?

In the context of this paper, the relevance of comprehensive was examined as an evaluation type in a B-school. A comprehensive exam is an evaluation type to test students' knowledge across one or more general fields of study (Stuart, 2014). The comprehensive were commonly used in higher education like Ph.d (Tiwari, 2012) to evaluate the students after their course work and during their thesis submission. It is different from an end-term examination which focuses on testing a student's knowledge in a particular course or an area.
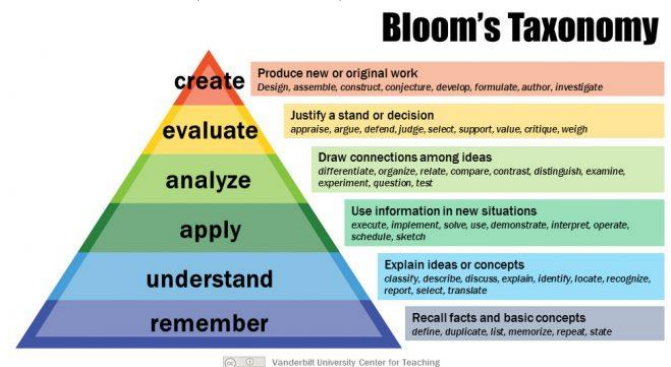
Many institutions follow different format of comprehensive exam. Some institutions conduct comprehensive evaluation after the first year of study; nevertheless, the purpose of this is to examine whether students can apply concepts learnt in the first year to managerial situations. At College of Education, University of Arizona, the comprehensive exam follows written and oral. The objective is to examine whether the students were able to demonstrate a deep understanding of foundational and contemporary literature, models and theories. In University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Education and Human Science, a comprehensive exam is administered through a completion of a capstone paper. The Athabasca University, Canada conducts written comprehensive exam at the end of phase one of the MBA program. The California State University also conducts comprehensive for their MBA graduates. At Kent State University, comprehensive exam at the undergraduate and the graduate levels, covers all the functional areas of business. Here it is a required exam for the students to ensure a level of mastery of various functional areas before they take the capstone courses. There are a few B-school in India which have conducted comprehensive exams in the past e.g. Goa Institute of Management.

Among the various formats, oral exam format is a commonly followed format and is used as a substitute for written exam. The objective behind the oral exam is to critically assess the students' knowledge on a particular domain. The oral exam are noted to be effective in science related disciplines like medicine, geology which requires a "show and tell" (Tewksbury, 1996). In many of the graduate programs and most commonly in doctoral programs, the comprehensive exam is effectively used to test the students' knowledge. Mostly to examine whether the students have developed competency in their program and are prepared for the dissertation submission phase. It assumes that a mentors can ascertain a candidate within a complete range of cognitive domain (Bloom, 1956, Markulis et.al., 2008).

## V. RELEVANCE OF ORAL EXAM AS A COMPREHENSIVE FORMAT IN A B-SCHOOL

The comprehensive exam has been administered in various B-school to test students' learning and their ability to integrate through various courses. The students' knowledge is tested in courses like Strategic management through a capstone format which expects the students to integrate and demonstrate their acquired knowledge from various courses.

Most importantly comprehensive exams have been effectively used in individual courses in a viva-voice format which is also otherwise called as oral exam. Even in the courses like accountancy and finance, the students' ability to integrate were tested in a viva format. The oral examination can provide the advantage to the evaluators to test the students in all five cognitive domains of Bloom's taxonomy (fig:1). The cognitive domain involves knowledge and the development of intellectual skills (Bloom, 1956).



*Courtesy: https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/*

*Figure 1*

## VI. MERITS OF AN ORAL EXAM FORMAT

Bridges (1996) suggested that oral exams offer instructors the chance to probe students' understanding of concepts and issues, to test their ability to think on their feet, and to assess their capacity to articulate clear, cogent, and compelling arguments for a point of view.

An oral format in a comprehensive exam can be effectively applied to evaluate in the following ways:

- ✓ The evaluation can be conducted to check their knowledge by asking the students to define or list. It is focussed on their memory or ability to recall the specific terms.
- ✓ Secondly, a student can be asked to explain, classify, describe or discuss. The motive is to check the students' understanding of the concepts or ideas.
- ✓ Thirdly, a student can be evaluated based on application based question. Their ability to use information in new frame of scenario. The objective is to find effectiveness in demonstrating, solve or interpret abstractions in a particular situation.
- ✓ The students can be tested on their ability to draw connections between ideas. Their competency to distinguish, organize, relate, compare, contrast the various issues or ideas.
- ✓ The students can be tested on their ability to evaluate concepts. Here a student's ability to evaluate itself becomes criteria. A candidate can be measured by her/his ability to argue, defend, critique, value ideas.
- ✓ Finally, students can be test based on their ability to create, assemble, formulate new ideas and concepts.
- ✓ Apart from this, oral exam also suggests the students' communication ability.

## VII. CHALLENGES OF AN ORAL EXAM FORMAT

The following are the challenges which acts as a hurdle
- ✓ What is the purpose of the oral exam: There should be a clear objective drawn on the application of oral comprehensive exam in the schema of evaluation, such as screening, elimination, promotion, or whether just to provide the feedback to a candidate?
- ✓ What are we testing? The oral exam is an effective evaluation tool; however, most of the time, oral exam becomes ineffective when it is used inappropriately. The evaluators should be clear with which of cognitive domain(s) need to be tested in the students. Therefore, effectiveness of an oral exam depends on:
  - Learning outcome or goals of the courses: In some B-schools, comprehensive is used as a platform to evaluate the students in multiple first year courses. This may be a futile attempt as various courses are taught with different learning outcomes. If the learning goal of the course is only to build the knowledge, then evaluating the students based on their application ability would be an ineffective method. It would also result in misjudging the students.
  - Learning style of the students: Another important aspect is the learning style of the students such as surface, deeper and strategic learning. The learning style impacts the students' ability to respond the questions. Given the multiple courses and need to build career-oriented specialization, the students can make a choice of their learning styles and discriminate the courses based on its importance.
- ✓ The competency of the evaluators:
  - The effectiveness of the oral exam format depends on the evaluators' competency to construct the questions on basis of Bloom's taxonomy.
  - When multiple courses been evaluated during an oral exam, a faculty panel may bound to focus on evaluating on their panel members' expertise area rather than spreading their evaluation on various courses.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

Given the above challenges and merits, the need for an oral comprehensive exam must be evaluated objectively. It must be viewed from both faculty and students' perspective. It is important to examine whether comprehensive exam format is applicable to the program or course goals? What are we testing from the students? And finally, what will be the consequences of the students who has not cleared?

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