

CHAPTER XII: PUBLIC EXAMINATION SYSTEMS IN THE SAARC REGION *

1. CONTEXT

While a number of historical, political, socio-cultural, and economic forces play a major role in shaping the education system of a country, external factors also play a significant role. Education systems in a globalized world cannot grow and develop in isolation. The extent to which the education system of a country can flourish depends on its ability to interact with other education systems. Policymakers, planners, and educators, who are always searching for the best practices, can get insights for policymaking through comparison of education systems. In recent years, therefore, countries look to one another for new directions in educational policy and practice. The growing trend of international comparisons of student performance is one example of educational planners and policymakers from around the world collaborating to learn from each other. While comparative methods are useful ways of improving educational policies and practices, we need to be careful that context-blind comparing and borrowing that overlook the essential elements of society, culture, and political economy will be of little or no use. Against this background, a comparative analysis of public examination systems was undertaken that involved careful examination of five countries in the SAARC region.

For details on the objectives and methodology, please refer to 'Public Examination Systems in the SAARC Region'.

2. OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC EXAMINATION SYSTEMS IN SAARC COUNTRIES

Table 1. Summary of the Major Points in SLE in SAARC Countries

Particular	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India	Maldives	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
Structure of School Education (Primary +Lower Secondary + Secondary + Higher Secondary)	5+3+2+2	6+2+2+2	5+3+2+2	5+2+3+2	5+3+2+2	5+3+2+2	5+3+3+2
Public Examination Conducted in Grade(s)	10, 12	6,8, 10, 12	10, 12	10, 12	10, 12	10, 12	5*, 11,13
Purpose(s) of public examination	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Certification of Achievement	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Selection of Candidates	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Evaluation of School/Teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Feedback to School/Teacher	x	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓
Mode of Examination							
Syllabus and Exam by Board	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Examination Board(s)**	M	S	M	S	S	M	S

Note: * Scholarship Examination ** M - Multiple Boards, S - Single Board

* This Chapter is based on the report 'Public Examination Systems in the SAARC Region' prepared by Mr. Ganesh Bahadur Singh for the SLC Study team.

A public examination is the examination conducted externally to the school by a national or provincial/state authority at the end of a distinct phase of the education system. Public examinations are typically formal, summative, and highly controlled. This chapter presents an overview of the public examination in SAARC countries. Table 1 summarizes the aspects of SLE discussed.

The particulars presented in the Table 1 are elaborated in the following paragraphs

2.1 Structure of school education

School education system is divided into various ladders, which usually includes primary, middle/lower/junior secondary, upper secondary/secondary, and higher/senior secondary. In Bangladesh, the structure of school education comprises 5 years of schooling as primary, 3 years junior secondary, 2 years upper secondary, and 2 years higher secondary; i.e. 5+3+2+2 system. A similar structure (5+3+2+2) is operating in India, Nepal, and Pakistan. In the case of Bhutan, it is 7 (1 year preparatory class plus Grades 1 to 6)+2+2+2, in Sri Lanka 5+3+3+2 and in Maldives, 5+2+3+2 (www.unesco.org/iau..., 2003). The for vocational and technical stream, however slightly differs. The plan in Bangladesh is to extend primary level to 8 years by 2001 (MOE, Bangladesh, 2000). The structure of first 8 years is also termed as elementary education in India which comprises 5 years of primary education and 3 of upper primary (NCERT, 2000b).

The trend in the SAARC countries is towards structuring first 8 years of schooling as primary/elementary/basic education. The preparatory works planned by Bangladesh for these 8 years implies a lot of preparatory works needs to be undertaken in advance to ensure smooth implementation of this restructuring. Education for All (EFA) scheme in Nepal also proposes extension of basic and primary education up to Grade 8, i.e. Grades 1-8 (MOES, 2002). This would be a parallel structure of school education in the SAARC countries.

2.2 Provision of public examinations in the school education

Public examinations in Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, and Pakistan are conducted at the secondary level (Grade 10) and higher secondary (Grade 12) but in the case of Bhutan at 6, 8, 10, and 12. In the case of Sri Lanka, Scholarship Examination is conducted at Grade 5, General Certificate of Education-Ordinary Level (GCE-OL) Examination at Grade 11, and Advanced Level (AL) at Grade 13. (www1.worldbank.org/education/examinations...; www.unesco.org/iau...; www.bangla2000.com). Bangladesh is planning to abolish public examination at Grade 10 and retain only Grade 12 examination as Secondary Examination. Grade 10 will be school-based internal examination (MOE, Bangladesh, 2000).

2.3 Purposes of public examinations

There are three major purposes of public examination: 1) certification of student's past school accomplishment, 2) predication of future success as a basis for selection of candidates for educational opportunities, and 3) evaluation of the school and/or teacher (IAEA, 1979). Public examinations at the secondary level in Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal are supposed to serve these three purposes. In addition, in Bhutan, India, Maldives, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka they are also intended to provide feedback to the school/teacher on the progress and needs of the students (www1.worldbank.org/education/examinations...). For purpose, performance analysis is undertaken. CBSE, India states that,

The analysis of students' responses to different questions asked in the examination can serve to diagnose the weakness in learning as well as shortcomings in curriculum transactions. It may reveal hard spots of learning and possible causative factors for errors being committed. Besides, such an analysis helps in identifying areas of contents to which much attention has not been devoted. (www.cbse.nic.in).

The Department of Examinations, Sri Lanka evaluates students' performance on an item by item basis in the core subjects. Observations and comments are provided for each item. Overall comments and suggestions are also provided in the evaluation report (Department of Examinations, Sri Lanka, 2003; see Annex 2 for sample pages of evaluation report). One major purpose of examination to be considered is making an analysis of the performance in examination and supply feedback to the schools/teachers drawing on the same so as to improve teaching learning. This would render examination as a tool for quality improvement at the classroom level as well.

2.4 Mode of examinations

Various modes of examinations can be used: 1) the syllabus devised by the school/teacher and examination by the Board; 2) the syllabus and examination both devised and conducted by the school/teacher; 3) the syllabus by the Board and examination by school/teacher; 4) the syllabus and the examinations both devised and conducted by the Board. For the secondary level public examination, both syllabus and examinations are devised and conducted by the concerned Examination Boards in the SAARC countries. Other modes of public examinations are not in practice. However, a provision exists that uses locally relevant content area/subject/activities in the curriculum to a certain extent in Sri Lanka (NIE, 2002). Such provisions operate in Bangladesh and Pakistan as well. In the curriculum of some of the subjects, such as Health, Physical, and Environment Education in the secondary level in Nepal, there is a provision of introducing locally relevant contents in the practical of this subject (CDC, BS 2055). In India, Examination Boards can set their own syllabus and conduct examination. In other SAARC countries, the examination set is based on a common syllabus for the country (www1.worldbank.org/education/examinations...).

2.5 Examination Board

There is a single Examination Board operating for the secondary level in Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka as a part of the Ministry of Education. In Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan there are multiple Examination Boards usually covering a state/province/region. For example, there are altogether 9 Examination Boards in Bangladesh, 17 in Pakistan, and about 41 in India. CBSE is one of the Boards in India for the Central Schools, Government Schools, Independent Schools, and other schools from the Union Territories and other parts of the country as well as schools from foreign countries are affiliated (www.cbse.nic.in).

Examination Boards in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan are partly independent of the Ministry of Education that enjoy a certain degree of autonomy in administration, finance, quality control, etc. For example, CBSE in India is a financially independent body that does not receive any grant-in-aid either from the Central Government or any other source. All its recurring and non-recurring expenditure and financial requirements are met from the annual examination charges, affiliation fee, and other incomes (www.cbse.nic.in).

Various efforts have been made to coordinate activities of the Boards in with multiple Examination Boards. For instance, in India, the Council of Boards of Secondary Education (COBSE) has 34 Boards of secondary education associated with it. COBSE provides academic support to its members on: 1) setting and maintenance of educational standards; 2) curriculum planning; 3) preparation of curriculum materials; 4) curriculum transaction; 5) evaluation in schools; and 6) public examination (COBSE, 2004a). An Inter-Board Committee of Chairmen (IBCC) in Pakistan is responsible for establishing coordination among different Boards of intermediate and secondary education and for implementing their policies and plans (www.ibcc.edu.pk).

Examination Boards also set up regional offices to undertake functions such as collecting the answer scripts, marking the answer scripts in the marking center, preliminary processing of the data, and so on. Decentralization of the functions has been found helpful in increasing efficiency in marking, evaluation, and data processing.

One the major purpose of setting up the multiple Boards is to make the management functions smooth and easier. But with the multiple Boards, issues of the comparability of quality, setting up uniform standards, establishing coordination among the Boards arise. A single Board can also work effectively with a proper decentralization of functions. A wider discussion on multiple Boards or decentralization of functions within the single Board would be helpful before coming to a decision on it.

2.6 Pass Percentage in School Leaving Examination

In all SAARC countries, public examination is conducted at the end of secondary level. Countries like India and Sri Lanka are considering the abolition of the system of labeling students 'fail'. Available data indicates the following scenario of pass percentage in the SAARC countries in the SLE conducted at the secondary level.

Table 2. Pass Percentage in SLE

Country	Examination	Target Grade	1997		1998		1999		2000	
			No. of Candidates	Pass %	No. of Candidates	Pass %	No. of Candidates	Pass %	No. of Candidates	Pass %
Bangladesh	CSEC	10	716,865	51.45	722,300	47.96	837,220	54.62	918,045	41.58
Bhutan	Bhutan Board - ISEC	10	1476	87.07	1,796	76.78	2,240	68.53	3,159	79.74
India	ICSEE (Delhi)	10	56,053	93.48	61,558	91.06	68,083	94.83	71,458	94.15
India	SSLC (Karnataka)	10	459,143	44.55	460,134	57.39	460,379	51.85	507,750	51.60
India	AISSE (CBSE)	10	385,858	64.27	409,695	63.24	438,137	64.38	466,990	65.37
Nepal	SLC	10	116,002	36.50	113,257	47.50	139,202	49.20	205,539	45.70
Maldives	SSCE	10	1,517	67.80	2,020	77.70	2,594	80.99	3,656	79.30
Pakistan	SSC	10	570,199	58.00	662,816	56.00	533,863	56.00	664,378	54.00
Sri Lanka	GCE-OL	11	360,026	29.46	353,372	33.25	349,464	36.98	346,796	37.70

(www1.worldbank.org/education/examinations...; www.cbse.nic.in/...)

Recent data show that in 2002 the pass percentage in CBSE was 69.53. In 2003, in Bangladesh, SSCE pass percentage was 35.91 (BANBEIS, 2003), in FBISE, Pakistan 66.85 (FBISE, 2004), and in Sri Lanka 42.81 (GCE-OL). The pass percentage in secondary level SLE is relatively high in Bhutan, Maldives, and some of the Boards in India, but in Bangladesh and Pakistan it is at the boundary line of 50%, that of CBSE (India) above 60% and that of Nepal below 50%. Though the table above indicates a low pass percentage in Sri Lanka, the percentage reported needs to be interpreted differently: it is the percentage of the students in GCE-OL qualified for the Advanced Level. Otherwise, percentage of students passing with the required minimum number of subjects comes very high -- above 75% (see Annex 3 for the reporting of result in GCE-OL, Sri Lanka).

3. SLC PRACTICES IN SAARC COUNTRIES

SLE at the secondary level assumes a prominent status in the public examination. The concerned authorities endeavor to ensure a high degree of objectivity, high level of quality, greater standardization of tasks and conditions, and greater comparability of results (Taiwo, 1995). For this purpose, due consideration needs to be given in the administration, test development, scoring, and certification. The chapter here in that context describes practices of the SAARC countries in these aspects of the examination providing mainly information on Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka and information available on Bhutan and Maldives. The major aspects of the practices are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of the Major Points in the SLE Practices in the SAARC Countries

Particular	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India	Maldives	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
Forms of examination							
Supplementary/Compartment	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Improvement	x	NA	✓	NA	x	✓	x
Registration of regular candidates (at Grade)	9	NA	10	NA	9	8	11
Provision of Security Press	✓	NA	✓	NA	x	✓*	✓
Centralized Marking	✓	NA	✓	NA	✓	Mixed	✓
Double Entry of Scores	x	NA	✓	NA	x	✓	✓
Appeal (Re-Totaling)	✓	NA	✓	NA	✓	✓	✓**
Examination Syllabus (contents of Grades)	9 & 10	NA	10	NA	9 & 10	9 & 10***	9, 10 & 11
Certification							
Use of Letter Grading	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓
Single Subject	✓	x	✓	✓	x	✓	✓
Composite/Overall Score	✓	✓	x	x	✓	x	x
Requirement for Passing (AS-all subjects, CS-certain numbers of subjects)	AS	CS	CS	NA	AS	AS	CS

Note: * Government security press, ** Re-evaluation also permitted,
*** Separate examinations for Grades 9 and 10,
NA - Information not available

The particulars presented in the table have been elaborated below.

3.1 Administration

SLE is a high stake examination involving a huge number of candidates, examiners, markers, and support staffs. There is a challenge to meet the schedule (i.e. timing), ensure quality, maintain confidentiality, assure transparency, and check undue practices. The administrative practices of the SAARC countries are described below.

Forms and Schedules of Examinations

Public examinations are set and timed at specific points or Grades. Usually, the SLE schedules are arranged according to the forms of examinations. Mainly three forms of examinations exist: 1) regular examination for students from schools; 2) supplementary/compartments examinations the students reappearing in the papers they were unsuccessful; and 3) improvement examination for students who are not satisfied with the Grade/marks they have achieved and want to reappear to improve their Grade/marks in the paper(s) they have passed. Supplementary examination is a follow-up examination allowing students to retake subjects. In Bangladesh, if a student fails in up to two subjects in the secondary level examination, she/he will be allowed to take examination in those subjects twice (MOE, Bangladesh, 2000). The examination is scheduled in March - April in Bangladesh. Students are allowed to repeat the examination, but only after 12 months of original sitting in Bhutan, Maldives, and Sri Lanka. Secondary level examination is scheduled in December in these countries. CBSE, India conducts regular examination in March and compartment in July (CBSE, 2004). In Karnataka, Board students are allowed to repeat the examination after 5 months of the original sitting and in Andhra Pradesh after 4 months. 'Save a year' approach has been considered in India make it possible for the repeaters to get over their examination to be able to get entrance to the higher level if they get through in the secondary level exam. In Nepal, supplementary examination is conducted in about two months from the publication of result of regular examination and candidates are allowed to appear in up to two failed subjects. Scheduling of supplementary examination in Nepal makes it possible for students to apply for higher education the same year without losing one academic year.

In Pakistan, students are also allowed one opportunity to retake examination in the subjects passed if the candidate desires to improve Grades/marks. Such improvement need to be accomplished within a period of two years of passing the said examination and before appearing in any higher examination held by a Board or University (FBISE, 2003a). Candidates are also allowed to appear for additional subjects if they want (FBISE, 2003b). (See Annex 4 for rules for reappearance, supplementary examination, and improvement of Grades/marks in FBISE). The argues for the availability for students of two chances to improve their Grades (2000b). CBSE (India) allows candidates to appear for improvement of performance or for an additional subject. However, such candidates are not issued a separate certificate or a combined marks statement, but are given only a statement of marks (CBSE, 2002).

The duration of SLE at the secondary level is about 8 days to a month and results are issued in 7 to 15 weeks, as given in Table 4. The table indicates that at least in Bangladesh, India (CBSE), Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, the examination time table provides a few days gap from one paper to another paper provide time to the students to revise important contents. This would be supportive to the students to prepare for the examination and puts less stress on them compared to the situation when they appear in one paper and immediately start worrying for the next day's paper.

Table 4. Duration for Conducting Examinations and Publication of Result

Country	Examination	Duration for examination	Publication of Result
Bangladesh	CSEC	25 days	15
Bhutan	Bhutan Board-ISCE	NA	10
India (CBSE)	AISSE	11 days	12
India (Karnataka)	SSLC	NA	7
Maldives	SSCE	NA	12
Nepal	SLC	8 days	10
Pakistan	SSC	About a month	12
Sri Lanka	GCE-OL	20-25 days	12

Registration of Candidates

Students appearing in SLE at the secondary level are 1) regular candidates, students from schools; or 2) private candidates, who are not appearing from a school, but fulfill requirement (such as Grade 8 pass with a two year gap); or 3) exempted candidates, who have failed in the previous examination and are again appearing. Registration formalities are usually undertaken in the school for the regular candidates and other institutions, such as the district education offices, might be responsible for other two types of candidates. Registration for the regular candidates is processed at Grade 8 in Pakistan, at Grade 9 in Bangladesh and Nepal, and at Grade 11 (the same year of examination) in Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, students are not required to paste their photographs in the registration form, but required to mention their 'National Identity Number' for registration and have their National Identify Card issued by the Department of Registration of Persons or a valid Identity Card issued by the Postmaster General or Valid Passport at the examination hall. The basic purposes of registration are to assign an examination number for examination and administrative purpose, and provide information on the number of question papers required for examination.

Students who have passed Grade 9 examination (Grade 10 in case of Sri Lanka) and are regular students of Grade 10 automatically qualify for SLE at the secondary level. However, in Nepal, students are required to clear up send-up examination to qualify for SLC examination (OCE, BS 2060). Such a barrier was suggested to be abolished by SEPP (MOE, 1997) stating, "In future, every student who has attended Grades 9 and 10 will be eligible for entry to SLC". The predictive validity of the send-up examination has not been established to prove that disqualified students are students bound to fail in SLC. In such a case, it would be helpful to reduce the pressure of huge numbers of candidates in the SLC examination. Without such proven reasons, send-up examination contributes more to mystify SLC examination by promoting the idea that SLC is an examination difficult to get through – first there is send-up and real challenge coming later in the form of the SLC examination. Even if send-up examination proves to have predicative validity, it can also be argued why two examinations (send-up and SLC) should be held for the same purpose - one would be sufficient.

Question Paper Production and Distribution

There are security presses of the Boards in India (CBSE), Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. FBISE, Pakistan does not have its own security press, but it uses the Government security press for printing and packaging of question papers. These are then sent to and kept in the treasury or police station ready for the examination day. The Boards in Pakistan use bank facilities to distribute question papers. In Sri Lanka, bank, police, postal, official, etc. are used for distribution. In Nepal, question papers are printed outside the country and officials are involved

for distribution. The provision of security press for OCE in Nepal has been discussed on several occasions including during SEDP. Such provision would be helpful for timely management, printing of question papers securely in times of emergency, and capacity building within the country.

Printing question papers and distribution are sensitive issues wherein leakage of the papers may occur. Various measures are employed to check such leakage. Some Boards in Pakistan do not allow the typed master copy to be checked by a proofreader or a subject specialist. This elimination of proof reading stage reduces the number of people seeing a question paper. Similarly, many Boards in Pakistan print question papers a few days before dispatch minimizing the chances of leakage. In Sri Lanka, printers are required to be in the printing premises for 24 hours a day until the printing is completed. In Nepal, OCE needs to consider exploring other means of distribution of question papers and collection.

Conducting Examinations

Conducting examination is an important process. Examination day is a big day for the students, parents, schools, and Boards and conducting examination smoothly is their major concern that involves superintendents, invigilators/guards, and security. Security personnel are supposed to provide security around the examination premises if called on. In Pakistan and Nepal, students are not allowed to appear in their home school of study if that school is an examination center. Where there are home centers, invigilators/guards are not employed from the same school. In all cases, the examination centers are required to be well furnished and students are required to be seated at an adequate distance.

For practical examinations in SSC, external examiners are appointed in Pakistan. In India and Sri Lanka, practical examinations are conducted in the purview of the school concerned. In Nepal, speaking and listening tests for the English language and practical examinations for Computer Science are external. Other practical examinations are conducted by the schools themselves. (CBSE, 2002; FBISE, 2003a; OCE, 2060 BS).

Arrangement for Marking of Answer Scripts

There is a general practice of using a fictitious code number to render the script anonymous before marking commences and decoding the candidates' real identity after the marking is over. Though coding and decoding process is time consuming and expensive, it is considered essential to check irregularity in marking. Coding and decoding is done in the additional pages of the answer script as well. In Bangladesh, the Optical Mark Reader (OMR) cover page, which could be read and recorded mechanically by the computer, is attached on the top of the answer script. The OMR sheet has three parts: top, middle, and bottom. Within three hours of the examination the top portion is separated and sent to the Computer Center where the result is compiled. The scripts are sent to the Board where these are distributed for marking. Marks are shown on the middle portion of the OMR sheet. The markers send the answer scripts to the chief markers, who check the scripts and separate the second portion of the OMR sheet and send these to the Computer Center. In the Computer Center the two portions are matched and the result is prepared (FBISE, 2004 see Annex 5 for a photocopy of the sample copy of the OMR cover page). OMR is also used for the multiple-choice part of the examination in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Deemed an efficient means OMR, has considerably reduced time for marking and data entry.

Marking centers are used in India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka where examiners come to mark the answer scripts. In Pakistan, there is a dual system -- there are marking centers for centralized marking and markers are also allowed to take papers home. There are some common practices among the Boards in these countries, such as the one of marking 20 to 25 copies in a day. Usually, the subject teachers are appointed as examiners to mark the answer scripts and the sample scripts of the marked materials are rechecked by the head examiners. Markings of the answer scripts are usually completed in two to three week's time. In Pakistan and Sri Lanka, some kind of accountability for the examiners is in used by fining the mistakes done by the examiner or refusing the service of the examiner for the next time (see Annex 6 for marking practices in CBSE, India and FBISE, Pakistan). Conference marking is deemed an effective practice to check malpractice, increase uniformity, and accomplish the process in time.

In order to maintain schedule and quality in marking, the number of answer scripts an examiner can mark is limited to a maximum of 300 scripts in India and 200 in Sri Lanka. In Pakistan, it does not exceed 300. In these countries, a marker is allowed to mark only one subject. In Nepal, the maximum limit for an examiner is 1000 copies and a marker can be allowed to mark multiple subject papers in an examination. At the rate of 25 copies a day, the examiner marking 1000 copies of answer scripts will take at least 40 days without a break. The limit is 3000 in CBSE of which the head examiner has to recheck 10%. Similar is the case in Bangladesh and Pakistan. In Nepal, the head examiner is supposed to recheck 20% of the scripts with an upper limit of 5000 for rechecking which is undoubtedly very high (CBSE, 2002; FBISE, 2003a; OCE, 2061 BS).

The practice of marking an answer script by two markers, i.e. double marking of the scripts, does not exist in Nepal, or in the SAARC countries visited (Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) nor is there any mention of such practice in Bhutan and Maldives in the documents available. However, such double marking is supposed to increase test reliability, albeit it is time consuming and expensive.

Entry of Score, Accuracy, and Results Publication

The examination processing system is computerized in the Boards of SAARC countries. Accuracy of the score entry, processing, and timely publication of results are emphasized. Duly verified award lists are double entered and horizontally checked in India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, a practice helpful to enhance accuracy of the data. The practice in Nepal is to prepare two ledgers TAB 1 and TAB 2 – TAB 2 is sent for computer entry. Computer entry printout is tallied and, if required, is corrected by matching with TAB 1.

In FBISE (Pakistan), two corrected and final sets of result tabulation register are maintained. These registers are tabulated by different persons and kept in possession of different persons in confidence: Register A is kept by the Deputy Controller of Examination (DCE) and register B by Superintendent of the Section. The certificates/marks etc. are prepared from tabulation B. The Assistant Controller of Examination (ACE) counter-checks the certificate with tabulation A (FBISE, 2003a) (see Annex 7 for 'details of conduct of business in the secret section' in FBISE).

CBSE does outlier analysis to improve accuracy in the result. It found this analysis encouraging as many sensitive cases were trapped during scrutiny of outlier cases. Using this system cases lying both towards the lower and the higher side were trapped. This was useful in maintaining accuracy of the result (CBSE, 2004). OCE, Nepal has a system of rechecking the cases if a candidate has secured above 60% marks in 7 subjects, but failed in one. Other types of outlier cases are not taken into account in OCE.

Results are published within 7 to 15 weeks (Table 2) for which Internet is widely used. India (CBSE), Nepal, and Sri Lanka also use telephone 'Voice Response System' to letting the candidates know about their results. In Nepal, only pass/fail status is announced in the Internet whereas CBSE (India) and, DOE (Sri Lanka) also publish result in the Internet. F.BISE in Pakistan uses a result gazette (Annex 8 for sample pages of result gazette of F.BISE, 2004). It is deemed a more accountable system of public announcement of the results on time and in a complete form (whole of the report, not just pass/fail status) even in the Internet.

Appeals

Examination Boards in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka allow students to appeal if candidates feel that the mark/Grade awarded is not correct. In Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Nepal re-checking/re-totalling is done on the application of the candidate. This involves checking for arithmetic errors, transcription errors, and unmarked work (Annex 9 for re-checking/re-totalling provision in F.BISE, Pakistan and OCE, Nepal). In Sri Lanka re-evaluation/re-marking of the answer scripts is permitted wherein, a candidate's answer script(s) is marked again without considering previous marking. However, it is reported that the result rarely changes in the re-evaluation/re-marking. Returning answer script to the candidate, a highly transparent approach, is not in practice in these countries. Sri Lanka's practice of re-evaluation is worthwhile looking into as it could be of help in enhancing test reliability and markers may pay more attention to make their marking more consistent.

Responding to Malpractices

Boards pay due consideration to check exam malpractice. Confidentiality of persons and security of materials gets a high priority. Question paper setters, moderators, and examiners are required to keep their involvement and work confidential. Printing and distribution of question papers, conducting examination, marking, and processing activities are executed under strict secrecy and security. Still, occasional cases of malpractice in the form of external assistance, copying, and cheating do not go un-reported from time to time in some of the Boards. Besides strict administration and security measures other steps have also been taken to check cheating in examination. In CBSE, India, and OCE, Nepal, multiple sets are used in the examination to discourage cheating. CBSE calibrates its multiple sets of questions and establishes equivalence before use. OCE uses multiple sets of question papers, but these are not pre-calibrated to establish statistical equivalence and therefore equivalence of multiple sets remains vague (Annex 10 for counter measures for responding to malpractice).

3.2 Test Development and Finalization

Adequate thought and consideration must be put into test development to make the test technically sound. A test must be valid, reliable, efficient, and acceptable. Examination Boards pay due attention to make the test technically sound with respect to adequate coverage, incorporation of various levels of test items, employing appropriate test formats, and so on. Various materials are produced and training provided for this purpose. These aspects as practiced in the SAARC countries are described hereunder.

Examination Syllabus

Examination syllabus provides information about the coverage for the question/paper setters as well as students and others. In Sri Lanka, questions are asked in the GCE-OL from the contents

of Grades 9, 10, and 11. Question papers set for Grade 10 in Bangladesh and Nepal cover contents from Grades 9 and 10. In Pakistan, external examinations are conducted separately for Grades 9 and 10 as part 1 and part 2 respectively, whereas in CBSE, India, only Grade 10 content is covered in the secondary level. The contents of Grades 9, 10, and 11 in Sri Lanka are based on vertical linkage whereas in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal, separate contents are covered at Grades 9 and 10 (MOE, Bangladesh, 2000; FBISE, 2003d; CDC, 2055 BS).

The Presidential Task Force in Sri Lanka has recommended limiting GCE-OL course to the Grades 10 and 11 instead of Grades 9, 10, and 11. Covering three years of works in a single examination is deemed educationally unsound as it places a strain on the pupils (The Presidential Task Force, Sri Lanka, 1997). For similar reasons, workload at the secondary stage has been reduced by separating courses for Grade 9 from Grade 10 and High School Examination is based only on courses prescribed for Grade 10 in Uttar Pradesh, India (NCERT, 2003).

The more the test is content-loaded and items are recall type, the more difficult a test becomes to pass. Making a test difficult for the sake of difficulty has little educational value. Therefore a study on SLC examination in Nepal has also suggested reduction of contents and basing SLC examination on Grade 10 syllabus only (FOE, 2003). CBSE Board in India covers Grade 10 syllabus in the secondary level examination and has introduced school-based comprehensive and continuous evaluation in its affiliated schools up to Grade 9 level (CBSE, 2004; COBSE, 2004b).

Introduction of the Comprehensive and Continuous Institution-based Evaluation, which covers both scholastic (learning and growth in cognitive areas) and non-scholastic (affective and psychomotor) aspects of pupil growth, is thought to be the 'most important innovation conceived and implemented in the education system today' (NIEPA, 2001). If education is supposed to provide opportunity for over-all development of an individual, both scholastic and non-scholastic aspects should be addressed by a school and need to be assessed. Scholastic aspects can be assessed through tests, home assignments, etc. Non-scholastic aspects include assessment on the basis of observation of students and assessment of their performance in games, sports, and other co-curricular areas such as art, music, drama, etc. (COBSE, 2004b).

Table 5. Number of Subjects and Pass Requirements

Country	Examination	No. of subjects and weightage to study		Minimum no. of subjects to pass	No. subject(s) for SBA
		Total (marks)	Compulsory		
Bangladesh	SSC	10 (1100)	5 (600)	10	30% weightage
Bhutan	BB-ISCE		6	6	NA
India (CBSE)	AISSE	5 (500) (plus 1 subject of 100 marks can be opted as additional)		5	3 subjects plus practical portion if any
Nepal	SLC	8 (800)	6 (600)	8	Practical portion if any
Pakistan	SSC	7 (1050)	4 (600)	7	None
Sri Lanka	GCE-OL	8 (800)	6 (600) (plus two subjects can be opted as additional)	6	SBA result reported for all subjects in the separate column in the same report.

The number of subjects a candidate is required to appear and pass in the secondary level examination also differs among the Boards. In Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka School-Based Assessment (SBA) is given emphasis and reported. Although India and Sri Lanka a candidate is

required to pass a larger certain number of papers to be qualified to have passed, she/he can appear in number of papers and gain certificate for extra number of subjects in her/his credit. Table 5 summarizes the number of subjects a candidate is required to appear and pass in the secondary level examination in the SAARC countries.

Assessment of Domains and Formats

In the educational realm, emphasis is given to include a higher level of item in the cognitive domain as well as to test the affective and psychomotor domains. This emphasizes is expected to broaden the scope of evaluation by paying equal attention to the assessment of psychomotor skills and socio-emotional traits (NCERT, 1988). For this purposes, guidelines for test item development, test blue prints/specification grid, model question papers/items are prepared. Generally, Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives is followed (Annex 11 for the sample pages of test specification grids and sample test papers used in the Boards in the SAARC countries).

External examination at the secondary level is dominated basically by a written test which comprises objective and structured/essay type questions. In Bangladesh, 35% weightage is given to the objective items in the subject with a practical part; 40% is structured and 25% practical. Otherwise, it is 50% objective and 50% structured. FBISE, Pakistan assigns 20% of weightage to the objective items. In India (CBSE) and Sri Lanka, very short questions of objective item nature are included. IBCC, Pakistan has issued guidelines for improving test instruments such as redistribution of weightage -- 60% for objective type and 40% for subjective type (FBISE, 2003c).

The practical papers in India (CBSE) and Sri Lanka are school-based whereas in Pakistan practical examinations are externally conducted. In Nepal, oral/practical test for English language and practical for Computer Science are conducted externally by district level committees whereas the concerned schools conduct other practical works.

Test Development, Finalization and Banking

The Boards in the SAARC countries were found providing test developers/paper setters various materials and training. Qualified and experienced persons (usually working and retired teachers) are selected and oriented/trained in test development. Test developers are provided with materials required such as curriculum, specification grid, old/model questions, guidelines, etc. Multiple sets of test papers/items are developed, moderated, and finalized. In India and Sri Lanka, test papers/items for the core subjects are pre-tested, calibrated, improved, and deposited in the item bank. (Please see Annex 12 for question setting and moderation in CBSE). Pakistan (FBISE) has started item banking and Bangladesh is planning an item bank from 2006. OCE, Nepal provides for item bank, but the items/papers are not calibrated. Item banking with the pre-calibrated items would improve the quality of test items. This would also be helpful in enhancing the technical quality of the test, specifically where the multiple sets of test papers are used.

3.3 Marking of Answer Scripts

Marking of answer scripts also involves qualified persons and orientation/training. Marking schemes in the point scoring guidelines or as a model answer or both are also provided to the markers. In Bangladesh, only a brief guideline is provided. In Pakistan, the paper setters along

with the question paper develop marking scheme. In India and Sri Lanka, marking schemes are reviewed and, if needed, are revised by the moderators, field tested, and finalized for use by the markers (Annex 13 for marking scheme provision of CBSE, India). A marker/examiner is supposed to mark about 20-25 answer scripts in a day and the head marker/head examiner is required to recheck about 10%-20% of the marked answer scripts. Head examiners are appointed to recheck the marked answer scripts to check correctness and consistency of marking. These procedures are helpful in making marking uniform.

FBISE, Pakistan has started item-wise marking from last year on a trial basis. In this system, different markers are assigned to mark different items with one item marked by the same marker(s). No one marker marks the whole answer script. Such marking practice is supposed to check malpractice and increase consistency in marking. Such innovative practices need to be looked into.

3.4 Equity in Assessment

Students should be provided with similar condition and equitable opportunity to demonstrate their level of attainment so that students with same degree of ability receive the same result. Standardization of the process of conducting examination, test construction, scoring, and reporting is essential for this. Where multiple sets of test papers are used, chances of some students getting advantage over their peers increase if they happen to get an easy test paper. If multiple sets are to be used, equivalence among these papers has to be ensured by pre-testing and carrying out statistical analysis as done by CBSE, India.

Equity in assessment also means adding extra facilities for the disadvantaged and disabled students. Amanuensis is allowed for blind and a disabled/ handicapped candidates who cannot write by themselves. They are usually provided 45-60 minutes extra time required to complete their work (Please see Annex 14 for provision of CBSE, India; FBISE, Pakistan; and OCE, Nepal), moreover, CBSE, India exempts one of the compulsory language subjects and provides more range of subject choices to them. Substitution test items for visual materials such as diagrams, maps, graphs, pictures, etc. are also provided for the visually impaired students (Annex 15 for the sample items for blind students, CBSE). FBISE, Pakistan arranges separate accommodation and appoints a special invigilator for the disabled candidates. Expenses incurred for such arrangements are borne by the Board. FBISE also allows disabled students to reappear in the examination to improve the score for as many times as the disabled candidate wishes with no extra charge. In Sri Lanka and Nepal, blind students can use Braille facility.

3.5 Certification Practice

The outcome of examination needs to be reported in a precise and understandable form. School Leaving Examination, as the name implies, is actually a certification of ten or more years of student schooling which is usually reported in a piece of paper. In that certificate, a few letters or marks or statements carry most of the weight such as pass/fail; Grade A, B, C....; marks at or between 0 to 100%; 1st, 2nd, 3rd division; etc. Summarizing a vast array of evaluation data in such a precise form, on the one hand, and providing relevant and usable information to a variety of users (pupils, parents, teachers, employers, administrators, university/educational institutions, etc.), on the other, is a challenging task (Gronlund and Linn, 1990). The following paragraphs describe the certification practice of the Boards in the SAARC countries.

Passing Criteria and Cut-off-score

The general practice in the Boards in SAARC countries is a requirement to pass all the subjects (Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal) or a certain number of subjects (Bhutan, India, Sri Lanka) in order to earn a pass certificate (Table 3 for details). Sri Lanka now mentions weak pass in the place of fail in its certificates. The possibility of stating Grades for each subject with no fail label in the future is under consideration. CBSE, India has also proposed that, "no student, who does not attain the qualifying level, in all the subjects, in one stroke, shall be declared a "failure", but has decided to issue a statement of "Grades" obtained by (her)/him in the subjects in which (she)/he has attained the qualifying level" (CBSE, 2000). The trend in certification in Sri Lanka and India is towards single subject certification and abolishing the practice of declaring results in terms of pass/fail (NCERT, 2000a).

Reporting – Marks vs. Grades, Single Subject vs. Composite Pass

Letter grading for reporting the achievement of students is in practice in Bangladesh (BISE), India (CBSE), Pakistan (FBISE), and Sri Lanka. To assign letter Grades, raw scores obtained by candidates can be converted into letter Grades in terms of absolute Grades in which pre-determined standards (such as above 80% - A+, 70%-80% A, etc.) becomes a reference point. Letter Grades can be assigned on relative terms by determining in advance the approximate percentage of students in each Grade based on a normal distribution of the scores. For example, absolute Grades are used in FBISE, Pakistan and relative Grades in CBSE, India (Annex 16 for grading criteria). CBSE uses a 9-point scale (A-1, A-2, B-1, B-2, C-1, C-2, D-1, D-2, and E), FBISE uses a 6-point one (A1, A, B, C, D, and E), and Sri Lanka, a 5-point one (A - Distinction Pass, B - Very Good Pass, C - Credit Pass, S - Ordinary Pass, and W - Weak Pass).

NCERT and CBSE have proposed a similar grading module with slight difference in implementation strategy to use in India. These proposals are widely discussed at present. As an interim arrangement CBSE is considering adoption of an absolute grading method with the ultimate target to introduce relative grading method which will adopt different approach than the one in practice now (CBSE Brochure on Grading). NCERT is undertaking a noteworthy work on how grading can be made functional/usable for admission in higher education (NCERT, 2001). Bangladesh is working towards using grading system in all the Boards realizing the need of training for teachers before introduction of grading system by 2007 (MOE, Bangladesh, 2000).

In Nepal, raw scores are reported in the candidate's mark-sheet. If a candidate fails in a subject, it is remarked 'F'. Letter grading system has been discussed on several occasions (such as The Working Team for SLC, 2058) and several documents (such as SESP Core Document, 2002). Considerable amount of work has been undertaken by SEDP, but it could not materialize in a policy or an operation. Discussing various types of grading system, judgmental grading was proposed for implementation in OCE, Nepal (Annex 17 for SEDP proposal for grading system for SLC examination).

Another practice on reporting of examination result is whether to report composite Grade/aggregate marks and composite pass/fail/division. In Bangladesh (BISE, Dhaka), candidates are provided with a separate result for each subject in terms of Grade and the results from different subjects are combined to form an overall result in terms of Grade Point Average. No overall Grade is provided in CBSE (India), Maldives, and Sri Lanka. In these Boards, candidates are provided separate result for each subject. In Bhutan and Nepal a results from a

different subjects are combined to form an overall result. Single subject certification and grading are considered to be technically sound practices for certification and worthwhile to look into.

Grace marks

Provision of grace marks greatly affects the fate of a number of students where there is a pass/fail system and pass in overall is required. This system can also be helpful to increase the number of subjects securely passed in the system where a cut-off score is applied to obtain a qualifying Grade. In India (CBSE), Maldives, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, the marker cannot adjust a mark if it is close to an important boundary line such as pass/fail, whereas in Bangladesh, the marker can if it is close to an important boundary line. (www1.worldbank.org/education/examinations...). There is a provision of grace mark in OCE, Nepal. The Examination Committee decides the amount of grace mark(s) when it deems necessary (OCE, BS 2060). OCE also instructs markers to recheck the answer scripts of candidates that are close to the demarcation of pass marks, but markers are not allowed to check answer scripts to provide grace marks and pass the candidate (OCE, Answer sheet checking manual). Grace marks can also be looked into as a positive discrimination practice in the educational scenario where school conditions widely vary and it affects the achievement of students. Compensation for students marginalized due to remoteness, unavailability of qualified, and trained teachers, face hardship due to geographical condition. Such arguments take up the point that given equal opportunity, those students would have also fared better. But grace mark for all on a flat basis cannot be justified. If grace mark is based on the differences of the difficulty of the test from year to year, all candidates, not just the failed ones, would deserve the grace mark for taking a difficult test. It will thus be appropriate to review the rationale for grace marks itself in the context of Nepalese situation.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

There are a number of practices in SLC examination conducted by OCE, Nepal, which are similar to those of other Boards in the SAARC countries. There are also a number of practices in the SLE of the Boards in the SAARC countries from which OCE, Nepal can learn. In this chapter, the practices of the Boards in SAARC countries are highlighted to draw implications for improving SLC examination in Nepal. Implications drawn in this chapter are aspects which this study deemed appropriate for OCE to look into. However, it is necessary to discuss further the practices of SAARC countries in the context of Nepal and draw measures feasible in the context of Nepalese system. The present study is only one of the components of the main study entitled 'Study on Student Performance in SLC'. Other major components would be looking in depth on the examination practices in Nepal. The study on examination practices in SAARC countries is also supposed to provide information required on these components.

4.1 Broadening the Purpose of Examination

SLC examination presumes three purposes -- certification of students' attainment, selection for further education, and evaluation of the school. In Bhutan, India, Maldives, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, the outcomes of examinations are also used as a feedback for improving teaching learning. As such efforts are deemed helpful in improving teaching learning at the school level, it will be worthwhile to institute students' performance analysis on the examination and provide feedback to the school/teacher that can help in improving teaching learning. In order to achieve

this goal, a training for the concerned personnel appears essential. CBSE, India, and DOE, Sri Lanka can be helpful for this purpose.

4.2 Emphasis on School-Based Assessment

Individual ability differs from person to person. Individuals also possess the ability to learn at a certain level of competence, if they are given care and their needs are catered for. Continuous assessment and using outcome of assessment to improve learning is deemed essential. It is also important that education be helpful for students in learning the non-cognitive aspects as well. These aspects also need to be assessed. Continuous assessment of scholastic and non-scholastic aspects can be best taken care of by the schools/teachers. Such school-based assessment is being emphasized in India and Sri Lanka and other SAARC countries are also working on it. Nepal is also working on this line. An example is the piloting of Continuous Assessment System (CAS) at the primary level. The outcomes and lessons from the piloting of CAS might serve as a helpful guideline for further broadening of the school-based assessment. One component of the present study is school-based assessment. That study might also come up with interesting and concrete findings and suggestions in the context of Nepal.

Effective implementation of school-based assessment is important. In this respect, NCERT strategy looks noteworthy. During discussion the experts of NCERT responsible for the piloting of school-based assessment described the program strategy. NCERT has selected four better facilitated schools for the piloting of school-based assessment. The purpose behind selecting better facilitated schools was positive demonstration. In its third year of piloting, sixteen schools are selected. Its outcome is very positive, schools/teachers are reporting better progress in students' learning, and teachers are accustomed to managing their time. The lesson that can be learned -- start slow, establish, stabilize, and demonstrate positively than going to mass and crashing down. CBSE has developed guidelines to schools on certification on school-based evaluation (2003). NCERT is providing training on SBA. Learning how to plan and make preparation for SBA from these institutions can be useful. Short-term training at NCERT and CBSE in India and DOE and NIE in Sri Lanka for the professionals on SBA will be helpful.

4.3 More Autonomous Institutions

In the SAARC countries visited, Boards and other institutions related to curriculum and teacher training were found to have enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy in terms of administration, quality control, and finance. In most of these institutions, one used to enter and complete the service life. This provided ample opportunity to develop expertise on personal basis and the institution could get service of more informed and dedicated persons. This has been cited as one reason for the better performance of the institutions there. It is important to develop specialized institutions such as CBSE (India), NETS (Sri Lanka), and FBISE (Pakistan) which correspond with OCE in Nepal, such as NCERT (India) and NIE (Sri Lanka) which correspond with NCED and CDC in Nepal. It needs to be considered to allow a certain degree of autonomy and longer terms for the personnel in OCE, CDC, and NCED. What kinds of autonomy and how to provide autonomy are issues that might be elaborated by other component studies as well.

Regarding the debate on the need of single or multiple Boards in Nepal, the practices of SAARC countries might serve as a helpful guideline. In the context of Nepal, where there are a manageable number of candidates (considering about 5 lakhs in CBSE, and more than 23 lakhs in UP), multiple Boards might not be essential on the basis of the number of candidates OCE has to manage. OCE, however, should look into decentralizing more of its administrative

functions (such as examination conduction, marking of the answer scripts, training for examiners) at the regional and district levels and develop a center for technical and quality management.

During SEDP a technical unit was formed in OCE comprising a subject specialist in the core subjects. The intention was to build the capacity of the technical unit and develop professionalism of its staffs. The staffs in the technical unit were supposed to work there for a long period without being transferred. Training and study visits for the staffs in the technical unit were organized. During SEDP this unit was developing technically. After SEDP the personnel from technical units were transferred and technical form and development as a unit stagnated. It is important to retain the positive aspects of the project within the program and institutionalize these aspects even after the project is over.

The Boards in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka are responsible for managing secondary level and higher secondary level examinations. This is helpful for using the expertise of the staffs and other persons and utilizing the resources to the maximum level. A single Board for secondary and higher secondary is also worthwhile looking into in the context of Nepal.

4.4 Improvement in Administration of Examination

A number of activities undertaken by OCE in the administration of examination are more or less similar to those of other Boards in SAARC countries; for example, registration of candidates, mobilization of staffs and other persons for examination conduction, use of marking centers, etc. There are also a number of lessons that can be looked into from the practice of the Boards of the SAARC countries as described hereunder.

Use of Send-Up Examinations

In Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, all the candidates who have passed Grade 9 (Grade 10 in case of Sri Lanka) and are regular students of school are eligible to appear in the secondary level examination. OCE, Nepal also needs to consider all Grade 10 students as bona-fide candidates for SLC as suggested by SEPP (MOE, 1997). The utility of the send-up examination requires to be examined. Otherwise, it appears to be an unnecessary barrier.

More Transparent and Student-Friendly Approaches

Public examination should be deemed fair and be open to public scrutiny. It should not be shrouded with mystery. OCE should continue to revise and make the examination-related materials (such as specification grids, model/sample questions and their marking schemes, examination by laws, etc.) available to the school/teacher, students, and other interested parties/individuals (obviously upon payment of the cost). This will help demystify the examination and lead to a better understanding of the examination processes to the concerned parties/individuals.

Students' appeal should be handled in a fair manner. As the examinations improve and become more transparent, such appeal would be given better consideration. The development in this aspect will be considered for the re-evaluation of the answer scripts on the application of candidates as practiced in Sri Lanka.

Students are allowed to sit for improvement examination in India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. OCE needs to look into this advanced practice. It is also essential to consider limiting SLC to Grade 10 syllabus, only as practiced in India and Pakistan and being considered in Bangladesh.

Administrative Functions to Enhance Technical Quality of SLC

The selection of examiners for paper setting, marking, moderation; development and publication of examination-related materials; and provision of training in the examination-related matters as practiced by OCE, Nepal are similar to those of other Boards in many respects. OCE needs to look into following practices as well:

Making markers more accountable as in Pakistan (marker's remuneration is reduced to careless marking and delay). It will help in meeting the examination schedule and also in improving marking.

The maximum number of the copies one examiner can check and a head examiner can recheck needs to be recalculated because the OCE's upper limit is too high compared to other Boards in SAARC countries.

Item banking is a useful concept. Items of objective and short answer type should be calibrated as far as practicable (Annex 18 for the suggestion on item banking developed by SEDP).

Data management needs to be improved. Double entry, double ledger system, publishing of result gazette, publishing a complete result of the individual candidates in the Internet are some of the noteworthy practices in the Boards in SAARC countries.

Outlier analysis system as done by CBSE can be a helpful tool to improve accuracy of the result. The OCE practice of rechecking the cases of a candidate securing above marks 60% in 7 subjects, but failing in one subject can be improved and extended for all the outlier cases.

4.5 Improvement in the Technical Quality of the Examination

OCE has already undertaken a number of activities to improve the technical quality of SLC examination and there will always be room for improvement. OCE, CDC, and NCED need to collaborate to revise specification grid in the light of the revised curriculum. Specification grid needs to be balanced in terms of content coverage, testing of higher level objectives, sample of truly representative items, and sample marking schemes. Along with improved examination-related materials, appropriate training should be provided to the paper setters/item writers, markers, moderators, and other persons involved in the examination process. OCE, Nepal should consider adopting some of the improved practices in the Boards in the SAARC countries.

- Pre-testing of marking scheme.
- Sample checking of the marked answer scripts by the head examiner before actual marking commences. (This modality was developed and training provided during SEDP.)
- Pre-testing, calibration, and finalization of test items for the item bank. Calibrated items will be extremely useful for the multi-set. A study by SEDP (2001) commented on the parallel papers:
- The difficulty with using parallel papers is that, without pre-testing and calibrating test materials, it is impossible to say whether they place equivalent demands on the groups of students that take them. There is also no information on any adjustments to be made to the marks, to compensate for differences emerging. Since, in this scheme, different

papers were to be supplied in different regions, there would be no basis for adjustment without the use of an external monitoring instrument.

- During SEDP (OCE, 2000b), two sets of test formats were trialed in a dummy SLC examination with a set with the traditional separate question paper and answer copy and another set with space for answer within the question paper. The second set was found better than the separate question paper and answer copy in several respects. Despite encouraging result for the combined format, it could not be adopted due to security management and bulk of the materials had to be printed outside the country. OCE needs to review the outcome of the dummy examination and see if it is possible to use certain aspects of the combined format of the question-cum-answer script – at least in a compatible format.

4.6 Improved Certification Practice

While considering improvement in certification practice, the unscientific nature of 101 scales in the reporting of raw scores, the lack of a sound basis in cut-off score, the practice of combining various subjects for a composite score, should be seriously looked into. In view of the unscientific elements noticed in reporting raw scores and keeping in mind the other Boards in SAARC countries that employ the grading system, OCE should also consider employing grading system. Reviewing the proposal of SEDP for grading may also help.