

English Language Test-taking Experiences from Nepal: An Ethical Perspective

Netra Prasad Sharma

Lecturer in English Education, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal

Abstract: *As one recalls the Shibboleth tests of the Biblical times, the failure of which meant the end of life (McNamara & Roever, 2006), it is evident that language tests impinge upon the destinies of examinees in a way beyond the grip of the imagination of even the experts in this field. The postmodern air of rapidly changing socio-political and economic relations may not allow to set the pattern of anyone's thinking that way but for an examinee who has consumed a span of valuable time, effort and material in preparing for tests, as I feel, a language test is no less serious for it holds seen and unseen power to regulate the trajectories of the examinee's goals of career and, in turn, life. Beside the impenetrable technicalities of language testing dealt with until the late 1980s, the state-of-the-art currents of ethicality were, then, undergone in the arena of language testing in order that the seriousness of the issue could be addressed better. In line with the same development, this article strives for examining examinees' lived experiences of examination halls from ethical lenses.*

Keywords: Test taking, Ethicality, Test administration, Test environment, Testee behaviour

1. Introduction

The tests conducted by Tribhuvan University assess the achievement of students in different courses of study and the same is true of the English language education tests. In fact, the tests primarily aim at measuring the knowledge of the English language and the ability of students in learning contents from different disciplines as well as reproducing the contents through writing in English. These tests do not seem to test the language itself in the technical sense of language testing.

Tribhuvan University began conducting its examinations since 1961. At present, although the examinations are conducted by the Office of the Controller of Examinations and the Office of the Dean of the respective faculties and institutes under the annual and the semester systems both, there is hardly any significant difference in the test environment of the examination halls. In this background, among several facets of language testing, this research aimed at exploring the experiences of examinees accumulated during their test-taking in the examination halls managed by Tribhuvan University.

Objectives

The objectives of this research were:

- To explore the test-taking experiences of examinees concerned with English language testing practices in the examination halls, and
- To examine the sustainability of the suggestions made by such experiences in terms of ethics.

Research Questions

This research attempted to answer the following questions.

- What are the experiences of examinees as regards the English language testing in examination halls?
- What do the experiences of the examinees suggest about the ethicality of such tests?

- How far the suggestions made by the experiences of examinees sustain in the light of ethical issues?

2. Review of the Literature

This section includes a brief discussion of the related theoretical issues and a review of empirical works in the field of test administration.

Test administration: Test administration is a crucial phase that makes or mars a test. Hughes (2010, p. 215) asserts that "the best test may give unreliable and invalid results if it is not well administered". Douglas (2010, p. 54) puts his views in a similar vein stating that "any of the elements of test administration can potentially lead to problems with reliability and cause our interpretations of test takers' performance to be erroneous". It is, therefore, that the planning and the execution of the task of test administration should be performed with caution.

There are different aspects to be considered while administering a test. Test environment, physical infrastructures, human resources and the training of the test administration personnel such as superintendents, assistant superintendents, invigilators, observers, clerical staff, and so on are the major ones. Fulcher and Davidson (2007, p. 122), for example, state that "rooms should be protected from noise, and large enough to host the number of test takers with plenty of space between individuals so that copying is unlikely. Rooms should be laid out well in advance, be clean and well aired". According to Heaton (1988, p. 168), test administrators should be "fully conversant with the test situation" for uniformity in the conduction of tests if there are different centres conducting the same test. Discussing the issues of quality control and quality assurance, Saville (2012, p. 406) highlights the different facets of test administration such as the physical setting, test administration staff, training and management of invigilators, communication between testees and test administrators, management of assessment procedures, and handling of unexpected incidents. As far as possible, it is

Volume 7 Issue 8, August 2018

www.ijsr.net

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution CC BY

obligatory for test administrators to provide conducive and uniform conditions to test takers so that they can manifest their potentials in the best way possible.

The tests are conducted by Tribhuvan University in classrooms, where routine classes are run. There are no special arrangements for test administration purposes. In this sense, tests are no longer taken as something different from teaching. This is what is the spirit of the traditional approach to language testing (Baker, 1989 & Heaton, 1988).

Ethics: Sperry (2007, p. 38) defines the term "ethics" as "the study of morality. ... it is the philosophical study of moral behavior, of moral decision making, or how one leads a good life". According to Pojman and Fieser (2012, p. 2), it is a branch of philosophy that "deals with how we ought to live". It is concerned with the morality of an action i.e. judging whether or not an action is good and acting accordingly.

Pojman (1999) discusses different theories of ethics. The aretaic theory, resembles the Aristotelian "nicomachean" ethics and emphasizes the virtues of an individual. The deontological theory is concerned with the human responsibilities or duties for choosing the good and avoiding the bad. It advocates that one has to perform one's duties honestly without being concerned with the consequences. Here, the idea resembles the Hindu god Krishna's preaching "nishkama karma" in the Bhagawat Gita. The teleological theory assumes the rightness and wrongness of an action in the light of the consequences and utility of actions. Ethical nihilism assumes "no valid moral principles" and that "the morality is a complete fiction" (Pojman and Fieser, 2012, p. 16). Subjective ethical relativism, according to them, maintains that "all moral principles are justified by virtue of their acceptance by an individual agent him- or herself" (p. 16). Ethical egoism "holds that everyone ought always to do those acts that will best serve his or her own best self-interest" (p. 82).

The theories of ethics just mentioned have a direct connection with language testing also. According to Fry (2005, p. 2), the "standard rules and regulations" set forth by different professional organizations such as the American Psychological Association can be termed as "principle ethics" and that "they serve an intermediate level of moral justification between personal intuition and formal theory". The different codes of ethics such as that of International Language Testing Association (ILTA), European Association for Language Testing and Assessment (EALTA), etc. can be termed as "principle ethics" that guide the ethical conduction of language tests. Even though such full-fledged codes of ethics are not available in our local context, the guidelines drafted in 2015 by Tribhuvan University (TU) for the management and conduction of its examinations are to a large extent in consonance with such codes of ethics. The TU examinations could, I believe, be further improved in different senses including their ethicality if the guidelines provided are seriously internalized by all concerned and effectively followed during the conduction of the examinations in all phases.

Empirical studies: In Nepal, there are hardly any empirical studies concerning test administration at the University level. Nevertheless, the studies concerned with examinations are reviewed below.

In a study, Pathak (2002) points out several lacunae in the test papers of School Leaving Certificate (SLC), Higher Secondary Education Board and Tribhuvan University.

The study of the SLC examinations undertaken by Mathema and Bista (2006) including test administration as a major component reveals that the overall procedure of test administration is far from satisfactory. The study points out the unethical eventualities such as bias and discrimination by invigilators themselves in the exam halls. They note that the "administration of SLC exam is far from fair and just to the students and the mission of administration of the public examination to provide equal opportunity to all students to show their abilities has yet to come into practice" (p. 91). Similarly, they also point out the need for the improvement of the physical setting for test administration. "In all cases, the examination centers are required to be well furnished and students are required to be seated at an adequate distance" (p. 347). In addition, the study also reports several instances of examination malpractices in the exam centres.

Anzene (2014) discusses the examination malpractices in Nigeria and points out different factors such as prevailing value system, importance given to certificates, incomplete teaching and learning, and so on leading to such practices. The results of the malpractices include "dismissal, loss of position, self confidence [*sic*] and credibility" (p. 1). She suggests "intensified continuous assessment, severe penalties for culprits, counselling of moral values" (p. 1) as the solutions.

Olubukola and Bankole (2015) study Continuous Assessment as an alternative to end-of-session examination for controlling examination malpractices in Nigeria. In the study, the sample consists of 240 teachers selected using the purposive as well as stratified sampling. In the descriptive survey design, the researchers administer questionnaires to the sample. It is found that Continuous Assessment is "an alternative effective technique in reducing examination malpractices" (p. 783).

Cornelius-Ukppepi (2015) studies the exam malpractice in Nigeria aiming to find out how students can be motivated to refrain themselves from exam malpractice and how the academic integrity can be created in the universities. She obtains the written answers to a five-item questionnaire from the students studying in the Faculty of Education, the University of Calabar, Nigeria. In addition, she also holds focus group discussions with the ten faculty members on the themes that emerge from the analysis of the written texts of the students. It is found that all the students but one accept that they are involved in exam malpractice in different ways and for different reasons. In order to assist students to refrain themselves from exam malpractice, the study suggests faculties ensuring content validity in tests, teaching their courses of study adequately, keeping to the allocated time, providing appropriate environment for examinations and

constructing the tests based on what has been taught rather than on the previous tests.

Minarcik and Bridges (2015) investigate the violation of academic integrity in examinations by graduates and seek for the recommendations of the students for deterring such violations. Out of a total of 201 university students involved in the study through an online survey questionnaire, only 8% opine that the academic integrity violations are infrequent. It means that the cases of such violations are a common phenomenon. Nevertheless, the 75% cases of such incidents are less severe. In order to deter the cases of integrity violations, the participants recommend providing better information about the integrity policies, effective supervision, severer penalties, and regular reporting of such violations.

The literature reviewed so far manifests what sort of test environment should be provided to examinees, how ethical constructs guide the actions of all involved in the conduction of exams and the behaviour of examinees in examination halls. Beside these insights, the review also implies the methodological strategies that could be employed in revealing the experiences stashed in examination halls not accessible to the general readership.

3. Method

Adopting the qualitative paradigm, a questionnaire consisting of a single open-ended question was administered to 28 students in Kathmandu. The question item required the students to write their experiences of test-taking in the examination halls. The respondents had the experiences of taking English language education tests at least twice. Out of the 28 written texts, only 25 were deemed appropriate for the study. The three of the texts were dispensed with as they were either not clear in terms of meaning or concerned with the test-taking experiences of Higher Secondary Education Board. The texts were entered into the computer as they were and, then, they were read carefully to identify patterns and themes. The irrelevant chunks of the texts were ignored. The contents of the selected chunks of the written texts were studied and thematized, which were, then, analyzed and interpreted from the ethical perspective in order to reach the conclusion.

4. Results and Discussion

The following section presents the themes identified in each of the respondents' written texts and discusses them under different headings.

The themes identified in the written texts are presented in the table below.

Table 1: Preliminary themes generated from primary written texts

Respondent	Themes
1	Invigilator behavior: not careful, nepotism, even assisting cheating, discussing politics and other personal problems
2	Invigilator behavior (rudeness, nepotism, disturbance caused, fairness and justice, unjustified penalty)
3	Fellow test takers disturbing, Invigilators disturbing, testees' valuable time wasted searching their bodies (had to be done before the start of exam, if necessary)
4	Fairness issue: students in hilly area deprived of even textbooks and, hence, unable to score as much as the students in urban areas
5	Exam hall management: Dirty, unsystematic and poor management
6	Mixed feelings, no uniformity, strictness good, invigilators not clarifying questions Suggestion: don't check students
7	Slackness contributing to cheating (teachers assisting cheating), invigilator disturbance, physical aspects not conducive (problem of lighting and cleanliness, desks and benches not comfortable), poor management
8	Physical aspects poor (problem of lighting and cleanliness, very small desks and benches not comfortable). Invigilator behavior: very frightening crying loudly, strict Positive: hall big enough
9	Compared to school level exams, TU exams not good (threatening environment, invigilators irresponsible and careless, exam hall not good as it is very dirty, desks and benches as well as walls not good)
10	Peaceful, invigilators good, invigilators clarifying questions
11	Positive: more strict than school exams Invigilators all good (helpful, clarifying questions and providing other required information) Test environment: quiet and clean, enough lighting, good furniture, logistics staff helpful (drinking water) Negative: fellow testees disturbing and cheating
12	Positive: strictness, no disturbance, drinking water provided, furniture managed well, invigilators clarifying questions Negative: problem of light,
13	Exam hall crowded, students silent and disciplined, testees cheating, respondent herself reporting cheating to invigilators, invigilators feeling sorry.
14	Positive: physical aspects good in both exams. In both exam halls, testees and invigilators respected each other. Negative: in first exam strictness and, therefore, good but in the second slackness and hence not good. In second exam, the testee had difficulty in finding the hall and hence he was late for exam.
15	All positive (strictness, invigilators cooperative, all kinds of facilities available, clean floor, peace) Invigilator noise when they found malpractices (punish the guilty only)
16	Golden opportunity (suitable environment, test administration staff good) Negative: physical facilities poor, no seat planning (in one centre there was but in another not), no classroom management, no good desks and benches, feeling uncomfortable
17	Comparison of two centres: one is good but another not (mixed feelings) Positive: good seats, good physical facilities, peace, no cheating, clean, good light, toilet, nice garden, security, invigilators good.

	Negative: seats not good, desks not good (answersheets slipping during writing), side talk but invigilators ignoring, hall dusty and dirty, noise, cheating
18	Positive: beautiful, clean Negative: dirty, dark, no good environment, one invigilator very bad
19	Positive: outside environment and management of desks, benches, windows, fans, light, etc.
20	Negative: dirty hall, invigilators not cooperative Critical incident: Testee asked invigilator to clarify a question but he/she became aggressive and punished the testee the result of which the testee couldn't write anything.
21	Negative: searching like the police, poor cleanliness, furniture not good, invigilator behavior not good, toilet bad, no water in toilet Positive: drinking water available
22	Comparison of two exam halls First exam centre good but second not (no rules and regulation). issue of uniformity Issue of fairness
23	Mixed feelings: environment positive (toilet) but other things not good (water, light, desks and benches)
24	Positive: peace and hence testees happy Negative: problem of cleanliness and furniture management
25	Invigilators helpful, environment good, peaceful, testees happy

Table 1 displays the preliminary themes that were generated from the primary data. The preliminary themes can be grouped under the broader categories as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Categories derived from the primary themes

S. No.	Themes	Number of Respondents
1.	Invigilator behavior - *P: strict, clarifying questions, respecting testees, helpful - *N: punishing the innocent, disturbing, threatening, not careful, nepotism, assisting cheating, uncooperative, rudeness, unjust penalty, unfair, slackness, no uniformity, unnecessary body search, strict, not clarifying questions, helplessness	09 13
2.	Behavior of fellow test takers - P: no cheating - N: disturbing, cheating, side talk	01 04
3.	Fairness issue (bias)	04
4.	Test environment - Physical aspects P: big hall, security, environment, peace N: dirty, poor desks and benches, problem of light, crowded hall	13 14
s5.	Management Good Poor	06 12
6.	Uniformity in exam conditions	06 vs. 13
7.	Test takers' preference - Strictness - Conducive test environment devoid of the disturbance of invigilators and fellow test takers - Proper physical infrastructures - Equal treatment - Clarification of questions - Uniformity in test conduction	06 19 11 04 05 03

*Note: P= positive; N: negative

Table 2 shows the seven broad categories under which the preliminary themes derived from the primary data can be adjusted. These categories are discussed as below.

Invigilator behavior: On studying the written texts of the sample test takers it is clear that there is no unanimous perception of the test takers towards the invigilators. Nine respondents perceived the behavior of the invigilators positively. The test takers highlight the strictness, cooperation, respect for test takers and helping attitude of invigilators such as clarifying questions as the good qualities of invigilators. For instance, Respondent 6 states that:

There were fixed strict rules and discipline as well in the exam. The invigilators were strict. But I was free in writing answers to the questions. There was no disturbance and,

hence, it was a very good examination situation in the classroom.

Respondent 10 opines that "all teachers were very good. Invigilators clarified the confusing questions". Respondent 14 asserted that the "invigilators were best for me ... they respected the students ...". Respondent 15 reacted to invigilator behavior writing that "teachers were so cooperative or helpful for students". Respondent 16 opines that "all the teachers and invigilators were good".

Nevertheless, there are several test takers who did not perceive the behavior of the invigilators very positively. In this train of thought, there are thirteen respondents pointing out the weaknesses of invigilators such as punishing the innocent; disturbing; threatening; not being careful; assisting

cheating; being uncooperative, rude, unfair, slack, and even too strict; showing nepotism; having no uniformity; carrying out unnecessary body search; not clarifying questions; etc. Respondent 1 blames the invigilators stating that:

Guards were not careful in the time of exam. If any relatives were there, the guards closed eyes to them but they were cheating openly. Even, to some extent, the teacher himself provided chits. Teachers were busy talking about political points and, sometimes, their own problems.

The respondent stresses nepotism and decadence of morality such as assisting cheating, and the disturbance caused by the invigilators as the unwanted behaviour of the invigilators. This is iterated in the writing of Respondent 2 and, in addition, rudeness and unnecessary checking of test takers are also focused thus:

The major challenges I have faced are the invigilators not showing good behavior towards the examinees, behaving rudely, the insane behaviour of checking during toilet time too, giving priority to one's own relatives, etc. Use of mobile frequently by invigilators and discussion among invigilators of the same class disturbing the environment of examination are the other challenges.

Respondent 7 points out the slackness of invigilators as well so as to assist cheating. "T.U exams are very loose and free compared to the +2 exams. Many students cheat in the exam hall and teachers are very helpful for the cheating. The teachers speak in a loud voice. Students' minds are diverted". Respondent 8 points out the frightening manner of the invigilators as:

There, guards always frightened us. So, sometimes we were afraid of them ... We know that strict behaviour is necessary with us but it is not necessary for them to behave that way because when they frighten us we can't write well.

Respondent 20 remarks that "teachers were not cooperative" and when she asked the invigilator to clarify a question, he "became aggressive".

From what has been experienced by test takers as mentioned above, it is evident that there is no unanimous perception of test takers towards the invigilators and that the invigilators also do not behave with test takers in a similar manner. To the extent testees feel comfortable, the behaviour of invigilators can be justified on the ethical grounds. However, their unfavourable acts reported by test takers can be right only when one holds the ethical theory "ethical nihilism" (Pojman&Fieser, 2012).

Behavior of fellow test takers. The respondents' experiences indicate that there is variation in fellow test takers' behaviour. Some respondents found that their fellow test takers remained quiet and disciplined during their test. Respondent 17 reports the experiences of two exam halls and finds the quite different behaviour of fellow testees. In the first exam hall, the testees exhibited good manner as the respondent reports, "all the students were silent and we didn't cheat in the examination". Nevertheless, the same respondent finds the second exam hall different as he

describes the behavior of fellow testees as, "all the students were involved in side talk in the exam but the guard ignored the students and examination". The other four respondents report the disturbance and cheating in the exam hall. For instance, Respondent 3 recounts, "sometimes I used to be very angry with my friends in the exam/test. There was disturbance of friends asking some questions or points in tests". Similarly, Respondent 11 details the behaviour as "but other friends sometimes made noise and cheated. So, sometimes I felt bored". Such behaviour of test takers has been reported by other studies also (Anzene, 2014; Cornelius-Ukpepi, 2015; Olubukola&Bankole, 2015; Minarcik& Bridges, 2015).

Fairness issue (bias). The term "fairness" has different nuances but in the sense of treating testees in a just and equal way, four respondents report the unjust and biased treatment of test takers. They stress nepotism and unjust punishment administered to the testees. Respondents 1 and 2, as mentioned above, highlight the biased treatment of test takers by invigilators. They point out nepotism as a problem. Respondent 22 reports the unjust punishment she had to suffer thus:

There was a problem. The people who were close to us used to cheat secretly from our paper but the teacher there changed my place. That rule is not good because the exact cheater was not myself, that's why I don't like the teachers' behaviour.

Despite such reports, the behavior of invigilators as reported by several other respondents (see above) indicates that such biased behaviour is an exception rather than a norm. Even if the cases are relatively few, they exemplify ethical decadence at the aretaic as well as deontic level.

Test environment. Several factors such as the behavior of test administration staff and fellow test takers, physical infrastructures, etc. contribute to the test environment. As the behavior of the test administration staff and the fellow testees has already been discussed above, the test environment is discussed here only in terms of physical infrastructures. As regards the physical aspects also, there are mixed experiences as reported by the respondents. Thirteen respondents point out the positive aspects of the test environment, viz. big enough exam halls, peaceful environment, and security. Respondent 11 highlights the positive aspect stating that "the exam centers are quiet and clean. The examination classes also were clean and lighting as well as exam hall's furniture was comfortable for students". Respondent 14 reports, "I feel so good and classroom is better for me. There were many facilities in the college including air conditioning. When I saw the outside view I was happy and felt so good". Similar view is expressed by Respondent 16, "in the year 2071, when I took a T.U exam in ... Multiple Campus ... I got a suitable environment to take exams properly. I got a golden opportunity".

Nevertheless, in the responses of 14 test takers the test environment is not found to be conducive enough owing to dirt, poor desks and benches, poor lighting, crowded hall and so on. Respondents 7, 8, 18, 21 and 24, for example, reveal that the exam hall was very dirty. Respondents 7, 8 and 18

point out the problem of lighting. Respondent 18 describes the defective condition of the exam hall as he writes, "the exam room was very dirty and dark". Respondent 21 reports that, "there was the 4th layer of dust" in the exam hall. Respondent 24 also reiterates the idea of Respondent 21 as "there was the 4th layer of dust in the classroom. Furniture was bad the desks and benches were placed randomly".

The issue of test environment is concerned with a range of factors, some of which directly linked with the economic status as well as values of the state itself. However, there are several things such as sweeping the floor, repairing the lights, etc. that could be managed even locally. But that is not the situation in the experiences of several testees. It evinces the lapse from the deontic level.

Management. The term "management" is conceived here to refer to the endeavor made to provide the basic needs and to best utilize the available resources. Concerning the experiences of test takers, six of them perceive the management to be effective whereas eleven of them to be deficient.

On the positive side, the respondents mention the proper management of desks and benches, lighting, drinking water and cleanliness of the exam halls. Respondent 11 stresses the cleanliness, lighting, furniture, drinking water and availability of different sorts of information. Similar is the view of Respondent 12 when she says "classrooms were large and the desks and benches were managed. The teachers even helped providing drinking water". Respondent 17 adds thus:

The examination hall was very clean and we had good light and other good facilities like the toilet in the school. In front of the school, there was a very nice garden, and it looked very nice. The first exam centre was in Kumaripati Lalitpur. We had security as well. All the teachers and students were safe in the school area. There were policemen.

On the negative side of the management, test takers highlight the deficiency in the management of desks and benches, lighting, cleanliness, drinking water, bathrooms, peaceful environment, etc. Eleven instances of such issues are raised by test takers. Respondents 1, 2, 3 and 7, for instance, mention the disturbance caused by the invigilators themselves by using cell phones and discussing issues like politics. Respondent 7 describes the situation, "When I entered the classroom, it was very dark and dirty. In this classroom, desks were very uncomfortable and management was very careless". Respondent 17 opines that "the examination hall was dirty. There was a lot of dust". Respondent 8 also describes the similar experience thus:

When I entered the examination hall, I found that it was big. This room was a little bit dark and there was dust. There were so many desks and benches but they were not comfortable because they were very small. We faced the problem of sitting.

It is clear that although, in some cases, the concerned actors seem to observe the ethical principles, in several cases they fail to do so.

Uniformity in exam conditions. Regarding the issue of providing uniform conditions to test takers, there exist problems that are clear from the discussion above. For instance, the same respondents 14, 17 and 22 each report the experiences of two exam halls and each of them find the experiences vastly different in terms of the test environment, management, invigilator behaviour and so on. Just to mention an example, Respondent 22 reveals that:

In the first examination, there were fixed rules and regulations in that campus, which was good for us. There was sit planning done very nicely. Examination rules were also good. There was the facility of water for students ... In another examination hall, there were no rules and regulations. We students could take sits wherever we liked.

When the experiences of Respondents 10, 11, 12, 16, 19 and 25 are compared with those of Respondents 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 15, 17, 20 and 21, it is evident that there exist no uniform conditions for test takers taking the same test at the same time.

The international ethical norm that the test takers in a group with the same rights and goals need to be treated equally does not seem to function effectively as the respondents themselves report a number of varying test situations.

Test takers' preference. On the analysis of the written texts obtained from the test takers, there emerges a clear range of their preferences. First, testees prefer the conducive environment for the performance. The test environment is affected by a number of factors including the infrastructural aspects, the behavior of all the test administration personnel as well as fellow test takers, and so on.

Second, testees also desire the strictness of invigilators in exam halls. This is something different from the popular conception that test takers do always wish they had slackness in exam halls. For instance, six respondents express that the exam halls they were in were good because there was strictness. Respondent 14 is an example:

I felt that the first year examination, which was in ... academy, a private college, was very tight. This college was very good for me but for other students this wasn't good because cheating, talking with friends, etc. were not allowed there. So I felt so good ... the second year examination was very bad for me because it wasn't tight. Many friends were cheating and talking with friends. I felt bad in the second year exam.

Third, test takers desire to be treated equally and fairly. Four respondents raise this issue. Respondents 1, 2, 4 and 22 advance this issue. Respondent 22, for example, mentions an incident, which is already mentioned above. The respondent was punished even though she was not involved in any malpractice whereas the test takers involved in malpractice went unheeded. She reports that in the exam hall thus:

Respondent 4 argues for a slightly different form of fairness issue. He indicates the question of equal treatment not only in testing but also in providing input. He argues that the test takers from the hilly areas have problems in the exams as they cannot find textbooks in some academic sessions. They

have to be dependent only on class lectures and, therefore, they cannot obtain good marks. Despite this situation, all the test takers, whether from the urban or hilly areas, are supposed to take the same exams.

Fourth, test takers want someone in exam halls to clarify the questions when required. Five respondents raise this issue. Respondents 10, 11 and 12 take the exam hall positively as their questions were clarified by invigilators whereas Respondents 6 and 20 hold a negative image of the exam hall as their questions were not clarified. Respondent 20 reports an incident:

In English examination I had one question which I didn't understand. Then I asked the teacher to clarify the question but he became aggressive. He took my answer copy. And I had to stand for 5 minutes. When I took the copy, I couldn't write anything.

From the ethical point of view, the preferences of the test takers can be justified in that they, as clients, are expecting not more than what is pronounced internationally in the related field.

5. Conclusion

The experiences of test takers in exam halls display the mixed results, i.e. their experiences are both pleasant and unpleasant. The pleasant experiences reported above are in conformity with the assertions made by different language testing experts (i.e. Douglas, 2010; Fulcher and Davidson, 2007; Heaton, 1988; Hughes, 2010 & Saville, 2012) as well as ethical theories whereas the unpleasant experiences conflict with the international norms and standards as well as the expectations of ethical theorists. A good test that is not administered well will threaten both reliability and validity (Hughes, 2010). Equal treatment of the test takers in the same group is an established international norm. Nevertheless, the experiences of test takers in the Nepalese exam halls reveal that, in many cases, the same group of test takers are supposed to take their tests in varying physical and psychosocial conditions such as varying infrastructures in exam halls and varying behaviour of test administration personnel. This fact contradicts with Heaton's (1988) assertion that test administration staff should be fully conversant with each other for uniformity when the same test is conducted in different centres. In this sense, several experiences of test takers in Nepalese exam halls indicate that there exist such contexts. Test takers' reports about the unfavourable test environments props the claim. The findings of this study, to a large extent, conform to the findings of Mathema and Bista (2006) about the administration of SLC tests. The test takers' involvement in exam malpractices, to some degree, conforms to the findings of Minarcik and Bridges (2015) that violation of academic integrity is a common phenomenon. The phenomenon, as revealed by the test takers in this study, has been reported by other studies as well (Anzene, 2014; Cornelius-Ukpepi, 2015 & Olubukola, & Bankole, 2015). The revelation of examination malpractices and their impacts in the Indian context by Maheshwari (2011) emits almost the similar impression of the experiences in Nepalese examination halls.

From the ethical perspective, the circumstances that lead to several experiences of test takers as discussed above are difficult to justify. Ethics defined as the study of morality, i.e. what is good to do and what is not (Pojman and Fieser, 2012 & Sperry, 2007) counts everywhere including language testing. The unpleasant experiences of testees such as having to perform tests in the deficient test environment, being maltreated and disturbed by invigilators themselves, being treated differently within the group in which one is parallel in terms of status and rights can be legitimized neither at the aretaic level nor at the deontic level. It is difficult to do so at the teleological level either.

In the light of the analogous sociopolitical, economic and geographical backgrounds of testers and testees in Nepal, test administrators, as I believe, are or should be well aware of what kinds of test conditions are suitable for their testees. What can be said when test takers report their complaints in writing about the very basic needs of the exam halls? What can be said when invigilators themselves create disturbance in exam halls? What can be said when test takers themselves, who are in the exam halls to gauge their ability and skills, involve in malpractices? From the ethical lenses, all these questions need to be tested against the ethical principles for the common good. Otherwise, actors shall continue to attempt to justify their actions under the guise of "ethical egoism" or even "subjective ethical relativism". The reactions to the questions just raised might sustain in the light of ethicality provided that they are underpinned with more solid grounds.

6. Acknowledgements

Coordination Division, Office of the Rector, Tribhuvan University deserves sincere acknowledgements for providing me with the study leave as well as the study grants. I would also like to acknowledge Prof. Dr. Jai Raj Awasthi, my Ph. D. supervisor, for providing useful insights and feedback throughout the development of this paper, which, otherwise, would not have taken this shape. I also acknowledge the unknown reviewers for the feedback.

References

- [1] Anzene, S. J. (2014). Trends in examination malpractice in Nigerian educational system and its effects on the socio-economic and political development of Nigeria. *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (AJHSS)*, 2(3), 1-8.
- [2] Baker, D. (1989). *Language testing*. London: Edward Arnold.
- [3] Cornelius-Ukpepi, B. U. (2015). We've got to do better: examination malpractice as a barrier to good governance and democratic leadership in Cross River state, Nigeria. *Educational Extracts*, 3(1), 16-28.
- [4] Douglas, D. (2010). *Understanding language testing*. Oxon: Hodder Education.
- [5] Fry, H. L. (2005). *The application of virtue ethics to the practice of counseling psychology*. Unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation, Graduate School of The Ohio State University.
- [6] Fulcher, G. & Davidson, F. (2007). *Language testing and assessment*. New York: Routledge.

- [7] Heaton, J. B. (1988). *Writing English language tests*. London: Longman.
- [8] Hughes, A. (2010). *Testing for language teachers*. Delhi: CUP.
- [9] Maheshwari, V. K. (2011). Malpractice in examinations. The termites destroying the educational set up. *India philosophical commentary on issues of the day*. Posted nov.24, 2011: Bookmark permalink.
- [10] Mathema, K. B., & Bista, M. B. (2006). *Study on student performance in SLC*. Kathmandu: Ministry of Education and Sports & Education Sector Advisory Team.
- [11] McNamara, T. F. & Roever, C. (2006). *Language testing: The social dimension*. Oxford, UK:
- [12] Minarcik, J. B. & Bridges, A. J. (2015). Psychology graduate students weigh in: Qualitative analysis of academic dishonesty and suggestion prevention strategies. *Journal of Academic Ethics*, 13 (1). doi: 10.1007/s10805-015-9230-x
- [13] Olubukola, A. & Bankole, O. (2015). Reducing examination malpractices in Nigerian schools through effective continuous assessment (C.A) techniques as an alternative to one-shot examination in Osun state, Nigeria. *American Journal of Educational Research*, 3 (6), 783-789.
- [14] Pathak, L. S. (2002). Do you mean what you ask, mr. examiner? A look into English question paper setting in intermediate level examination. *Journal of NELTA*, 7(1&2), 72-77.
- [15] Pojman, L. P. & Fieser, J. (2012). *Ethics: Discovering right and wrong*. Boston: Wadsworth.
- [16] Pojman, L. P. (1999). *Ethics: Discovering right and wrong*. Boston: Wadsworth.
- [17] Saville, N. (2012). Quality management in test production and administration. In G. Fulcher & F. Davidson (Eds.), *The routledge handbook of language testing* (pp. 395 – 412). Oxon: Routledge.
- [18] Sperry, L. (2007). *Dictionary of ethical and legal terms and issues*. New York: Routledge.