

# **B.Ed. Students' Ability of Identifying Focal Points and Command Words in a Question to Develop Appropriate Answer — A Study**

NIKITA RATHOD\* AND A. RAMACHARY\*\*

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## **Abstract**

*Questions set for B.Ed students' evaluation process contain few focal points as well as some command words to be addressed in offering appropriate answers to the questions asked in the examinations. Noting poor performance of prospective teachers in their own ability of identifying focal points and command words in the question papers, an effort was made to test the same. In the present study, with a quality concern in the evaluation dimension, the diagnostic observations were done from the performance of 69 B.Ed. students in their internal tests. An attempt was made to develop material for due orientation to improve their ability to understand the true meaning and role of focal points and ability to address the command words in the questions asked in the examinations. Besides, this study reveals the improvement in the final exam performance, after the remedial orientation, confirming the positive influence of the treatment for both the vernacular and English medium students at B.Ed level.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Education of teachers in the country has been considered crucial, not only for ensuring greater professionalism in teachers but also for facilitating school improvement

and effectiveness. The Education Commission (1964–66) accepted this influence of teachers in powerful words, “No system can rise above the status of its teacher...” as it has direct impact on the generations to come.

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\*Lecturer, Oxford B.Ed College, Mumbai, 400 067

\*\*Principal, Oxford B.Ed College, Mumbai, 400 067

It is universally accepted that teachers should possess some knowledge, skills and values, meeting the needs of the profession from time to time (UNESCO Report 2006).

According to Srivastava (1997), “teachers to be taught and trained” is a relatively growing concept. Thus, for the quality professional preparation, we need to focus on various aspects of the teacher-training programme like pedagogical knowledge, mastery of the content, practical skills related to classroom-teaching, theoretical foundations related to the skills, conducting assessment and so on. It is generally expected that B.Ed. students should have various abilities like raising appropriate questions at every stage, developing a question paper (which is the part of their B.Ed. programme—where they prepare year plan, unit plan and unit test along with blueprint and all weightage tables required) and the ability of developing appropriate answers for each given question. But to our dismay, we ask them something and get answer of something else, especially in application-based questions. This defocused reflection in answering a question is found to be significant and more common with the students having vernacular background. It is a most common observation of many evaluators that students are writing much of irrelevant material in their answers. Mostly they are writing what they know or remember, than what they were asked to reply, for a given question.

Right information given in an answer can become inappropriate when it is not question-focused. Questions are not just dreamed up and written down. They are assessed, scrutinised, re-worded, re-worked and re-written to get it right. This raises a few natural research questions, such as, does the question asked in the exam contain any Focal Point (FP)? Are there any Command Words (CW) in the question which deserve greater attention of the student to answer the question asked appropriately? Whether, it is essential to identify Focal Points in any given question to present an appropriate answer? In its absence, the answer will go astray and likely to become defocused and even irrelevant answer.

#### **FOCAL POINTS AND COMMAND WORDS**

Developing an ability of Focal Point identification in a given question is strongly required for offering relevant answer to the question asked. When B.Ed. students acquire this ability, not only their own performance in examination will improve, but also their skill of designing better question paper for evaluating their own students will enhance. This also ensures more improved and accurate evaluation process of the student in their examination. This ability will help him or her in framing better questions and preparing appropriate answer keys which eventually lead to accuracy of assessment.

Along with Focal Points, there are other controllers or directors in any question asked in the examination, which a student needs to carefully look at. These can be known as Command Words. Command Words are the navigating guides in a question which direct as to what assessment objective is being targeted by the question asked (Bized 2004). They are used very carefully and each question has a certain order of words that try to give the maximum help to the student about what the examiner is looking for. It is important to read the whole question and to understand what the question is asking. This is because the Command Word, on its own, cannot serve the purpose. Therefore the Focal Points together with the Command Words complete the form of the question and it succeeds in eliciting the appropriate answer for the given question. Consider the following example:

- Q1. Explain the interdependence of measurement and evaluation.  
 Q2. Illustrate the procedure of team-teaching.

Q3. Discuss the important aspects of the definition of educational evaluation.

Q4. Distinguish between Inductive and Deductive methods of teaching with examples.

**Question 1** is asking to explain; which requires to give details and clarify all dimensions/aspects/parts/elements of the topic.

**Question 2** is asking to illustrate; which comprises to clarify/explain with the help of examples or to provide with explanatory or decorative features for the point given.

**Question 3** is asking to discuss; which involves noting down points in an effort to reach an agreement; it involves close examination of a subject/topic/point with interchange of opinions.

**Question 4** is asking to distinguish; that requires showing the difference between two methods/points/parts with the help of a few examples.

In the above mentioned examples the Focal Points and Command Words are:

#### Focal point and command words

Q.No.	Focal Points (FP)	Command Words (CW)
Q.1	Interdependence, measurement, and evaluation	Explain
Q.2	Team teaching, Procedure	Illustrate
Q.3	Educational evaluation, important aspects definition	Discuss
Q.4	Inductive and Deductive methods, Examples.	Distinguish

Therefore, summarily speaking, Focal Points and Command Words are the key guiding elements to develop effective, relevant and appropriate answer for any given question.

Keeping in view, the scope of the present study, the following operational definitions are formulated to define the key words:

### **1. FOCAL POINT IDENTIFICATION**

These are the words used in any question for eliciting the relevant and appropriate content-based answers for the question asked in the examination. Focal Point identification is the ability of making a judgment about what are the points a student identifies as the most significant, in a given question. Scores obtained on the test paper administered on the B.Ed students to identify the Focal Points indicate the ability of students in identifying the focal points.

### **2. COMMAND WORDS**

These are the directing words used in any question for guiding the relevant and appropriate content-based answers for the question asked in the examination. Scores obtained on the test paper administered on the B.Ed students to identify the Command Words indicate the ability of students in identifying the command words.

This leads to the emergence of the following research questions which needs to be addressed:

1. Do the prospective teachers identify Focal Points and Command words in the question asked?
2. How is the performance of the B.Ed students in terms of their ability to identify the Focal Points and Command Words?
3. Is there any difference in the ability of identifying Focal Points and Command Words in the question asked by the vernacular medium students and the students from English medium?
4. Is it possible to develop some remedial measures to improve the ability of prospective teachers to understand the meaning and power of Focal Points and Command Words in the questions asked in the examination?
5. How are the Focal Points, Command Words, and scores obtained in the examination correlated?

Keeping in view the research questions raised above, an attempt is made to “study the B.Ed. students’ ability of identifying Focal Points and Command Words in a question to develop appropriate answer.” With a view to answer research questions raised above the following objectives are formulated:

1. To find out the ability of understanding examination questions of B.Ed. students.
2. To study their ability of developing appropriate answers.
3. To investigate the effect of remedial treatment given to B.Ed. students.

4. To ascertain the importance of Focal Point and Command Word identification ability for developing appropriate answers.
5. To study the difference, if any, between the vernacular and English medium students in their understanding of the meaning and the use of Focal Points and Command Words.
6. To find the correlation between Focal Points, Command Words and the scores obtained in the examination.

#### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

As per the requirement of the problem and objectives of the study, one of the quasi-experimental designs, namely Time Series Design is used. With a Time Series Design, observations were taken to establish a baseline; after which a treatment was offered to the sample under consideration. Following this additional observations were made. From this, an estimate of the impact of the treatment was computed (Gribbons and Herman 1997, Morgan, et al 2000, Gliner and Harmon, 2000). Research methodology used the internal test data as the basis for diagnosis of the problem. Here internal test data consists of the scores of 4 essay tests of half an hour duration carrying 10 marks each (total 40) and the scores of 4 class tests of one hour carrying 25 marks each (total 100). The topic for the essay test was informed in advance to the students, each time. Similarly, the portion for class test

remains very limited and made known to the students in advance. Thus it is clear that the internal test consisting of essay tests and class tests cannot be laterally compared with scores of prelim and the final semester 1 examinations. However, the scores on essay tests and class tests, together termed as internal tests, at best, served the basis for diagnostic observations, prior to the launch of intervention and further study. The post-test scores involve the scores of the prelim exams for all the four courses and semester-end university exams of four courses of semester 1 based on the B.Ed. syllabus. Keeping in view the objectives of the study and the nature of the problem under study, research design can be figuratively depicted in figure 1.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

The method adopted for the present study includes the following steps:

1. Diagnostic observation of B.Ed. students' performance on the basis of internal tests, which includes essay tests and class tests of four courses.
2. Orientation on focal point identification for B.Ed. students.
3. Power point presentation on Command Words for B.Ed. students.
4. Developing test paper for the identification of FP and CW.
5. Scoring the above test paper on FP and CW.

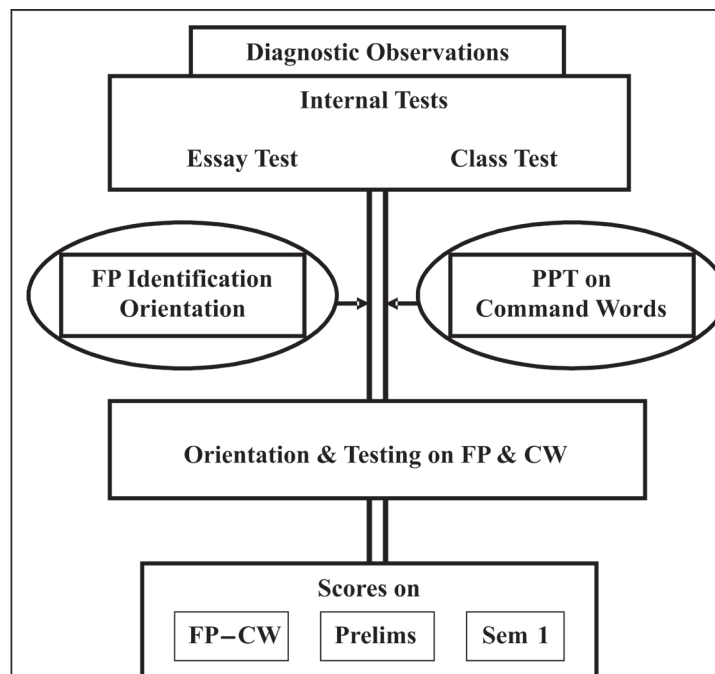


Figure 1: Research Design

6. Data collection on prelims and semester 1 B.Ed. examination scores.
7. Statistical treatment of scores on FP, CW, prelims and semester 1 examination.
8. Listing findings and drawing inferences based on the study of mean scores and correlations between FP, CW, prelims and semester 1 examination.

Keeping in view the above methodology, sample identification and tool development and its administration, together with data collection procedure, are explained on the next page:

#### POPULATION AND SAMPLE

Essentially population comprises of B.Ed students. As the researcher has an idea and experience of the B.Ed. students' evaluation process, they are chosen as the sample for the present study. This study includes 69 students of the Oxford B.Ed. College, Kandivli (W) Mumbai, who were selected purposively. The selected sample includes 23 vernacular students of B.Ed, coming from Hindi (19) and Marathi (4) backgrounds and 46 English-medium background B.Ed students.

#### INTERVENTION

Based on the diagnostic observations from internal test information some



remedial treatment was provided to the B.Ed students. Following are the two aspects included in the remedial treatment:

- An orientation on focal point identification. What, how and why about focal point identification.
- A power point presentation on command words showing their usage and guidelines for the command words commonly used in B.Ed. Examinations.

The treatment was followed by testing using a self-made tool, as explained below. This helped to check the impact of the intervention.

### **TOOL**

For the purpose of the present study a specific test paper, namely; FPCWI i.e. Focal Point and Command Word Identification was developed. The objective of developing the tool FPCWI was: to test the ability of B.Ed. students in identifying the Focal Points and Command Words, from the given set of course content-based questions. FPCWI contains 25 questions from previous years' University question papers. This includes all the four courses of their B.Ed syllabus. Sample under study was asked to identify both Focal Points and Command Words from the given test paper. Response sheets were scored, basing on the number of right answers out of the maximum possible correct answers i.e. 35 Focal Points and 25 Command Words respectively in the Test paper provided. Necessary instructions

about the treatment were given to them. Sufficient time was provided to the students to respond on it properly. Researcher had quantified the data by giving score to their marking of the Focal Points and Command Words. Scores were separately obtained on the percentage basis for both Focal Points and Command Words.

### **DATA SOURCE AND DATA COLLECTION**

Data was obtained from the test paper developed to find out the ability of B.Ed students to identify the Focal Points and Command Words. Percentage scores were computed for both the FPs and CWs. Besides, performance of B.Ed students on their Internal Tests (IT) in all the four courses was observed with a view to provide a base for the diagnostic observation. Similarly, scores on Prelims Test of all the four courses, as well as, the scores on the same four papers of the final Semester examination of the Mumbai University were collected for the present study.

### **RESULTS**

Data was processed choosing the percentage scores of all the parameters, like scores on Focal Points, Command Words, scores on Prelims, and finally, scores on Mumbai University final Semester 1 examination. These scores were used to compute the mean values for comparison. Mean value was found for both the vernacular and English

medium students, and their total value. Also the scores from all these parameters were statistically treated for finding the Pearson's Product

Moment Coefficient of Correlation. Data was tabulated and is presented below, together with their graphical representation.

**Table 1**  
**Mean scores on different tests in percentage**

Sample	FP	CW	FP+CW	Prelim	Sem1
Vernacular	65.34	26.78	46.06	38	47.11
English	76.65	59.83	68.24	49.95	57.1
Total	72.88	48.81	60.84	45.96	53.77

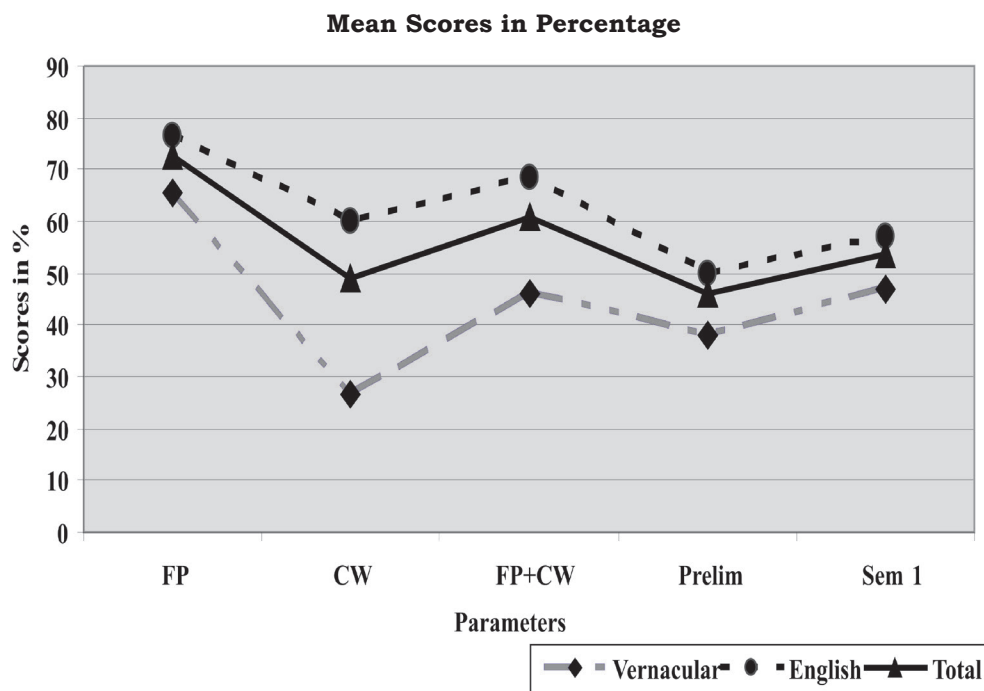


Figure 2: Mean scores in % of Vernacular, English and Total Sample on Different Tests



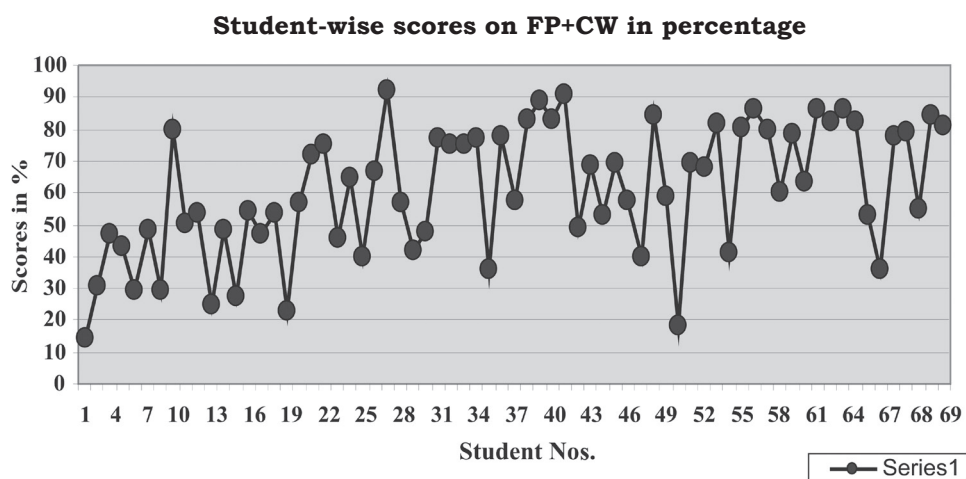


Figure 3: Student-wise score in % on the sum of Focal Points and Command Words

**Table 2**  
**Correlations Matrix**

Parameters	FP	CW	FP+CW	Prelim	Sem 1
FP	1	0.2105**		0.208*	0.1093**
CW	0.2105**	1		0.2632*	0.2472*
FP+CW			1	0.3059*	0.2411*
Prelim	0.208*	0.2632*	0.3059*	1	0.7049*
Sem1	0.1093**	0.2472*	0.2411*	0.7049*	1

\* Significant at 0.05 level, \*\* Not significant

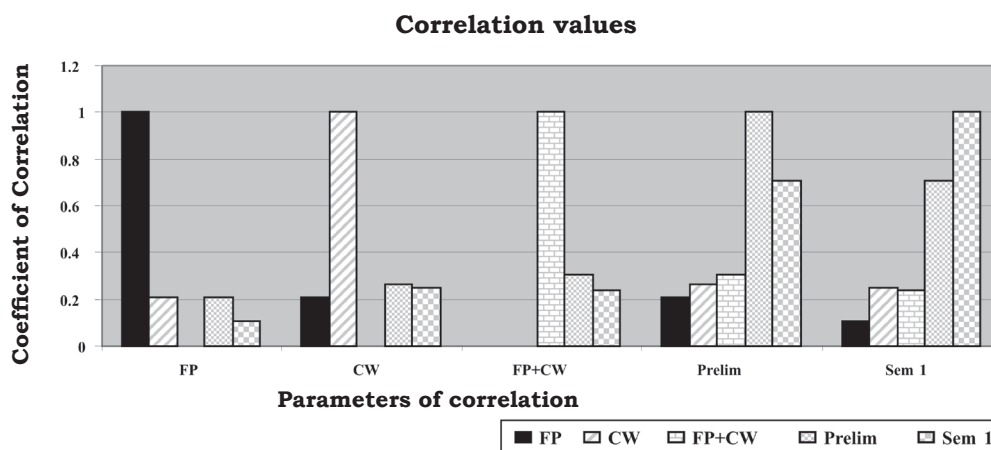


Figure 4: Correlation Values on Different Parameters

## FINDINGS

1. Mean scores on the identification of Focal Points (FP) in the question paper by B.Ed students remains good enough with 72.88% score, with little difference between the vernacular and English medium groups. However, mean score on the identification of Command Words (CW) was less than 50%, with vernacular group scoring 33% less than the English medium group. Sum of FP and CW scores could reach up to 61% for the total sample, maintaining vernacular group at less than 50% level.
2. Mean scores on prelims for the total sample showed the vernacular group at 11% below the English medium group. An identical trend was observed for the scores on semester exam results. Significantly, there appeared a clear growth in the attainment levels of both vernacular and English medium students, in respect of their scores on prelims to final Semester exam scores. This growth showed 7% increase on the total sample.
3. Inter-Correlation values between the scores on Focal Points (FP), Command Words (CW), and their combination, Prelims (Prelim) scores and the final Semester (Sem 1) remained positive and significant at 0.05 levels, with an exception to the correlation between FP–Sem 1 and FP–CW.
4. Correlation between Semester 1 and FP, CW and their sum

remained low, while correlation between Prelims and Sem 1 showed strong positive correlation scores.

5. Scores on FP+CW of B.Ed students from vernacular background ranged from 12% to 90%, but, the same for English medium background ranged from 35% to 90%; with one outlier at 20%. This shows good amount of heterogeneity in the class.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. Understanding of Focal Points and Command Words by the vernacular students remained low, as compared to the students from English medium.
2. Vernacular students could show improvement after making an effort in understanding the Focal Points and Command Words. This improvement is about 10% from Prelims to final Semester 1 examination scores. However, the same is 10% less than the improvement shown by the English medium students in their final semester examinations.
3. Scores on the sum of FP and CW showed good amount of variation confirming the heterogeneity in the group of students considered as sample for the study.
4. Positive correlation is observed between different parameters, like FP, CW, and their sum, Prelims and final Semester 1 examination scores.
5. High correlation between the Prelims and Semester 1 scores was

evident, confirming the positive contribution of orientation on FP and CW to the students under study.

The results of the present study lead to the conclusion that development of focal point and command word identification ability plays a significant role in enhancing students' ability of developing appropriate answers. Further, the students have shown a significant growth in their academic performance, especially in answering exam questions. This has its bearing in enhancing the answering ability to the given question; promoting better quality in performance by these students, is evident from the study. The development of the ability will

enhance their ability of conducting effective assessment of their own students, subsequently. This aspect also helps the prospective teachers in guiding, evaluating their own students for quality performance in examinations.

Teacher education like any other educational intervention, can only work on those professional commitments or dispositions that are susceptible to modification. We can reshape attitudes towards testing and evaluation process and develop their skills in framing better questions, understanding them and answering them appropriately. This process can help in promoting better quality in evaluation process.

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