

# Exploring Graduate Students' Attitudes and Academic Satisfaction with Open Book Examinations: A Qualitative Study

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**Abstract** - In the dynamic realm of education, assessment methodologies continuously evolve to accommodate diverse learning environments. Open book examinations (OBEs) have emerged as an alternative to traditional closed-book assessments, garnering attention for their potential to evaluate students' ability to comprehend and apply knowledge. This qualitative study delves into graduate students' attitudes towards OBEs and their academic satisfaction with this examination format. Through structured interviews and thematic analysis of 200 graduate students, the research explores factors influencing attitudes, including the reduction of rote learning, alleviation of exam-related fear, and development of source determination skills. Additionally, the study examines concerns such as academic integrity and the impact on study habits. Findings underscore the need to address challenges while leveraging OBEs' potential to promote critical thinking and real-world application of knowledge. Insights from this study inform pedagogical practices and contribute to the ongoing discourse on assessment methodologies, facilitating the design of more effective and student-centered approaches to evaluation and learning.

**Keywords:** Open book examinations, Graduate students' attitudes, critical thinking, Attitude, Academic Satisfaction.

## I. Introduction

In the dynamic and ever-evolving landscape of education, assessment methodologies have continually adapted to meet the diverse needs of learning environments. Among these methodologies, the open book examination (OBE) has garnered significant attention as an alternative to traditional closed-book assessments (Ackerman & Leiser, 2013). This qualitative study explores the attitudes of students towards OBEs and their academic satisfaction with this examination format. Understanding these attitudes is crucial for educational institutions aiming to enhance assessment strategies and

optimize learning outcomes (Anita, Ellen, Nicole, & Jason, 2021).

The concept of OBEs is grounded in the belief that assessments should evaluate students' ability to understand and apply knowledge rather than merely recall information. OBEs allow students to refer to their textbooks, notes, and other resources during the examination, promoting critical thinking, problem-solving, and real-world application of knowledge (Ashri & Sahoo, 2021). Despite these potential advantages, the adoption of OBEs has been met with mixed reactions from students and educators alike.

Attitudes towards OBEs can be influenced by various factors, including prior experience with traditional exams, perceived difficulty of the subject matter, and individual learning styles. Positive attitudes towards OBEs are often associated with reduced exam anxiety, increased engagement, and the perception that this format better reflects real-world scenarios where resources are available to aid decision-making (Boniface, 1985). Conversely, negative attitudes may stem from concerns about the fairness of OBEs, the potential for academic dishonesty, and the adequacy of preparation.

Academic satisfaction with OBEs is another critical dimension that this study seeks to explore. Satisfaction levels can provide insights into how well this assessment method meets students' expectations and educational needs. Factors contributing to academic satisfaction include the perceived relevance of exam content, clarity of instructions, accessibility of resources, and overall impact on learning and performance (Celik & Storme, 2017).

By employing a qualitative approach, this study aims to capture the nuanced perspectives of students regarding OBEs. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the research will uncover the underlying reasons behind students' attitudes and satisfaction levels. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of how OBEs are perceived in

academic settings and inform the development of more effective and student-centered assessment practices.

This study's insights are particularly relevant in the context of increasing digitalization and the shift towards remote learning, where OBEs have become more prevalent. As educational institutions seek to navigate these changes, understanding student attitudes and satisfaction with OBEs can help in designing assessments that not only evaluate knowledge but also enhance the overall learning experience.

## II. Objectives

- To explore graduate students' attitudes towards open book examinations.
- To assess academic satisfaction with open book examinations among graduate students.
- To identify key themes and patterns in attitudes and satisfaction with open book examinations.

## III. Methodologies

The methodology of this study involved a systematic and structured approach to explore graduate students' attitudes towards open book examinations (OBEs) and their academic satisfaction with this examination format. The research process began with identifying the research problem, followed by formulating specific objectives aimed at understanding these attitudes and satisfaction levels. Based on these objectives, two structured interview guides were developed: one focused on attitudes towards OBEs and the other on academic satisfaction with OBEs.

These structured interviews were administered to a sample of 200 graduate students from the Malda district, equally divided into 100 college students and 100 university students. The sample was not stratified based on gender or locality, ensuring the focus remained on the primary research variables.

Data collection involved administering the structured interviews to the selected sample, capturing detailed responses on both attitudes and academic satisfaction. Following data collection, a detailed coding process was conducted to identify significant codes from the responses. These codes represented key concepts and patterns that emerged from the data. The identified codes were then grouped into broader themes, combining related codes to develop significant themes that encapsulated common attitudes and satisfaction levels regarding OBEs. The thematic analysis was followed by a comparative analysis of the themes derived from the responses of college and university students, highlighting differences and similarities in their perceptions. Finally, the findings were synthesized to draw conclusions, providing valuable insights

into students' attitudes and satisfaction with open book examinations, thereby informing educational practice and assessment design.

## IV. Delimitations

Based on the analysis of attitudes towards open book examinations and academic satisfaction with open book examinations, several delimitations were identified for further research:

- **Geographical Context:** The study may focus on a specific geographic region or educational institution, which could limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts.
- **Educational Level:** The research may be limited to a particular educational level, such as undergraduate and postgraduate students, impacting the applicability of the findings across different academic levels.
- **Language and Communication:** The language used in the study and the mode of communication (e.g., interviews, surveys) may influence participants' responses and the interpretation of their attitudes towards open book examinations.

## V. Analysis of Attitudes towards Open Book Examinations

- **Reduction in Rote Learning:** The qualitative analysis revealed that open book exams are perceived to reduce rote learning by promoting critical thinking and deeper understanding. These exams create barriers to rote learning by requiring analytical and integrative thinking. However, concerns were raised about students relying more on external resources than on mastering the material, potentially reducing their interest and motivation to study.
- **Alleviation of Exam Fear:** The availability of study material in open book exams is seen to alleviate exam-related fear, providing security and decreasing anxiety. This format encourages curiosity and active learning, reducing apprehension. However, challenges include difficulty in quickly finding answers and concerns about retention and reliance on external resources.
- **Development of Source Determination Skills:** Open book exams are perceived to foster source determination skills, encouraging critical evaluation of sources. However, some concerns include time wastage during exams, decreased study habits, and difficulties in evaluating sources.
- **Tendency to Gather Material:** Open book exams may lead to a tendency to gather material rather than acquiring appropriate knowledge. Emphasis on understanding over rote memorization is crucial, but the

impact of external factors, such as teacher guidance, plays a significant role.

- **Impact on Study Habits:** The availability of learning materials may make students reluctant to work hard, leading to mixed findings. Some see benefits in fostering interest and understanding, while others note a potential reduction in effort and performance.
- **Logical Thinking Ability:** Dependence on learning materials can reduce students' logical thinking ability. While exposure to diverse resources can enhance logical reasoning, over-reliance on materials may hinder deep comprehension and independent inquiry.
- **Classroom Participation:** Open book exams may reduce classroom participation and attentiveness. While some students may become less engaged, others may develop informed contributions and accountability, highlighting varied impacts on engagement.
- **Mastery of Subject Matter:** A lack of teaching materials in open book exams may hinder subject mastery, affecting critical analysis and problem-solving abilities. The findings reveal mixed views on the impact of material availability on mastery.
- **Plagiarism Concerns:** Open book exams may foster plagiarism habits due to easy access to materials. Concerns about academic integrity and cognitive growth are noted, emphasizing the need for traditional methods to deter dishonesty and encourage integrity.
- **Mental Health of High-Performing Students:** Open book exams may impact the mental health of high-performing students, inducing dissatisfaction, depression, and anxiety. The system may hinder critical thinking and self-esteem, affecting the competitive spirit and self-assessment.

## VI. Analysis of Academic Satisfaction on Open Book Examinations

- **Preparation and Learning Material:** Participants recognized the value of finding learning materials in aiding exam preparation, enhancing understanding and readiness. However, some expressed irritation due to difficulties in locating relevant materials and time constraints.
- **Satisfaction with Results:** Participants expressed varied levels of satisfaction with exam results. While some were happy with their outcomes, others had concerns about the impact on study habits and preparation methods.
- **Online Classes:** Participants reported mixed experiences with online classes. While some were satisfied with the convenience and flexibility, others faced challenges such as technical issues and reduced engagement.
- **Source Material from Teachers:** Participants showed varied emotions towards finding teacher-provided source

material. While many felt happy and developed a better understanding, others found the process frustrating and unfulfilling.

- **Use of Classroom Notes:** Using classroom notes for open book exams received mixed responses. While some found them valuable for exam preparation, others were dissatisfied with their effectiveness.
- **Internet Use:** Participants expressed satisfaction with the opportunity to use the internet for exam preparation, appreciating the flexibility and resourcefulness. However, concerns about distractions and the impact on critical thinking skills were noted.
- **Fear of Failure:** The availability of information was seen to reduce the fear of failure, enhancing confidence and easing question-solving. However, some participants highlighted concerns about learning gaps and last-minute preparation.
- **Online Instruction:** Participants had mixed feelings about online instruction. While some found it helpful and satisfying, others expressed confusion and dissatisfaction, preferring face-to-face interaction.
- **Online Classes Flexibility:** Participants were generally excited about the flexibility of online classes, appreciating the ability to participate anytime from anywhere. However, some preferred traditional classroom settings and highlighted concerns about engagement and participation.

## VII. Comparison between Attitude towards Open Book Examination and Academic Satisfaction on Open Book Examination

The attitudes towards open book examinations and academic satisfaction reveal complementary perspectives on the benefits and challenges of this examination format.

- **Reduction vs. Alleviation of Fear:** While some participants acknowledge that open book exams reduce fear by providing access to study materials, others express concerns about potential negative impacts on study habits and reliance on external resources.
- **Source Determination Skills vs. Satisfaction with Finding Learning Material:** Participants recognize the development of source determination skills in open book exams, but there are also challenges associated with finding relevant learning materials, leading to mixed emotions such as irritation and satisfaction.
- **Logical Thinking vs. Internet Use Satisfaction:** While there is acknowledgment of the potential decrease in logical thinking due to dependence on learning materials, participants express satisfaction with the opportunity to use the internet for exam preparation.

- **Decrease in Classroom Participation vs. Satisfaction with Online Classes:** Concerns about reduced classroom participation due to open book exams.

### VIII. Significance of the Study

The significance of the study lies in its exploration of the attitudes and academic satisfaction of graduate students regarding open book examinations (OBEs). Here are some key points highlighting the significance of this research:

- **Educational Innovation and Adaptation:** The study delves into the evolving landscape of educational assessment methodologies, particularly focusing on the adoption of OBEs. By examining student attitudes towards this alternative examination format, the research contributes to understanding how educational institutions can innovate and adapt assessment strategies to better meet the needs of diverse learning environments.
- **Enhancing Learning Outcomes:** Understanding students' attitudes towards OBEs is crucial for optimizing learning outcomes. By exploring factors such as exam anxiety, engagement, and perceptions of fairness, the study provides insights that can inform the development of more effective assessment practices aimed at enhancing student learning and academic satisfaction.
- **Promoting Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving:** OBEs are grounded in the belief that assessments should evaluate students' ability to understand and apply knowledge rather than simply recall information. By allowing students to access resources during exams, OBEs promote critical thinking, problem-solving, and real-world application of knowledge. This study sheds light on how OBEs contribute to these cognitive skills and their perceived effectiveness in academic settings.
- **Informing Pedagogical Practices:** The findings of this research have implications for pedagogical practices, particularly in the context of increasing digitalization and remote learning. As educational institutions navigate these changes, insights into student attitudes and satisfaction with OBEs can guide the design of assessments that not only evaluate knowledge but also enhance the overall learning experience. This study provides valuable information that can inform the development of student-centered assessment strategies.
- **Addressing Concerns and Challenges:** The study also addresses concerns and challenges associated with OBEs, such as the potential for academic dishonesty, reliance on external resources, and impact on study habits. By examining these issues through qualitative analysis, the research offers nuanced insights that can help educators mitigate challenges and optimize the implementation of OBEs in academic settings.

### IX. Conclusion

This qualitative study offers valuable insights into graduate students' attitudes towards open book examinations (OBEs) and their academic satisfaction with this examination format. The findings highlight the complex interplay of factors influencing students' perceptions, including the reduction of rote learning, alleviation of exam-related fear, development of source determination skills, and concerns about academic integrity and study habits. Moreover, the study underscores the significance of addressing challenges associated with OBEs while leveraging their potential to promote critical thinking, problem-solving, and real-world application of knowledge. Ultimately, these insights contribute to the ongoing discourse on assessment methodologies and pedagogical practices, informing the design of more effective and student-centered approaches to evaluation and learning.

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