

Differing Views of Stakeholders on Credit Based Semester System (CBSS)

Ms. Hema Peese
Ms. Gomathi Shah

K. J. Somaiya Comprehensive College of Education, Training & Research

ABSTRACT

The UGC guidelines say the traditional format of examination at the end of the session suffers from several limitations while the western semester system encourages and supports faster learning opportunities. The credit-based semester and grading system essentially implies a redefining of the curriculum into smaller measurable entities or 'modules' with the hours required for 'learning' these – not 'teaching' – being at the primary focus and also development of a mechanism whereby these modules can be combined in different ways so as to qualify for a certificate, diploma or degree. The completion of a single 'module' of learning can pave the way for learning other modules either in the same institution or elsewhere and a combination of modules in keeping with the needs and interests of the learners illustrates the much talked about 'cafeteria approach' to learning with the learner at the centre state of all academic transactions. The authors studied the various reviews of related literature in this regard and gave an overview of the opportunities and challenges based on the views and opinions expressed by the Vice-Chancellor, Principals, and Heads of various institutions, students in aspects of attendance, evaluation system, time constraints, time schedule for co-scholastic activities and other operational aspects of CBSS.

Key words: CBSS, perplexing issues, stakeholders' views and perceptions.

INTRODUCTION

The inflexibility in academic structures, practices of institutions and the outdated practices relating to methods of assessment and conduct of examination have slowed down the pace of internationalisation of education. The American pattern of education is highly flexible, accommodative and adaptive and hence has served as a model for our institutions. Hence examination reforms based on credit-based system were introduced, evolving a system of grading in consonance with international practices. This could facilitate credit transfer mechanisms, collaborative degrees and international curriculum.

All major higher education providers across the globe are operating system of credits. The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), the 'National Qualifications Framework' in Australia, the Pan-Canadian Protocol on Transferability of University Credits, the Credit Accumulations and Transfer

System (CATS) in the UK as well as the systems operating in the US, Japan, etc. are examples of these. After UGC recommendations of 2008 many Universities in India have also implemented the scheme.

WHAT IS CBSS?

The credit based semester and grading system essentially implies -

- Redefining of the curriculum into smaller measurable entities or 'modules' with hours required for 'learning' these (not 'teaching') being the primary focus, and
- Development of a mechanism whereby these modules can be combined in different ways so as to qualify for a certificate, diploma or degree.

Essentially, completion of a single 'module' of learning can pave way for learning other modules, either in the same institution or elsewhere. A combination of modules in keeping with the needs and interests of the learners illustrates the much talked about 'cafeteria approach' to learning with the learner at the centre of all academic transactions.

UNLEASHING THE PERPLEXING ISSUES

- **Asymmetrical distribution of semester**

University of Mumbai introduced the credit based semester system this academic year, keeping the same syllabus which brought lot of confusion amongst the teaching fraternity. Since teachers were specialized in teaching a specific course, they were nearly free for one part of the semester and over-loaded in the other part of the semester. In this regard, it was observed that Principals were at a loss to decide work distribution according to the potential and capabilities of the concerned teacher. Instead of creating a semester syllabus, it did a mechanical chopping of the old annual syllabus into two. It also led to the distribution of course work in such a way that one subject was dealt with by two or more teachers. This led to difficulty in transacting the course smoothly as also the assessment of students and teachers. It was also observed that CBSS failed to bring students to the classroom.

- **Time constraints**

The academic year in B.Ed colleges commence too late and admissions continue till late September. This forces the teachers to rush through the courses to complete them by November end because the semester examinations are held in December. The course starts with Micro teaching skills to enable student teachers to deliver better lessons in schools. In addition to this, the course requirements include 20 practice teaching lessons in schools by students, of which 75 % has to be invariably completed during the first semester because schools conduct examinations, co-curricular activities, etc. during and after January and hence do not entertain B.Ed. student teachers during that period. This leaves the B.Ed colleges with less time for transacting their courses in the first semester as compared to the second semester.

IS IT JUSTIFIED TO GIVE UNEQUAL TIME TO DIFFERENT COURSES IN B.ED.?

This led the authors to study various related literature and give an overview of the opportunities and challenges based on the views and opinions expressed by the Vice-Chancellor, Principals, and Heads of various institutions, students in aspects of attendance, evaluation system, time constraints, time schedule for co-scholastic activities and other operational aspects of CBSS, from time to time.

VIEWS AND OPINIONS OF STAKEHOLDERS

1. The Hindu, Online edition of India's National Newspaper

Tuesday, June 09, 2009

Education Plus Kerala

Academia unsure about reforms.

A large section of the academic community in Kerala is apprehensive whether the choice-based credit and semester system can be implemented successfully under the present circumstances, reports G. Krishnakumar.

Whither reforms: The shortage of permanent faculty in affiliated colleges is a major impediment in the implementation of the credit and semester system.

Universities are gearing up to implement the choice-based credit and semester system. But a large section of academia remains doubtful about the success of the program. Even though many support reforms in the higher education sector, there is a general perception among the teachers that the universities are going ahead with the reforms without plugging the loopholes.

Many shared the feeling that there is an undue haste in introducing the new reforms at a time when the universities continue to receive brickbats from the students and the public on issues including lack of permanent teaching faculty and inordinate delay in the conduct of examinations and publication of results.

Investigations by the *Hindu-Education Plus* found that publication of results of various programs in all the universities is getting delayed thanks to the increasing number of examinations conducted by each university every year. Stating that the conduct of examinations will be a major headache under the new system, several teachers said that the number of examinations is likely to double under the choice-based credit and semester system. Explaining that the serious shortage of permanent faculty in affiliated colleges is a major impediment in the implementation of the credit and semester system, the council of principals of colleges has pointed out that many teaching and non-teaching posts in colleges are lying vacant.

2. The Hindu

November 8, 2010

Shahid Amin, Shobhit Mahajan

Delhi University in a hurry to 'semesterise'?

What really is at stake in academic and governance terms in the battle over the semester system? What implications does it carry for academic reforms in the country more generally? What is clear is that very little thought seems to have gone into balancing the requirements of access, equity and quality. Universities are now committed to increasing student intake from 'backward' social groups at all levels. To adjust and develop the capacity to imbibe what is necessarily a more rigorous academic program requires time and mentoring.

To examine and grade differently-abled students in the first two months when a large number are still struggling to find their feet is in effect to deny them the opportunity they had come seeking in the first place. It will be unwise to just keep failing students in large numbers. What we need are imaginative schemes that enable knowledge acquisition by all — in the classroom and in smaller tutorial groups.

3. DNA

June 7, 2011

Santosh Andhale

Credit system will give learners autonomy: Mumbai University Vice-Chancellor.

1) *The continuous assessment process could be a little difficult as the burden on teachers will increase; they are already overloaded. Will you offer any incentives to them?*

"The continuous evaluation process helps both teachers as well as learners. The teachers can measure the learning that has happened of an individual, identify gaps in learning, and take appropriate action including strategy of teaching and pedagogy. Learners also can know where they stand at the end of each unit/module and correct themselves so as to help them in enhancing their knowledge. Teaching students and shaping the future generation can never be a burden on teachers. I don't think teachers take it that way. However, every person has a capacity to give it their best in an efficient manner and therefore, we have taken care of that while implementing the credit system at undergraduate level from academic year 2011-12. The teachers' workload is as per the UGC guidelines. We have not made any change in that. UGC has taken care of the incentives in 6th pay commission. However, there cannot be any incentive more than satisfaction."

2) *What is being done to spread awareness amongst the teachers about the credit system?*

"More than 15 training programs were conducted for teachers at different cluster centers. A training program was conducted for principals at the head office, while some board of studies conducted for their teachers. The basic structure was also made available on the

website. However, more number of workshops are being conducted for teachers in the month of June. A time table is chalked out for that. The credit system is not difficult to understand and teachers and students are intelligent enough to understand it.”

3) **Recently a committee was appointed to discuss student attendance issues. What were the recommendations?**

“This is the issue which takes lot of time of the vice-chancellor as short attendance issues comes to the VC including the delegation of students’ representative. This can be avoided, if the rules laid down by the university are followed strictly in spirit and letter. All stakeholders need to cooperate with each other so as to follow the rules and regulations in this respect. The Management Council of the University appointed a committee to revisit the existing ordinances and suggest measures to the University so as to bring qualitative change. The credit system will also help in improving attendance.”

4. **DNA**

October 26, 2011

Kanchan Srivastava

Credit system fails to bring students to classroom.

- Jai Hind College has 900 B. Com students, out of which close to 450 are on defaulters list. Thakur College, KC College, Khalsa College, Bhawan’s and S. K. Somaiya College have almost 20%-40% defaulters.
- “We made it clear to students that credit system requires 75% attendance. Still we see a large number of defaulters, especially in commerce as students are concentrating on CA coaching classes. They will lose 10 marks in each subject,” says Jai Hind vice-principal Lalitha Ganeshan.
- Principal of Thakur College Dr. Chaitaly Chakravarty says, “We can’t debar hundreds of **students from exams, but we have given them warnings that this will not be tolerated in next semester.**”
- Bhawans College Principal Dr. Vasanti Kutchi & Nirmal Singh from Khalsa College said, “Attendance has improved. Students who didn’t meet 75% attendance criteria were allowed to appear for semester exams with strict warnings.”
- Vice-principal of KC college Smaranjit Padhi says, “Not many students are aware that their first semester marks will be counted in the last semester. Things will improve when first batch of the credit-based system will clear TYBCom.”
- Dean, Faculty of Commerce, University of Mumbai, Madhu Nair says, “We have checked the defaulters list in our college before the last date of distance education admission. We asked such parents to shift their wards in correspondence course. Some students shifted and some improved. However, if a student doesn’t attend 75% class, it doesn’t mean that his/her 10 marks will be deducted.”

5. *A study of English teachers and students' perception about the differences between annual and semester system of education at postgraduate level in Mardan* (Volume 15, 2011, Pages 1639–1643) from the 3rd World Conference on Educational Sciences – 2011 showed a significant difference between annual and semester systems in terms of students learning strategies. In Annual system students had ample time to master the target subjects, whereas in Semester system, the students had not only to synthesize the subjects but were also made to undergo rigorous evaluation in terms of both intellectual and emotional growth.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE ENDEAVOR

CBSS has many advantages like –

- reducing the load on the students,
- inculcating regular study habits,
- providing upward mobility by clearing the backlog in one or more subjects even after moving to the next semester,
- enabling the students to learn at their own pace.

But the controversial views of different stakeholders create a dilemma about the system. This puts greater responsibility on our fraternity to view the various aspects of CBSS and change our ways of thinking to better tackle the challenges of this educational reform, utilizing all the benefits to the optimum. It also is a recommendation to the policy makers to keep in mind these views to cater to the majority of stakeholders.

References :

1. G. Krishnakumar.(2009, Tuesday, June), *Academia unsure about reforms*, The Hindu. Retrieved from <http://www.hindu.com/edu/2009/06/09/index.html>
2. Shahid Amin, Shobhit Mahajan.(2010,November 8), *Delhi University: in a hurry to 'semesterise'?*, TheHindu. Retrieved from <http://www.hindu.com/edu/2009/06/09/index.htm>
3. Andhale.Santosh.(2011, Tuesday, Jun 7) *Credit system will give learners autonomy: Mumbai University vice-chancellor*, Retrieved from http://www.dnaindia.com/academy/interview_credit-system-will-give-learners-autonomy-mumbai-university-vice-chancellor_1552444
4. Srivastava Kanchan.(2011, Wednesday, Oct 26) *Credit system fails to bring students to classroom*. Retrieved from http://www.dnaindia.com/academy/report_credit-system-fails-

to-bring-students-to-classroom 1603470

5. Zafar Iqbal Khattak, Muhammad Ali, Amjid Khan, Shahid Khan, Abdul Wali Khan (2011, June 10). *A study of English teachers and students' perception about the differences between annual and semester system of education at postgraduate level in Mardan*. Paper presented at 3rd World Conference on Educational Sciences, Volume 15, 2011, Pages 1639–1643.
6. Express News service, New Delhi (2009, Tuesday, March 24) *In two years, semester system at all universities*. The Indian Express. Retrieved from <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/in-two-years-semester-system-at-all-universities/438055/>
7. University of Mumbai (2011, June). *Manual on Semester based, Credit and Grading System for Under Graduates Programmes Under the Faculty Of Science*. Mumbai. Retrieved from <http://www.mu.ac.in/2 Manual SCGS Science 09-06-2011.pdf>