A study of student's perception about semester system practices in public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

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Abstract

The study aimed to explore student's perception about semester system practices in public sector Universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The demographic variables like gender, departments, and semester wise were explored. A structured questionnaire consisting of close ended 40 items developed for five factors *i.e.*, curriculum, syllabus coverage, class regularity, teacher and teaching methods and evaluation processandone open ended question about the drawbacks of semester system practices in 4-year (Hon's) programs was developed. Mean, percentage, t-test and One Way ANOVA were used as statistical techniques for data analysis. Overall, the views of the students of BS (Hon's) program were positive about the prevailing semester system practices in the public sector universities. No significant difference was found between the mean scores of male and female students; natural and social sciencedepartments; and students of different semesters of BS (Hons) program about the semester system practices. For open ended question mixed type of viewswere observed for course completion, regularity of the classes, teacher'sfavoritism, lesson plans, content and important aspects of the course. In semester system courses remained incomplete due to non regularity of the classes by the teachers as perceived by the majority of the students of (Hon's) program.

Keywords: Annual system; semester system practices; BS (Hons); curriculum; Teaching method

Introduction: Education means to get awareness and is the process of civilization. Education deals with development of complete person enables him to get awareness; attitudes, skills, and ethics that will be part of his life. Dewey (2009) explained education as reform, reorientation and renewal of knowledge, values, manners, skills and acts. Education plays a vital role in shaping the feature of every nation. Education does not signify to get specific talent or find specific job. It means if people have become educated they have achieved development in every field (Adrianna, 2006).To meet the global challenges and innovations in present time education is compulsory for all nations. Literacy rate of country determines the growth rate of the country (Rowland, (2002). Universities play a critical role for active contribution in the knowledge transmission to their youth and ultimately lead towards more rapidly economic growth. Higher education is the spine of any society; it represents a critical factor in innovation and human capital development and sustainability of the knowledge economy (Dill &Vught, 2010). It is the quality of higher education that determines the quality of manpower in a country (Kahsay, 2012). Highereducation provides wide range of competency and generic skills that but not limited includes are to communication skills, problem-solving skills, self-directed learning skills, the ability to integrate ideas and concepts, and the capacity to work in teams and group environments (Menges& Austin, 2001). Higher education institutions "supply the knowledge and ideas that create new protect us from disease, industries, preserve and enrich our culture, and inform us about our history, our environment, our society, and ourselves" (Bok, 2013).

Annual system

For the achievement of aims and objectives of education, a systematic system of evaluation and examination is important. In Pakistan there are two types of learning systems i.e., annual system and semester system that are prevalent and monitored by higher education commission of Pakistan (Malik, Avais&Khanam, 2010). Pakistan had inherited annual educational system from the British. For many years in the past and still Abbottabad Board and many other educational boards of our country are operating under this education system (Zafar, Jadoon, Iqbal, Nasira&Jabeen, 2008).

This is predominantly based on a two-year extensive and comprehensive study session followed by an exam that includes both subjective and objective portions, but it predominantly tests on subjective and comprehensively acquired knowledge. Annual system allows the students to explore and mature their talent in fields of reading and writing skills (Malik, Avais, &Khanam 2010). In many countries, especially in the West, the Annual system is called TAP, or Tuition Assistance Programmed. Even in some British Universities the annual system existed fifty years ago (Hashim, 2012). Annual system is a bit monotonous, students study at the time of exam with lot of burden of syllabus on their shoulders. Annual system covers more syllabuses at a stretch and compels the student to remember all this till the end of the year.Long term memorization, better evaluation (through externals), better grading system and in depth knowledge makes this system more valuable. There are some disadvantages of annual system i.e continuous evaluation is not there, no punctuality, less class participation, less personality grooming, and students became lazy in it (Suter, 2001).

Semester System

In 2001 Government of Pakistan directed all higher education institutions in the country to change their academic system from (British-type) annual system to (American type) semester system.A halfyear term in a school or university, especially in North America, typically lasting for fifteen to eighteen weeks is known as semester (Mahmood, 2001).After the establishment of Higher Education Commission (HEC) in 2002, HEC took this responsibility to train and prepare faculty members of universities to adopt and role effectively in semester system. Most of public and private sector universities follow semester system. In semester system time to time assessment of student helps them to improve tests and other reports, reduces the burden of syllabus. Semester system helps students to attain maximum marks in their final exams because it prepares students before the examination time Bidani, (2010). According to Westerheijden, Stensaker& Rosa (2007), semester system gives an opportunity to students to polish them to a huge level by assignment, presentations, group discussion and mid-term exams, making at regular intervals. Semester system reduces the burden of syllabus. Similarly, surprise tests and guizzes that are taken in semester system help students to attain maximum marks in their final exams because it prepares students before the examination time (Bidani, 2010). The effective and successful implementation of semester system depends upon a number of conditions as stated by (Jadoon, Jabeen, &Zeba, 2012). These are well designed curriculum, course coverage within stipulated time, regularity of classes, timely and constructive feedback to students by the teachers; accessibility of teachers to students outside the class; availability of information resources to students such as stat-of-the-art library and computer facilities; highest level of secrecy and confidentiality in examination; transparency in evaluation and grade; timely declaration of semester results etc (Shahied, 2002).

The evaluation system is of great importance in regulation of the education cycle, as it determines the fruit of the system and help in management and information about the changes in syllabus, contents and methodology of teaching(Chongbang, 2014). For this purpose, it needs a detail breadth and depth in order to engage the students in evaluation of their competency, capability and knowledge of the contents of teaching and syllabus. For higher education it is very important to base training and teaching methodology on the results, didactic method based upon outcomes and results of the syllabus(Dadwani, 2011). The comparative research is necessary to explore the difference between these two systems on ground reality.

Therefore this study attempts to justify the rationality by exploring realities elicited from context of the semester system and annual system of higher education programs(Hoodbhoy, 2009). The findings of this study related to teaching, learning, classroom management, instructional technologies, achievement etc., between semester education program and annual education program will be useful to the policy makers, decision makers, planners and implementers to shape their program strategies to replace the annual program.

ADVANTAGES OF SEMESTER SYSTEM IN EDUCATION.

It provides an opportunity to students for continuous learning and assessment/feedback and a better paced understanding of the subject. There will more focused class interaction because of continuous engagement between students and teachers (Niazi& Mace, (2009). This provides regular study habits among students. The main advantage is that the performance would not be judged at the end of one year rather conducting examinations two times a year will help in regularly evaluating the student progress (Bhattacharya, 2011). A semester system allows greater freedom and scope for designing and delivering a variety of courses that the students can pick flexibly to enhance the quality of their learning. Adopting a semester system at the undergraduate level leads to а harmonization with the changes made at the postgraduate level as well as with undergraduate courses that are already being run in a semester system(Omar, 2010).Semester system is its formative, continuous and internal type of assessment that promotes teaching-learning process. Through this assessment method students frequently retain a relationship with their teachers and consequently learn and try to improve in the light of teacher's comments and feedback(Aitchison 2012).

CONDITIONS REQUIRED FOR SUCCESSFUL/ EFFECTIVE SEMESTER

The Effective successful and implementation of semester system depends upon the number of conditions as stated by Jadoon, Jabeen&Zaba (2012). Some of these are well designed curriculum, course coverage within stipulated time, regularity of classes, timely and constructive feedback of the teachers by students, accessibility of Teachers to students outside the class, availability of information resources to students, highest level of secrecy and confidentiality in examination, transparency in evaluation and grading system, timely declaration of results.

Currently most of the public sector universities adopted the semester system but there are so many problems associated with the semester system in its implementation in true sense Anthony & Walshaw, 2009.

Students have observations about the practices like assessment and evaluation, course completion, teacher's attitude and regularity in the classes. But at the same time most of the students are satisfied with system (Reddan, 2013). These divided opinions compel the researcher to explore the student's perception about semester system practices in public sector Universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The respondents were compared for the views, in term of gender and discipline wise about the curriculum, syllabus coverage and regularity of classes, methods of teaching and evaluation process and role of teachers in the semester system in universities. The study will be helpful to understand the prevailing semester system practices in the public sector Universities. This study will be significant because it will help the planner and policies maker to make and to take such plans and decisions that can be helpful to promote the best understanding of semester system at university level to achieve the desired objectives of higher education.

This study will help the teacher in the improvement of teaching learning process and adopt appropriate methods of teaching that can provide such opportunities which may be helpful in the fulfillment of the aims of education. This study will be greatly helpful for science student which are going to step in research work *e.g.,* it has emphasized more on wellequipped instrumental labs besides to improving the provision of adequate and appropriate learning resources. This study will be helpful for the further researchers to maketheir research highlighting the needs for the proper implementation semester system. This study will be helpful for HEC to set its rules for improving quality assurance in semester system.

METHODOLOGY

The population of the study consisted of all the enrolled students (6450) from the different B.S (hons) program at Hazara and Haripur University in Session 2014-15. A two-stage random sampling technique was used to select the study sample (400 students) from two universities. In the first stage10 departments, five each from social and natural Sciences disciplines were selected. In the seconds stage 20 students from each selected department were selected for the study sample according to (Gay, 1985) (Table 1).

A questionnaire consisting of 40 closes ended and one open ended question about the drawback of semester system practices in 4-year (Hon's) programs was used for the purpose of research. Student ware asked to give the impartial opinion about the five factors *i.e.*, curriculum, syllabus coverage, class regularity, teacher and teaching methods and evaluation process. Likert type scale having options strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly disagree. Items designated positively are scored as 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. For the purpose of reliability of the scale, 50 students were taken from Hazara Universitv Mansehra. Cronbach's coefficient Alpha formula was used in estimating the internal consistency of the scale. The coded data was analyzed by utilizing statistical techniques such as Mean, Independent-Samples t-test and One- Way ANOVA was utilized to find out means difference between the views of students' perception about semester system practices (Stevens, 1996). The SPSS statistical software package, version 16, was used to analyze the data.

Results

No significant difference was found between the mean scores of male and female student of BS (Hon's) program about the curriculum, syllabus coverage, class regularity, teacher and teaching methods and evaluation process Table 2. Table 3 shows that since p>0.05 nosignificant difference was found between the students of natural sciences and social sciences department about curriculum syllabus coverage, class regularity, teacher and teaching methods and evaluation process. This shows that the views of the student of natural and social science were almost same about the semester system practices. The table 4 shows that F (4, 395) = (.278, 0.304, 0.674, 0.674, 0.409, and 0.503) Since p = (0.892, 0.161, 0.610, 0.802, 0.733) > α = 0.05, reveals that there is no significant difference among the views of students of different semesters in the BS (Hon's) program about the curriculum, syllabus coverage, class regularity, teacher and teaching methods and evaluation process respectively.

This means that all students studying in different semesters in BS (Hon's) program have similar views about the semester system practices. Table 5 shows main drawback identified by the students in the semester system practices. Three hundred and fourteen (78%) students were of the view that in semester system mostly courses remained incomplete. Two hundred and forty-eight (62%) students were of the view that there was no regularity of the classes in the semester system. Two hundred and thirty-six (59%) students were of the view that teachers favor some students in marking. Two hundred and twenty-four (56%) students were of the view that teachers do not prepare lesson plans. Two hundred and twenty-one (55%) students were of the view that cocurriculum activities are not included in semester system. One hundred and fifty (37.5%) students were of the views that the checked scripts one not discussed with the students. One hundred and ten (27.5%) students were of the views that Burden of assignments and presentation on students. One hundred and five (26.2%) students were of the views that limited knowledge on the part of students.

DISCUSSION

Overall views of the student of BS (Hon's) program were found positive about the prevailing semester system practices in public the sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This result was in good compliance with the study of Yousaf Hashim (2010) whose finding showed positive perceptions about the same practices except the views about the evaluation and assessment process. Similarly, the views of the students of BS (Hon's) program were found positive about the prevailing semester system practices in public sector universities.

Majority of the students had positive's opinion with the statements about the different aspects of curriculum. This result contradicts with the findings of the studies of MunshiJaved &Hussain (2012) about curriculum while the same results were in line with the finding of Pathak & Rehman (2013) who showed positive perceptions about the curriculum practices in semester system. In the same way views of the students were found positive about the prevailing semester system practices in terms of regularity of the classes in public sector universities. Majority of the students had positive's opinion with the statements regarding regularity of classes. This result was in good compliance with the study of Chan, College & Ludlow (2014) and Pathak Rehman (2013) who showed positive perceptions about the regularity of classes in semester system.

Likewise, the views of the students about syllabus coverage were also positive in the prevailing semester system practices in universities. Majority of the students were of the positive's opinion with the statements about the different aspects of syllabus coverage. These results contradict with the findings of Aslam&Attia (2012) who found negative perceptions about the syllabus coverage in semester system. Views of the students of BS (Hon's) program were positive about the prevailing semester system practices in public universities. Majority of the students had positive's opinion with the statements about the different aspects of teacher and methods of teaching. These results were in good compliance with the study of Hanif& Saba (2000) whose findings showed positive perceptions about the same practices except the views about the teacher and methods of teaching. Views of the student of BS (Hon's) program were positive about the prevailing semester system practices in public universities.

Majority of the students had positive's opinion with the statements about the different aspects of evaluation. This result was in good compliance with the study of Niazi& Mace (2006). whose findings showed positive perceptions about the same practices except the views about the evaluation. In the same way majority of the students were of positives opinion with the statements about the different aspects of evaluation. This result was in good compliance with the study of Mcarthur (2011) whose findings showed positive perceptions about the same practices except the views about the evaluation. Similarly, majority of the students had positive's opinion with the statements about the different aspects of curriculum. These results contradict with the study of Shirazi (2004) while the same result in lined with the finding of Malik, Avais, &Khanam (2010) who showed positive perceptions about the curriculum practices in semester system.

In the same way views of the students were of positive opinion with the statements about the different aspects of evaluation process about the prevailing semester system practices. This result was in good compliance with the study of Mahmood (2001). In the light of the findings of this research study, the student's state that semester system promotes subjectivity in objectivity. These finding showed positive perceptions about the same practices except the views about the evaluation. Majority of the students had positive's opinion with the statements about the different aspects of regularity of classes. This result was contradictory with the study of Reddan (2013). who declared time management a major problem for university teachers.

Conclusion and recommendations

Overall, the perceptions of the majority of students of BS (Hon's) program were positive in all five factors about the prevailing semester system practices like

curriculum. syllabus coverage, and regularity of classes in semester system. Students showed high level of satisfaction and agreement with the five semester system practices in public sector universities. Irrespective of the gender, department and semesters of the students there is consensus among students about the system practices. In semester system incomplete courses remained due non regularity of the classes by the teachers as perceived by the majority of the students of (Hon's) program. In semester system students can get maximum benefit if the courses are completed in time.

Since most of the students were of the view that courses remained incomplete. Therefore, it is recommended that focus may be given to the content and important aspects of the course. For this purpose, first of all important topics and aspects of the course may be selected before starting to teach the class. Since most of the students were of the view that there is no regularity of the classes from teacher side. Therefore, it is recommended that timetable of all the

> department may be strictly

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teachers

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Table1

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Variable	Group	Ν	% Age	completion of
	Male	256	64 %	the courses.
Gender	Female	144	36 %	For this purpose, Head
Describer	Natural sciences	260	65 %	of the
Department	Social Sciences	140	35 %	concerned
	4 th	153	38.2%	department
	5 th	41	10.2%	may regularly check the
	6 th	187	46.7%	attendance of
	7 th	5	1.25%	the ongoing
Semester	8 th	14	3.5%	

Sample composition of the respondents

classes. It was observed that some of the teachers unduly favor some students in marking depriving talented one from position. In order to avoid these grievances it is recommended that semester system rules of examinations may be strictly implemented and papers may be crossed checked within the department by the faculty members.For the smooth execution of the semester system practices in true spirit it is recommended the approved semester rules should be strictly implemented by the management through faculty members and there may be a follow up system of formative evaluation to check the performances of the ongoing semester system practices.

Journal of Xi'an Shiyou University, Natural Science Edition

Table 2

	Gender	Ν	Mean	SD	df	t	P-Value
Curriculum	Male	256	34.13	5.54	398	1.24	.214
	Female	144	33.33	5.152			
Syllabus coverage	Male	256	37.76	2.88	398	.540	.589
	Female	144	37.92	2.70			
Regularity of classes	Male	256	22.34	6.10	398	.281	.779
	Female	144	22.17	5.26			
Methods of teaching.	Male	256	30.45	6.21	398	.355	.723
	Female	144	30.23	5.71			
Evaluation process	Male	256	44.01	5.8	398	1.18	.236
	Female	144	42.98	7.84			

Gender wise comparison of semester system practices

Table 3

Department wise comparison of semester system practices

department	Ν	Mean	SD	df	t-Value	P value
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Curriculum	Natural science	260	33.75	5.31	3.98	.106	.915
	Social science	140	33.8	5.47			
Syllabus coverage	Natural science	260	37.97	2.72	398	1.4	.136
	Social science	140	37.53	2.97			
Class regularity	Natural science	260	22.35	5.50	398	.29	.766
	Social science	140	22.16	6.35cccc			
Teaching methods	Natural science	260	30.38	5.75	398	.037	.97
	Social science	140	30.36	6.60			
Evaluation process	Natural science	260	43.94	8.15	398	.98	.32
	Social science	140	43.08	8.61			

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Table 4

Views of the students of different semesters about semester system practices

		SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.
Curriculum	Between Groups Within Groups	32.872 11658.87	4 395	8.218 29.516	2.78	0.892
Syllabus coverage	Between Groups Within Groups	38.526 3133.784	4 395	9.631 0.934	0.304	0.161
Class regularity	Between Groups Within Groups	91.300 13371.778	4 395	22.825 33 .853	0.674	0.610
Teachers and methods of teaching	Between Groups Within Groups	60.421 14583.078	4 395	15.105 36.919	0.409	0.802
Evaluation process	Between Groups Within Groups	139.997 27460.441	4 395	34.999 69.520	0.503	0.733

Table 5.

Frequency distribution of views of the students regarding drawback in the semester system.

S. N	Identified drawback by the respondents	N	f	%
1	Mostly courses remain incomplete.	400	314	78.50%
2	No regularity of classes by teacher.	400	248	62 %
3	Teachers favor some students in marking.	400	236	59 %
4	Teachers do not prepare lesson plans.	400	224	56 %
5	Co-Curriculum activities are not included in semester system.	400	221	55 %
6	The checked scripts one not discussed with the students.	400	150	37.50%
7	Burden of assignments and presentation on students	400	110	27.50%

8 Limited knowledge on the part of students 400 105 26.20%
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