

A Comparative Study of Examination Practices in Annual and Semester System in Public Sector Universities of the Punjab Pakistan

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to find out the examination practices in annual and semester system at public sector universities of the Punjab. The sample of the study was drawn from three public sector universities of the Punjab. All these three universities conduct exams both semester and annual-based. Data was collected from 600 students who appeared in examinations in annual and semester system in selected universities. Questionnaire was designed for students to know their opinion about annual and semester system examination. For data analysis frequency count, mean, and standard deviation were calculated. Results of the study reveal that annual examination is conducted in more formal way as compared to semester exam; the final grades in annual system rely on final exam, questions and test in annual system are lengthy and long, there is sufficient choice of questions in annual exam as compared to semester exam and tests are more secure and confidential in annual system as compared to semester system.

Keywords: Annual Examination, Punjab, Public Sector, Semester system, Universities

Introduction

All over the world, universities play a vital role for active participation in the knowledge societies. This ultimately leads towards faster economic growth. Some universities in another country develop human capital (students) for not only better contribution in different professions but in society as whole. They are responsible for successful development of an open and democratic civil society, universities where they give their students deep insight of specific subject knowledge; they also provide the social norms of communication and interaction. A quality education providing institute always proves to be a model for modern civil society (Batool & Qureshi, 2007).

This article reflects the findings of educational system all over the world has never been consistent over the years. Innovations in education are constantly occurring with the passage

of time. Educationists investigate possibilities to teach text in various feasible manners through advancement and exposure to new ideas, strategies and concepts. According to Tribus (1994), there are innumerable proposals/suggestions in educational system and there are infinite number of good ideas and research results. The target is not just to pick one of them rather it is to have comprehensive attitude and approach within which to bring to action many good works known to us.

Pakistan had an inherited educational system from the British. This was predominantly based on two years extensive and comprehensive study session followed by an examination that tested memory and comprehensively acquired knowledge. Since independence most of the universities of Pakistan have been operating under the principles and methods of an Annual education system, although some of them have switched over from Annual to Semester system. In Khyber Pukhtunkhwa (Pakistan), University of Peshawar and University of Malakand are running their M.A. English classes under Annual system while Hazara University in Mansehra and Wali Khan University Mardan (AWKUM) are running M.A. English classes under Semester system. Gomal University D.I. Khan is operating its M.A. English classes under Term system. Annual system is a traditional method that gives ample chances of two years to understand and grasp concepts, and sit for a comprehensive exam at the end of each year. This exam predominantly is subjective and comprehensive. In many countries, especially in the West the *Annual* system is called Tuition Assistance Programme (TAP). Even in British universities the *Annual* system existed fifty years ago (Malik et al., 2006).

Educationists over the world are not only looking at the Annual and Semester but there are many other including quarterly and term semester, and a more recent debate is going on quarter semester system. Annual system allows the students to explore and mature their talent in fields other than just grasping their curriculum. It also provides an opportunity to students to make deep analysis on subjects and develop reading and writing skills. Annual system is a bit monotonous and students became lazy in it. Semester system divides the academic year into two large blocks called *Semester*. One semester is usually 14-16 weeks long. Whatever is studied remains afresh in the minds of the students. *Semester* system lays more emphasis on learning rather than teaching. In simple words, it is a learner centered system of education which lays more emphasis on building learning potential of students rather than improving through rigid system of instruction. The course content, learning strategies, learning methodology, and learning process with specific techniques of assessment and evaluation of students are decided on course by course basis. A teacher takes the role more of a facilitator rather than a teacher in its strictest and traditional sense (Jadoon & Jabeen, 2006).

Aggarwal (1997) argues that only that system of education is good which ensures effective learning. The criterion for success is effective learning. So some precautions or some details about the semester system must be informed to students before switching from *annual* to *semester* or from semester to *quarter* system. Evaluation is a cyclical process having four phases; preparation, assessment, evaluation and reflection. Assessment and evaluation serves two purposes. It enhances students' education and improves teacher instruction. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan has been doing a lot in order to help realizing the need of improving educational system and thus to raise the standard of education in the country. There has been a change in overall educational scenario as it was felt that the prevalent educational system is not producing good results in terms of knowledge acquisition of students. As a result National Committee on Examination System (NCES) was constituted

in 2003 to go through the effectiveness of the existing system followed in Higher Educational Institutes of Pakistan. It was strongly felt by the committee that an in-depth analysis of educational system is mandatory before any remedial measures are suggested. A Sub-Committee was thus constituted to collect data on existing examination processes and practices. This was done with two aims in mind: first to find the inadequacies and malpractices in existing annual examination system across the country, and secondly to suggest comprehensive changes to formulate nationally agreed principles and practices.

The members of NCES, in its 3rd meeting held on 1st of March 2005, again deliberated on the information collected from various universities and formulated final recommendations. It categorically states that uniformity needs to bring in educational systems in Pakistan by adopting Semester system. The committee asserted that different examination systems i.e. Annual, Semester, and Term are being practiced all over the country. In order to attain uniformity and harmony it was decided that, by fall 2008, all higher educational institutions will gradually shift towards semester system. Course objectives in terms of students' learning outcomes, Table of Specification should be available to all concerned persons including students. Choice of questions in examinations, e.g. 5 out of 8 questions encourages selective study and should be totally abolished. Grace marks in examination to pass candidates should not be allowed in any circumstances by the year 2007. A system of moderation / arbitration; however, must be evolved by then for all institutions by consensus. Assessment Tools: use of multiple questions (MCQs) and short essay questions (SEQs) should be encouraged to increase the content validity of question papers. Descriptive questions should preferably do away with except where writing skills, concepts or ability to dialogue need to be evaluated. A policy of complete transparency must be adopted in Semester/Term system where candidates are guaranteed an opportunity to discuss the marks awarded to them with the concerned teacher. After thorough considerations the National Committee on Examination System and Quality Assurance in its meeting held on 10th September, 2005, and 29th October, in 2005, respectively, has approved the above recommendations for improvements in examination system of higher educational institutions in Pakistan.

The above recommendations were forwarded and placed on the agenda of Commission meeting held on 15th August 2006. Looking through the outcomes of the meeting of HEC it is clear that measures have been taken to introduce in our culture all over the government sector institutions. In many other private and semi private institutions semester system has existed since 2003 and even before. From the above literature review we have gathered this impression that Semester system is quite new in our educational institutes. It was, therefore, felt imperative by the researchers that students and teachers' perception may be incorporated to help analyze the effectiveness of both the systems in terms of students' learning strategies. Evaluation is an integral part of learning process; it forms the basis for admission, promotion and influenced the selection in jobs. The evaluation system has been reviewed by various committees like University Education Commission (1948), Education Commission (1964-66), National Commission on teachers (1983-1985); Ishwarbhai Patel Committee (1977); Acharya Ramamurthi Committee (1990) and the major drawbacks cited are:

- Annual System of examination in many Universities;
- Measuring on Rote memory;
- The present examination system provides grades and certification, but no feedback
- Validity and reliability of results are questionable;
- 100% option is still used to a large extent in essay type questions.

The University Education Commission in 1948 stated, "If we were to suggest a single reform in education system, it would be of examination." Till date there has not been any remarkable improvement, despite various recommendations like internal assessment, continuous evaluation grading system, semester system, national examination and open book examination. Though 48.57% of Universities follow semester pattern and 32.86% follows internal assessment, lacunae still exists. Continuous evaluation is meaning full and it enhances the learning of students. Peer evaluation may also help to enhance student achievement. Open book examination maybe considered as an innovative practice. "Education plays a vital role in the formulation of the cultural environmental of a society. It also acts as one of the main determinants of competitive advantage of societies and nations." Students from institutions of higher learning are churned out to meet the following industry needs from the Undergraduate and Post graduate students: Ability to work in a team, Performance focus, Leadership skills, Analytical ability, Self confidence, Risk taking, Capability to sustain work pressure, Flexibility, Interpersonal skills, Ability to priorities, Dealing with an ambiguous situation, Global mind set, Problem solving, Managing diversity and conflict, Communication and Presentation skills.

The examination systems are to be designed to test the ability and knowledge of students so that their future becomes ethical and valuable to the society. Examination centers reveal some common problems:

- Question papers are not received on time.
- Wrong question papers received
- Inadequate infrastructure.
- Inadequate remuneration to the examination staff.
- Advance is not received on time or meager amount is received.
- Senior faculty in many colleges refusing to take up Chief Superintendent Job, because of loss of holidays or insufficient compensation.
- Subject teachers teaching wrong syllabus and leaving the students panic stuck and
- Sometimes Question papers reaches to the examination center at 10 pm in the night, non availability of responsible staff to receive the papers.

The quality of education is denied as the one which provides an individual with an enjoyable, stimulating and challenging environment in which ones knowledge is furthered and is tested against nationally and internationally recognized standards. In a study conducted in Karnataka University, to understand the perception of students on the system of evaluation, 38% of professional courses students and 45% of non professional course student viewed the current system of examination as inappropriate. They suggested more frequent examination and an examination that tests all the knowledge and similar to the ones adopted in other competitive examination. They also suggested more transparent and accountable method of evaluation. The system of having internal examiner in autonomous college should not be allowed because they tend to influence the external examiner while evaluation. There should be uniform question paper pattern in all universities and the examination should be conducted at the same time. Examinations are like Damocles Sword above the students head. The student inculcates a feeling of fear instead of a love and understanding for the subject. These days' examinations are stress test and lack test of understanding, application and creativity. Large number of really successful people, who have greatly contributed to the humankind either failed their examination or barely managed to pass.

The best way to promote assessment practices is to help teachers and administrators become aware of what is and is not acceptable practice (Michigan Department of Education, 2005)."

There are various shortcomings in examination system, which are driving the quality of education towards, unsatisfactory. Prominent among these are: emphasis on memorization; subjectivity; poor content coverage and administrative shortcomings. The present examination system encourages students and teachers to adopt an easy way for learning and teaching and to resort to rote learning. Children tend to do better in subjects requiring rote memory but do poorly on basic comprehension and understanding (National Education Policy, 1992). It is also an impediment in the way of developing a book-reading culture and using libraries for reference purposes. Teachers and students rely only on the board-prescribed syllabus and five-year papers. They do not attempt to create an effective teaching and learning environment in the schools or colleges. The construction of question papers is affected. Similarly The fluctuation in cognitive levels i.e. knowledge, understanding and application, around a major focus on simple recall questions in examinations tends toward rote memorization as an examination strategy. Nevertheless in the absence of a uniform scheme of assessment across the boards, lack of standardization of allocation of marks to cognitive levels brings the credibility of scores and grade into question (Shah & Afzaal 2004-p-20). It has become necessary to check the creditability of the results of the boards. Reliability and validity of examination papers in terms of coverage of curriculum, selection of paper setters, lack of training for the paper setters and examiners, making system dubious (Greaney and Hasan, 1998). The above mentioned situation of education in the country created anxiety among the masses regarding the future of their children. This disrepute and low credibility of public examination boards can be highlighted through government sponsored reports and studies, such as: Large scale cheating and other malpractices in examinations have by and large eroded the creditability of public examinations (National Education Policy, 1992-2002). "Unfortunately, large scale cheating and other malpractices have by and large eroded the credibility of public examinations".

Comparison of annual and semester system

Comparison between semester and annual systems is very often done. Both the systems have its own merits and demerits.

Annual system covers more syllabuses at a stretch and compels the student to remember all this till the end of the year. Sometimes, two or more topics will be included in the same paper (very often. A paper will have to be set by two examiners under such situations), when specializations are there. Otherwise, certain topics will be omitted and the syllabus diluted.

Since at the end of the year only the public examinations are conducted, university gets enough time to prepare question papers and value answer papers. Number of examiners and examinations also can be reduced, which become more economical for Universities. Results can be announced in time and the schedule can be kept.

In semester system, the students get more advantage; since examinations are held within five months (what is studied will remain afresh in their brain). The syllabus load also will be less. Different topics need not be combined in the same paper. Students get more chances to improve also. Since examinations come within a few months student unrest also will be less in a semester system.

As far as the University is concerned the work load will be almost doubled. Unless systematically organized. Valuation, result publication, etc., may be delayed, causing difficulties to the students. Teachers also will have additional work in semester system. Here an attempt is made to compare merits and demerits of both the systems.

Statement of the Problem

The topic of this research is a comparative study of Examination practices in Annual and Semester system at public sector universities of the Punjab

Objectives of the Study

- To review the pros and cons of semester and annual system
- To invite opinions of the students about pros and cons of semester and annual system of examination in the public sector universities of Punjab
- To know the positive or negative effects of test on the behavior of students

Methodology

Nwana (1981) stated that “research design is a term used to describe a number of decisions which need to be taken regarding the collection of data before the data are collected”. An authentic reliable research depends on the procedure adopted, it describes in detail, different aspects through which the research projects has undergone for collecting relevant information and documents in order to arrive at reliable conclusion. So, this section deals with design adopted to conduct this study. This chapter includes nature of the study, population and sample size, sampling procedure, development of research instrument, data collection and data analysis. In order to achieve the objectives of this study, the research adopts these following procedures. The study aimed the comparative study of Examination practices in Annual and Semester system at public sector universities of the Punjab.

Survey research design was used to undertake the study. The random sampling method was used in this research study. This was considered appropriate because it is flexible such that a wide range of information can be collected and it is an efficient way of collecting information from a large number of respondents. Total sample of the study was consisted of 600 students of three public sector universities.

The primary data for the research study was collected using structured questionnaires. Questionnaire was consisted of 13 close-ended questions. Questionnaires were of two types, one was on Semester system and the other was on Annual system. All the items were related to at comparative study of Examination practices in Annual and Semester system at public sector universities of the Punjab. The questionnaire was distributed among 600 hundred students of the sampled universities. The students were requested to encircle the correct one. The close ended questions were designed on 3 point Likert Scale: Yes, To some extent, and No. The students were requested to encircle the correct one. The data was analyzed using mean, standard deviation to identify the comparative study of Examination practices in Annual and Semester system at public sector universities of the Punjab using SPSS 15.0.

Data Analysis

Nwana, (1981) states that “analysis of data refers to those techniques whereby the investigator extracts from the data information that was not apparently there before and which would enable a summary description of the subject studied to be made” Therefore, the data was analyzed using descriptive statistics which includes mean (average) and Standard deviation and Chi square of the respondent’s responses to the various questions and variables. The data were tabulated and findings were drawn on the basis of statistical procedure by using SPSS 15.0 version with the help of instruments

Table: 1

Descriptive analysis of data on annual system

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Assump. Sig.
The final grades rely on only one final test/exam.	300	1.62	.768	.000
There are midterm exams whose marks are added in final grade.	300	1.78	.673	.000
Due to less number of courses in one year, relatively less study require to get good marks in exams.	300	1.79	.692	.000
The tests are lengthy and long.	300	1.54	.705	.000
The test covers whole content of the courses and don't constructs from specific content.	300	1.75	.749	.000
The teachers borrow items from web source to develop test.	300	1.88	.701	.000
The teachers use readymade tests and don't follow any table of specification to construct test.	300	1.72	.738	.000
There is sufficient choice of questions in tests.	300	1.76	.738	.000
There is suitable proportion of subjectivity and objective part in test.	300	1.65	.764	.000
The test are secured and not disclosed to any student before it taken.	300	1.60	.722	.000
The tests are relatively tough.	300	1.74	.808	.000
The tests are not the only mode of assignments grades and others assessment techniques (assignments, classroom, participation and quizzes) also contribute in final grades in annual or semester system.	300	1.77	.752	.000
The evaluation gives the true picture of student's performance.	300	1.87	.808	.027

The Table 1 shows the mean 1.62 of students reported that the final grades rely on only one final test. Whereas there are midterms exams whose marks are added in final grade 1.78. The mean of tests are lengthy and long is 1.54. Due to less number courses in one year, relatively less study require to get good marks in exams 1.79. Minority of the students in annual system said that the test covers whole content of the courses and don't construct from specific content. In annual system 1.88 students are agreed that the teachers borrow items from web source to developed test. But the mean of 1.72 shows that teachers use readymade tests and don't follow any table of specification to construct test most of the students said in annual system. There is sufficient choice of questions in tests 1.76 students are agreed in annual system. There is suitable proportion of subjectivity and objective part in test most of the students 1.65 are agreed in annual system. The test are secured and not disclosed to any student before it taken most of the students is agreed in annual system. The tests are relatively tough was mean 1.74 in annual system. The tests are not the only mode of assignments grades and others assessment techniques (assignments, classroom, participation and quizzes) also contribute in final grades in semester system not in annual system. The

mean of evaluation gives the true picture of student's performance was 1.87. Overall majority of students responded in negative of the statements related to the test or exams as show in table 1. It is also shows the significant value of annual system expect that the evaluation gives the true picture of student's performance this statement shows the non significant value 0.27 it revealed that majority of the students are not agree with the evaluation system of annual system.

Table: 2

Descriptive Statistics of Semester System

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Asymp. Sig.
The final grades rely on only one final test/exam.	299	1.86	.700	.000
There are midterm exams whose marks are added in final grade.	300	1.42	.667	.000
Due to less number of courses in one year, relatively less study require to get good marks in exams.	300	1.73	.747	.000
The tests are lengthy and long.	300	1.89	.680	.000
The test covers whole content of the courses and don't construct from specific content.	300	1.76	.785	.000
The teachers borrow items from web source to develop test.	300	1.73	.758	.000
The teachers use readymade tests and don't follow any table of specification to construct test.	300	1.84	.728	.000
There is sufficient choice of questions in tests.	300	1.81	.694	.000
There is suitable proportion of subjectivity and objective part in test.	300	1.67	.728	.000
The test are secured and not disclosed to any student before it taken.	300	1.62	.747	.000
The tests are relatively tough.	300	1.92	.824	.174
The tests are not the only mode of assignments grades and others assessment techniques (assignments, classroom, participation and quizzes) also contribute in final grades in annual or semester system.	300	1.59	.742	.000
The evaluation gives the true picture of student's performance.	300	1.72	.807	.000

The table 2 shows the mean 1.86 of students reported that the final grades rely on only one final test. Whereas there are midterms exams whose marks are added in final grade 1.42. The mean of tests are lengthy and long is 1.89. Due to less number courses in one year, relatively less study require to get good marks in exams 1.73. Majority of the students in semester system said that the test covers whole content of the courses and don't contract from specific content. In semester system 1.73 students are agreed that the teachers borrow

items from web source to developed test. But the mean of 1.84 shows that teachers use readymade tests and don't follow any table of specification to construct test most of the students said in annual system. There is sufficient choice of questions in tests mean was 1.81 students are agreed in semester system. There is suitable proportion of subjectivity and objective part in test most of the students 1.67 are agreed in semester system. The 1.62 mean of test are secured and not disclosed to any student before it taken most of the students is agreed in semester system. Majority of the students said that the tests are relatively tough was mean 1.92 in semester system. The mean 1.59 of tests are not the only mode of assignments grades and others assessment techniques (assignments, classroom, participation and quizzes) also contribute in final grades in semester system. The mean of evaluation gives the true picture of student's performance was 1.72. Overall majority of students responded in positive of the statements related to the test or exams in semester system. It is also shows the significant value of semester system expect that the tests are relatively tough this statement shows the non significant value 1.74 it revealed that majority of the students are not agree that tests are relatively tough in semester system as compare to annual system.

Conclusions

On the basis of the data analysis following conclusion were made:

The students of University of the Punjab agreed that there should be at least two tests mid semester and final test in each course whereas no one is in the favour to change. Majority of the students are in favor of final term of examination will cover entire course in annual system. Minority of the students are disagreed that the test covers whole content of the course and don't construct from specific contend in annual system but in semester system but minority of the students are agreed with this statement. Majority of the students are disagreed that the annual system developed student's ability. In semester system majority of the students are agreed that the system developed student's ability but only few students are disagreed with this statement. Semester system raised the standard of the education. The teachers got help in semester system and their subject's quality of education enhanced by semester system it should be in annual system.

Semester system should not be continued in the present form but with more changes e.g.

- External evaluation is necessary for check and balance.
- More advanced project having high weight age should be offered to the students in semester system to enhance the ability of the students.
- Developing of student's ability.
- To give more knowledge to the students according to the requirements of the present system.

Recommendations

- Semester system does not work properly; there should be external evaluation as well.
- Examination system should be changed with certain changes.
- We must seriously consider how children will come out of a school system that gives little importance to tests and examinations which are an integral part of the learning process.
- We must also consider the extremely important fact that tests and examinations are the main motivation for students to study.

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