

CHOICE BASED CREDIT SYSTEM: A MAJOR REFORM IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Parvaiz Ahmad Lone

Assistant Professor, Department of Botany,
Government Degree College Sumbal Bandipora, Kashmir, India

Email: spbotany@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Indian education system went through a lot of amendments before it emerged in its present form. University Grants Commission (UGC) has been actively engaged in formulating various regulation and guidelines, and initiating measures to bring equity, efficiency and excellence in the Higher Education sector of India. The important measures taken by UGC to enhance academic standards and quality in higher education include innovation and improvements in curriculum, teaching-learning process, examination and evaluation systems, besides research and many other matters. Very recently University Grants Commission has brought out guidelines for the implementation of the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) in all higher educational institution for undergraduate and postgraduate courses. This system provides a 'cafeteria' type approach in which the students can take courses of their choice, learn at their own pace, undergo additional courses and acquire more than the required credits, and adopt an interdisciplinary approach to learning. Though this system offers many opportunities in the form of providing better facility to the learners like freedom, flexibility, advanced learning opportunities, fulfillment of students' academic needs and aspirations, intra and inter institutional transferability and quality education but India is still facing lot of challenges in its implementation which include lack of proper and good infrastructure for universal spread of education, lack of proper training & educational programmes. Therefore, for a major academic reform in Indian higher education, the need of the hour is to engage educationists and policy

makers in open debates, seminars, workshops and conferences on better and successful implementation of CBCS.

Key words: Choice Based Credit System (CBCS), Credits, Reforms, Challenges, Opportunities

INTRODUCTION

To bring out reforms in Indian Education System and to make it at par with global standards, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD), Government of India, has already initiated the process for developing of New Education Policy) in our country. Execution of policy and promotion of higher education comes under the responsibilities of University Grants Commission (Hasan and Parvez, 2015). University Grants Commission (UGC) has formulated various regulations and guidelines from time to time to improve the higher education system and maintain minimum standards and quality across the Higher Educational Institutions (Universities and Colleges) in India (Kumar, 2015). The academic reforms recommended by the UGC in the recent past have led to overall improvement in the higher education system. However, due to lot of diversity in the system of higher education, there are multiple approaches followed by universities towards examination, evaluation and grading system. While the Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) must have the flexibility and freedom in designing the examination and evaluation methods that best fits the curriculum, syllabi and teaching–learning methods, there is a need to devise a sensible system for awarding the grades based on the performance of students. Presently the performance of the students is reported using the conventional system of marks secured in the examinations or grades or both. This creates difficulty for the academia and the employers to understand and infer the performance of the students graduating from different universities and colleges. The grading system is considered to be better than the conventional marks system and hence it has been followed in the top institutions in India and abroad. So it is desirable to introduce uniform grading system which will facilitate student mobility across institutions within and across countries and also enable potential employers to assess the performance of students. Further, there is need to allow the flexibility in education system, so that students depending upon their interests and aims can choose interdisciplinary, intra-disciplinary and skill-based courses. This can only be possible when choice based credit system (CBCS), an internationally acknowledged system, is adopted. The choice based credit system not only offers opportunities and avenues to learn core subjects but also exploring additional avenues

of learning beyond the core subjects for holistic development of an individual. CBCS is critical for India to develop employable university graduates, a major challenge facing the country (Naidu and Sreedevi, 2016).

WHAT IS CHOICE BASED CREDIT SYSTEM (CBCS)

University Grants Commission has come up with the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) which makes undergraduate and postgraduate education student centric rather than system centric or teacher centric. The basic idea is to look into the needs of the students so as to keep up-to-date with development of higher education in India and abroad. CBCS aims to redefine the curriculum keeping pace with the liberalization and globalization in education. CBCS allows students an easy mode of mobility to various educational institutions spread across the world along with the facility of transfer of credits earned by students.

Adoption of CBCS is a historic endeavor of Indian Higher Education to remove the conventional annual system with semester system. Currently many institutions have adopted the choice based credit system (CBCS). It accelerates the teaching-learning process and enables vertical and horizontal mobility in learning. Thus, this credit based semester system provides flexibility in designing curriculum and assigning credits based on the course content and hours of teaching. The uniform CBCS aims at removing all variations across colleges and universities in the methods applied for award of grades computation of semester grade point average (SGPA) and cumulative grade point average (CGPA), which will result in eventual grading, to be done on the basis of specified formulae (Kaur and Sharma, 2016). One credit is equivalent to one hour of teaching (lecture or tutorial) or two hours of practical work/field work per week. Each semester will consist of 15-18 weeks of academic work equivalent to 90 actual teaching days.

The choice based credit system provides a '*Cafeteria*' type approach in which the students can take courses of their choice, learn at their own pace, undergo additional courses and acquire more than the required credits, and adopt an interdisciplinary approach to learning. The CBCS provides an opportunity to students to choose courses from a pool of prescribed courses. Courses offered in CBCS programme may be of three kinds: Core, Elective and Foundation.

- 1. Core Course:-** There may be a Core Course in every semester. This is the course which is to be compulsorily studied by a student as a core requirement to complete the requirement of a programme in a said discipline of study.

2. Elective Course:- Elective course is a course which can be chosen from a pool of papers.

It may be:

- Supportive to the discipline of study
- Providing an expanded scope
- Enabling an exposure to some other discipline/domain
- Nurturing student's proficiency/skill.

An elective may be "Generic Elective" focusing on those courses which add generic proficiency to the students. An elective may be "Discipline centric" or may be chosen from an unrelated discipline. It may be called an "Open Elective."

3. Foundation Course:- The Foundation Courses may be of two kinds: Compulsory Foundation and Elective foundation. "Compulsory Foundation" courses are the courses based upon the content that leads to Knowledge enhancement. They are mandatory for all disciplines. Elective Foundation courses are value-based and are aimed at man-making education.

All the courses are to be evaluated following a grading system. This will benefit the students to move across institutions both within India and across countries. CBCS guidelines are, therefore, meant to bring uniformity in evaluation system. Besides, CBCS gives emphasis on the continuous and comprehensive evaluation. The efficacy of CBCS can be understood by findings of Kelkar and Ravishankar (2014) which reveal that, 42% of the teachers agreed that the objective of CBCS was achieved, 39% felt that they were not met and 18% were uncertain. In response to the question whether CBCS emphasizes on only teaching or evaluation, or both, the feedback was mixed – majority (62.5%) felt that the emphasis is on evaluation only, while 20% felt that the emphasis was on teaching only and 15% felt that both teaching and evaluation were given equal weightage in the CBCS system. Roy et al. (2013) found that science background students and boys are having higher level of positive attitude towards CBCS in comparison to Arts and Girl students.

MERITS OF CHOICE BASED CREDIT SYSTEM (CBCS)

Following are the advantages of CBCS

- CBCS represents a major shift in focus from teacher centric to learner centric education.

- Students may undertake as many credits as they can cope with (without repeating all the courses in a given semester if they are unsuccessful in one/more courses).
- This system offers more flexibility to the students by allowing them to choose inter-disciplinary, intra-disciplinary courses, skill oriented papers.
- It makes education broad-based and at par with global standards. One can take credits by combining unique combinations. For example physics with economics, microbiology with chemistry or environmental science etc.
- It is also helpful to the learners to choose courses and papers as per their choice and interest.
- It provides opportunity to transfer the credits earned at one institution to another. It promotes mobility of learners from one institution to another one.
- It also helps to the learners to pursue their courses at different times and at different institutions.
- Stress and anxiety of learners can be reduced through Choice based credit system.
- It puts emphasis on seminar presentation, assignment, discussion, project etc. based teaching.
- CBCS system calculates not only the time spend by the students in lectures or seminars but also the time they need for individual learning and the preparation of examinations etc.
- Slow learners can get advantage from it, as it has the flexibility in choosing credits at one time.
- Equality among the learners can be ensured through it, as it has the grading system.
- Cooperation and healthy work temperament can be ensured and developed among the learners. Habits of work commitment of learners can be strengthened.

DEMERITS OF CHOICE BASED CREDIT SYSTEM (CBCS)

In spite having the above discussed advantages, following could be the disadvantages of Choice-Based Credit System.

- Maintaining compatibility among main subject's papers and soft papers would be challenging one. Offering more than one program of different nature simultaneously would be challenging one.

- Extra burden would be experienced by the institution as CBCS has the flexibility in taking or choosing credits.
- It would be tough to measure or calculate the exact marks.
- Work load of teachers may fluctuate.
- Mobility or transferring of students from one institution to another one would be problematic.
- Mastery over concerned subject would be hampered.
- Problems of indiscipline would happen as full liberty or choices of students are given maximum importance.
- Every student would desire to move from substandard institution or university to standard one. This would cause chaos in institutions.
- It may pose problems in maintaining the cumulative record of every student.
- Seriousness of students will go away from the examination as much weightage is given to continuous or internal assessment and evaluation.
- Most of the time will have to be consumed for setting papers for different type of examinations. It will call to increase the infrastructure to house or accommodate the students.
- Equalization of performance through it may discourage the gifted and talented students.
- Research work and innovation would get hampered, as most of the time teachers have to be involved in setting papers and making arrangement for the examinations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following points could be considered as the recommendations for effective implementation of CBCS in India.

- Every aspect of CBCS should be explained clearly to the student.
- In CBCS, time is very short so, syllabus should be prepared accordingly.
- Infrastructure should be provided to every department.
- Extra time should be given for discussion among teachers and students.
- CBCS must facilitate the student's mobility from one university to another.

- Seminars, conferences, open debates, orientation programmes and workshops should be organized to discuss its merits and demerits in detail. Further, the teachers must be engaged in all such activities to understand the details about grading, semester, credit system, credit transfer etc. by inviting and involving resource persons with appropriate expertise.
- Every university/college must follow the academic calendar in letter and spirit.
- Regular class work should not be disturbed due to semester examinations. Both examinations and class work should go simultaneously so that degrees are completed well on time.
- Courses offered by CBCS must be collaborated with industries and foreign partners to foster innovations possible. This can go a long way in capacity building of students.
- The syllabus and its detailing should be done by concern department.
- Class room teaching should be given importance.
- Carry on system must be abolished so that students may take their studies seriously.
- Provision of both percentage and grading system should be maintained.
- Its adaptation should be optional or choice based rather than mandatory.
- Equalization in standard of education system should be maintained so that mobility of students could be checked.
- Selection of papers and choosing credits should be governed by the concerned department/ institution.
- To make it more effective, guidance and counselling services should be arranged for the teachers and students while choosing core papers.
- Care should be taken about the gap between Central and state Universities in regard to quality of education as well as the availability of infrastructure at point.

CONCLUSIONS

Choice Based Credit System is a new concept introduced by UGC for reformatory changes in Indian Higher Education System. The educationists and policy makers must come forward to look into the CBCS scheme in detail in terms of challenges that are confronted in its implementation and the opportunities it is providing for moving ahead. This can be done by organizing open debates, seminars, workshops and conferences on better and successful

implementation of CBCS. Hopefully, through CBCS, a constructive change in Indian Higher Education System would be evident in the coming years.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Whatever is written in this article is based on personal experience and observations of the author. Therefore, it is not necessary to agree with the recommendations of the author discussed in this paper. To have more clarity over the effectiveness of CBCS, further studies should be carried out in different situations.

REFERENCES

- Draft Rashtriya Uchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA)-UGC published on the web on 21.1.2013:
http://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/5867549_rusa.pdf
- Hasan, M and Parvez, M. (2015). Choice-Based Credit System in India: Pros and Cons. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(25): 30-33
- Kaur, A and Sharma, M. (2016). Academic Curriculum Reform of Indian Higher Education: Choice Based Credit System (CBCS). *International Journal of Advanced Research in Education & Technology (IJARET)*, 3(1): 78-80
- Kelkar, A.S and Ravishankar, L. (2014). Choice Based Credit System: boon or bane. *Current Science*, 107(8): 1229-1230
- Kumar, A (2015). Choice Based Credit System based on UGC Guidelines.
<http://alfalahuniversity.edu.in/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Choice-Based-credit-System.pdf>
- Moving Towards Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) in UG and PG Programs: A Road Map.
http://hpuniv.nic.in/pdf/CBCS_IQAC13.pdf
- Naidu, B.V.R and Sreedevi, O.V.A.M. (2016). Choice Based Credit System in India: A critical evaluation. *International Journal of Academic Research*, 3(2): 77-84
- Roy, N.R., Khanam, U.K and Devi, T. (2013). Attitude Towards Choice Based Credit System of PG level in Higher Education: A Study on Assam University. *Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies*, 1:1198-1208
- U.G.C. Guidelines on Adaptation of Choice Based Credit System. University Grants Commission Bahadurshah Zafar Marg New Delhi.110 002